

FRANK MERRIWELL'S ATHLETES

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ATHLETES ***

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Frank Merriwell's Athletes

OR
The Boys Who Won

BY
BURT L. STANDISH
Author of the famous MERRIWELL STORIES.

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Frank Merriwell's Athletes

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Frank Merriwell's Athletes

CHAPTER I—FRANK AND HIS FRIENDS

“Say, boys, just listen to that racket!”

It was Jack Diamond who spoke, and he addressed Frank Merriwell and several others of his friends.

“It is certainly awful,” came from Harry Rattleton, one of the boys.

“I can't stand much of this,” put in Bruce Browning. “It is enough to drive one crazy.”

The boys had just entered the outer portals of a Chinese theatre, located in Chinatown, the Celestial portion of San Francisco. There was a great crowd, and it was only with difficulty that they made their way along the narrow and gloomy passages leading to the theatre proper.

Frank Merriwell and his chums from Yale College had filled in their summer vacation by a trip on bicycles from New York to San Francisco. They had had numerous adventures, but had come out “right side up with care,” as Frank put it.

The party was composed of Frank Merriwell, Harry Rattleton, a former roommate at Yale; Jack Diamond, from Virginia; Bruce Browning, fat, lazy and good-natured; and Toots, a colored boy from the Merriwell homestead.

On reaching California, Frank had fallen in with Bart Hodge, a schoolmate of years gone by, when Frank had attended Fardale Military Academy. Bart had been in serious trouble, and it was Frank who helped him out of it. For some time Hodge had found it best to “keep shady,” and his troubles were not yet a thing of the past.

As the boys walked farther into the entrance of the Chinese theatre, a clanging medley of the most horrible sounds came up from the passage that lay at the foot of a steep flight of stairs.

Frank Merriwell laughed.

“That is music, old fellow!” he said.

Then came another burst of sounds, more horrible than the first, if possible. There was a banging of brass, a clanging of gongs, a roaring of drums, and a wild shrieking and wailing as of ten thousand fiddles cut of tune.

Jack jabbed his fingers into his ears and actually turned pale.

“Music!” he gasped—“that music? That is enough to drive any man crazy! It is the most frightful thing I ever heard. Music! You are joking, Merriwell!”

“Not a bit of it,” declared Frank. “Aren’t we on our way to witness a play in a Chinese theatre?”

“Well, I supposed so, but it strikes me now that this is one of your jokes. You have put up a job on me. You are trying to horse me.”

“Nothing of the sort, my dear boy.”

Jack still continued suspicious.

“Who ever heard of such a way of getting into a theatre?” he exclaimed. “We entered a narrow door in an old building, came through a long, dark passage, climbed stairs, descended stairs, turned, twisted, climbed more stairs, turned again, and now here we are with another flight of stairs before us. A fine way of getting into a theatre!”

“That is the way the Chinese do the trick. Eh, John?”

The Chinaman who had been acting as their guide, and who stood on the first stair, waiting for them to follow him downward, nodded his head, saying:

“Allee samee legler way.”

“It may be the regular way,” admitted Jack; “but I doubt if I could find my way out of here alone. This would be a fine place to run an enemy into if one wished to murder him secretly. There would be little danger that the police would ever find out anything about it.”

Frank made a signal to the guide, and then the trio slowly descended the stairs, which were dimly lighted by paper-shaded lamps.

At the foot of the stairs the boys passed a door that stood open, enabling them to look into a room that was filled with bunks, upon many of which lay Chinamen who were sleeping or smoking opium. The powerful odor of “dope” that came from that room was sickening.

Then they came to an ordinary step-ladder that led downward again.

Jack halted in dismay.

“Why,” he said, “we must be underground now! Where are we going?”

“To the theatre, dear boy. Hear the music.”

“Why will you persist in calling it that? It seems that those sounds come from the infernal regions, and this passage must lead down to the old fellow’s reception-room.”

“Glit to theatal plitty soon,” assured the guide.

Down the ladder they went, and then, at an open door, paid an admission

fee, after which they entered a room that was packed with human beings and was not at all well ventilated.

The room had a low ceiling, from which Chinese lanterns were suspended, shedding a soft light over the scene, which was so strange that it actually seemed weird to the American visitors.

At either side of the theatre was a space railed off and raised somewhat above the level of the general floor. This was reserved for women, and was well filled. In the pit sat a closely packed throng of men, all with hats upon their heads.

There were a great number of Caucasian visitors, drawn to the place by curiosity.

The stage was on a level with the raised portion reserved for women, and it was filled with actors, many of whom were richly dressed in oriental robes.

Instead of sitting in front of the stage, like an American orchestra, the musicians were on the stage.

As for scenery, there was none to speak of, save a few movable screens. It was not thought necessary to attempt to please the eye further than in the matter of costumes.

As no female actors are ever permitted on the stage of a Chinese theatre, the female *rôles* were played by youths, who were carefully made up for their parts.

The Chinese guide found seats for Frank and Jack, but retired himself to the back of the room, where he stood and waited till they should see enough of the show and wish to go.

The audience never applauded, although there was a quick rippling response to what seemed to be an occasional witty passage or clever situation.

But the musicians—the musicians wearied and tortured Jack Diamond's soul. They were there to accentuate the emotional parts of the play, and they seemed bent upon doing their duty and doing it fully. At times they poured forth a maddening volume of sounds, and then they seemed to get weary and rest, with the exception of two or three stringed instruments, which sawed, and squeaked, and squawled, and growled, and muttered till the Virginian's blood was cold and his hair standing like porcupine quills.

"Frightful! frightful!" he gasped.

Frank chuckled with satisfaction. It was a new experience for Diamond, and Merriwell was enjoying it as one always enjoys introducing his friends to something new and novel.

"My dear fellow," whispered Frank, "I fear your ear is not educated to appreciate the beauties of Chinese music."

"Music! music! Why, a boiler factory in full blast makes better music than

this!"

"You are prejudiced. It is a fact that their music is based on an established scale and a scientific theory."

"Oh, come! that's too much! Why, see, those players have no leader, and every man is going it alone for himself. It is exactly the same as if every person in one of our orchestras should play a different tune than anybody else and all play at the same time—only I don't believe these heathens are playing tunes at all. They are just hammering, and tooting, and sawing away, and letting it go at that."

"It does seem so," confessed Frank, "although at certain points they all come together with a grand burst, like sprinters making a dash."

Jack's hand dropped on Frank's wrist.

"Look!" he excitedly whispered, pointing to a Chinaman who had risen amid the spectators at a short distance. "What is that fellow going to do? I saw him conceal a knife in his sleeve."

"And he acts as if he meant to use it on some one," said Frank, made suspicious by the fellow's manner. "That's exactly what he is up to!"

But the Chinaman did not succeed in his purpose, for a stout youth suddenly arose from a seat and gave the heathen a terrific crack on the jaw, knocking him down in a twinkling.

"Take thot, ye thafe av th' worruld!" cried the one who had delivered the blow. "It's Barney Mulloy thot wur watchin' yez all th' toime, ye haythen spal-pane!"

"Barney Mulloy!"

Frank uttered the name in a joyous cry of recognition; but his voice was drowned by the sudden uproar in the theatre. Men sprang to their feet, and women screamed.

Frank caught Jack by the arm, shouting in his ear: "Come, we must stand by that fellow! He is an old friend of mine!"

"I am with you," assured Diamond, who had good fighting blood, which was easily aroused.

They forced their way through the throng which surrounded the boy who had struck the Chinaman.

"Barney!" cried Frank.

"Mother av Mowses!" shouted the Irish lad in amazement. "Is it mesilf thot's gone crazy, or am Oi dramin'?"

"Not a dream," assured Merry, as he grasped Barney's hand.

"Is it yesilf, Frankie?"

"It is!"

"Dunder und blitzens!" cried another voice at Frank's side. "Uf id don't

peen Vrankie Merriwell, you vos a liar!”

Then Frank’s amazement and wonder was complete, for he was grasped and hugged by the arms of a fat boy who was laughing all over his fat, jolly face, and that boy was Hans Dunnerwust, who, with Mulloy, had known him at Fardale Academy when all were students there.

“Hans! Why, where—how—”

But Frank was given no time for questions, as an angry crowd was pressing about them, and they were in danger.

Merriwell lifted his voice, crying:

“Every American in the place should stand by us! My friend struck the Chinaman because he saw him draw a knife, and the blow was delivered in self-defense.”

Several voices answered, and bursting through the crowd came three men in yachting suits, who assured the boys that they would stand by them.

The yachtmen seemed to be on a lark, and they took great delight in knocking Chinamen right and left, which they did in a highly entertaining manner.

“For the door!” cried Frank, commandingly. “We must get out of here!”

For the door they rushed, sweeping everything before them. Crack! crack! crack! sounded the blows of the yachtsmen’s fists, and they gave a hoarse cheer that seemed to have in it the boom of the surf on a rocky coast.

“Hurro!” shouted Barney Mulloy, in a wild fever of excitement. “It’s meself thot’s not been in a bit av a scrap loike this fer a wake! It’s fun, it is! Git out av th’ way, ye pig-tailed rat-’aters! Ye nivver wur made ter live in a whoite man’s country at all, at all!”

“Say, you nefer saw such a fight as this, did I?” cried the Dutch boy, flourishing his arms in a furious manner and striking friends almost as often as foes. “Uf this don’d peat der pand, you don’d toldt me so!”

With a few exceptions, the Chinamen did not seem at all anxious to get in the way of the Americans. It was not the first occasion when an affair of a similar nature had occurred in a Chinese theatre.

Sometimes some of the bloods of the town would come down into Chinatown full of wine and “good intentions,” and it was their custom to end the racket whenever possible by “cleaning out” a Chinese theatre.

Many of the spectators on this occasion believed it was a pre-arranged plan to clean out the theatre, and so they made haste to get out themselves as soon as possible.

The boys and their sailor friends were among those who early rushed out through the door, and they clambered up the step-ladder with no small haste.

It was not difficult to find their way out, for it was only necessary to follow the crowd. Now and then a few of the Chinamen disappeared by means of side

doors, but the most of them kept straight on to the open air.

The main streets of the quarter were lighted by paper lanterns, which gave out a dim, mellow light, beneath which the oriental throng looked strange and fantastic.

To Frank it seemed as if they were in Pekin instead of the American city of San Francisco.

Barney Mulloy laughed heartily.

"Did yez ivver see th' bate av thot?" he cried. "It's th' divvil's own ruction it wur, but nivver a Chink came back fer a sicond dose afther gettin' a chrack av me fist."

"Dot's vot's der madder mit Hannah!" put in Hans. "Ven I hit somepody my fist mit they nefer lif to dell uf him. Yah!"

"They nivver knew ye shtruck thim, ye Dutch chase," said Barney, contemptuously.

"Dot vos righd," agreed Dunnerwust. "Ven I hit nopody it always means suttin death."

"G'won!" snorted the Irish boy. Then Barney caught hold of Frank once more, and gave him a genuine bear hug.

"Begorra! Oi thought Oi'd nivver see yez again, Frankie!" he cried. "Oi hearrud ye wur in Yale Collige, an' it's yersilf Oi thought moight get such a great gintlemon ye'd care nivver a bit to see yer ould fri'nds any more at all, at all."

"You should know me better than that, Barney," said Frank, protestingly. "No matter what happens to me, you may be sure I'll always be true to my old friends."

"Dot vos righdt!" grinned Hans. "Vrankie Merriwell nefer goes pack on his friendts, ur don'd you pelief me. He vas all righdt vrom der top uf his headt ubvard."

Other visitors kept pouring from the small door that had admitted them to the passage leading to the theatre, and one of the sailors, a handsome-looking man with a full beard, said:

"I think, we'll get away from here, as the police seem to have a grudge against any one in a sailor's suit, and this racket may bring some of them down here."

Immediately Frank said:

"We owe you thanks, sir, for the aid you gave us in getting out of a bad scrape. You responded to my appeal for help immediately, and—"

The man interrupted with a laugh.

"We were only too glad of a chance to do it, as we were looking for a good opportunity to smash a few Chinks in the mug. Eh, boys?"

"That's right," nodded his companions.

Merriwell looked at the men curiously, and he saw they were anything but ordinary sailors. All were fine-appearing men, and they spoke like persons of education.

"We will go along with you, if you don't mind," he said. "I think we have seen quite enough of Chinatown to suffice for to-night. What do you say, fellows?"

"I am sure I have," said Diamond.

"And Oi," nodded Barney.

"You vos anodder," grinned Hans, who meant to say he was quite willing to leave Chinatown for the night.

So the little party moved away, and as they went along the leader of the yachtsmen said:

"My name is Chandler and I am stopping at the Baldwin. Have been cruising in my yacht with several friends, but just now I am trying to sell her, as some business has arisen which defeats my plans for a summer's outing."

Frank introduced himself, and in a short time the boys were chatting freely with the yachtsmen, who proved to be rather jolly gentlemen.

Passing out of Chinatown they were soon on Market Street, and a walk of a few blocks brought them to the hotel where Merriwell and the friends who had accompanied him on the bicycle tour across the continent were stopping.

Chandler wished to go in and "blow off," but Frank insisted that none of the party drank.

"If that is the case, you are a queer set of college lads," said Chandler, with a laugh. "I never saw a college boy who would not swim in beer every chance he found."

"There are exceptions, you see."

"I see, and I consider it most remarkable. Will you smoke?"

But Frank declined to drink or smoke, shook hands with his accidentally found friends, and they parted.

"Now," he said, addressing Barney and Hans, "you must come in and see our rooms."

They entered the hotel and ascended in the elevator to the floor on which the boys had their rooms.

A few minutes later Barney and Hans were thoroughly at home.

CHAPTER II—BARNEY'S STORY

“Well, Oi nivver saw th’ loikes av this!” exclaimed Barney, in amazement. “It’s loike bein’ back at Fardale ag’in.”

“You pet my poots!” grinned the Dutch boy. “Id makes me think der time uf dot Hodge vos hazed der oldt poathouse in. You tidn’t like dot so much as you might, eh, Partly?”

“I can’t say that I ever took to hazing much,” confessed Hodge, who looked moody and worried.

“Yaw, dot vos der trute. Dot vos der nighd ven I sing dot peautiful hymn caldt ‘Bull For der Shore.’ I remember me dot song. Id vent someding dis a vay:

“Bull vor der shore, sailor, bull vor der shore,
Ged indo dot lifepoat, undt ged der roof off,
Shbit on your handts, sailor, undt let her rip,
Uf you dond’d prace up, you ged left alretty yet.”

Dunnerwust roared forth the song as loudly as he could, and Frank hastened to stop him, laughing as he said:

“Good gracious, Hans! this is no menagerie! It is a first-class hotel, and we’ll be fired out if we make such unearthly noises in the rooms.”

“I don’d toldt you so?” exclaimed the Dutch boy in surprise. “Don’d der people der hodel in abbreciate goot musicks?”

“Possibly they do when they hear it.”

“Vell, oben der toor und gif um der chance uf their lifes. I vos goin’ to sing again alretty soon.”

“If you try it, I’ll throw you out of the window!”

Diamond gave a sigh of relief.

“Talk about a Chinese orchestra!” he muttered. “There are other things quite as bad.”

Hans looked sad.

“I vos afraidt mein voice vos not abbreiated,” he said. “Id vos hardt ven a veller feels so goot he wants to varble like der pirds und der friendts uf him von’t gif him a shance. Oxcuse me vile I shed a tear. Vill somepody lent me an onions?”

“Oi’m glad ye’ve got somebody to hold ye down, ye Dutch chaze,” grinned Barney. “It’s mesilf has been unable intoirely to kape th’ Dutchmon shtill, Frankie. It’s in danger av bein’ arristed he has put us twinty toimes a day.”

“What I want to know,” said Frank, “is how it happens that I find you two together here in San Francisco.”

“Vale,” said Hans, “I comes me oudt here to visit mein cousin, Fritz, undt I runs me acrost Parney.”

“But, Barney, the last I knew of you you were in London with your Sister

Bridget. I didn't suppose you were in America."

"It's an accidint Oi'm here at all, at all," averred the Irish lad. "An' it's yesilf thot'll be moighty interisted whin Oi tells yez how thot accidint happened."

"Yah," nodded Hans; "he vos sure to trop deat ven you toldt him der odder berson of dot vas San Vrancisco in."

"I am getting intensely interested already," said Frank. "Go ahead, Barney, and tell the story. We'll all sit down and listen."

"Excuse me if I lie down," murmured Browning, as he stretched his massive frame on a couch. "I am troubled of late with that tired feeling."

"Vot you took vor him?" asked Hans, anxiously. "I'd vos tangerous ven you let him go und don't took nottings."

"The best thing I have found to take for it is a rest."

"Do you know why the Chinese make such good actors?" asked Rattleton.

"You toldt me dot."

"All right. They make good actors because they never forget their cues."

"Yah! yah! yah!" cackled Toots, the colored boy, who had been keeping still and remaining in the background. "Land ob watermillions! dat boy Rattletum cayan't help sayin' dem fings. It jes' comes nacheral wif dat boy."

"Meester Raddleton must haf peen eatin' eggs," observed Hans, soberly. "He vos full uf yokes."

Toots stared at Hans, and then, suddenly seeing the point, he had a fit. He laughed till Frank threw one of Browning's bicycle shoes at him. The shoe struck the colored lad and knocked him off his chair to the floor. He picked himself up and sat down without a word, looking sad and subdued.

"Now, Barney," said Frank, gravely, "be good enough to go on with your story. I think we have quieted the menagerie."

"Begorra! Oi nivver saw such a crowd as this in all me loife," declared the Irish lad. "It's a jolly ould party it is."

Then he began his story:

"It's nivver a bit av money could Oi make in London, an' so, whin Oi got a chance to go to Australia wid a foine gintlemon thot gave me a job on his ranch, Oi shnapped it up quicker thin ye could wink th' two oies av yes.

"But afther Oi got there Oi didn't loike the place a great dale. It wur too fur away from anything at all, at all, an' it's lonesome Oi got; so Oi wint to th' gintlemon an' told him. It's a foine splindid mon he wur, fer he said to me, sez he, 'Barney, me b'y, it's sorry Oi am to have yez go, but Oi don't want to kape ye av' ye're lonesome an' homesick.' Wid thot he wur afther givin' me a roll av money thot he said Oi could pay back av Oi ivver got th' chance, an' Oi packed me hooker an' shtarted fer Sydney.

"It's a roight shmart town thot same Sydney is, as ye know yersilf, Frankie,

fer it's goin' there ye wur th' last toime Oi saw yez. Oi wur moighty intheristed in that place, an' wan day who should Oi mate roight on th' strata but— Oi'll bet ye can't guess in a thousan' years, Frankie."

"Yah," nodded Hans; "he don'd peen aple to guess in zwei t'ousan' year."

"Then I will not try," said Frank. "Who was it that you met, Barney?"

"It wur th' girrul ye used ter be so shtuck on at Fardale, me b'y."

"What, not—not—"

"Inza Burrage!"

"Yah, Inza Porrige," grinned Hans.

Inza Burrage was a young lady of whom Frank had been very found in former days, and she still held a warm corner in his heart.

"Goodness!" cried Frank. "Inza—in Australia?"

"Sure she wur, me b'y. Ye know th' last toime ye saw her she wur wid her fayther, an' th' ould gintlemon wur thtravelin' fer his hilt on th' continent."

"Yes, yes."

"They wint to Italy."

"Yes."

"It wur there that Misther Burrage met Lord Stanford."

"Who is Lord Stanford?"

"An English gintlemon wid more money than brains."

"Und he vos nod der only bebble on der peach," put in Hans.

"What about him? How does he come into the Story?" asked Frank.

"He made love to Inza, me b'y."

"Made love to her? Why, she is nothing but a little girl."

"It's forgittin' ye are that she has been gettin' oulder, as well as yersilf. She is almost a young lady now, me b'y."

"But not old enough to think seriously of love."

"Is it that oidea ye have, Frankie? An' do yez fergit how Rolf Raymond, her cousin in New Orleans, troied to make her marry him?"

"That was an outrage, for she was a mere child."

"Ye'll see a change in her whin ye mate her. An' it's her fayther thot's lookin' out for a foine match fer her."

"Impossible! I am sure Mr. Burrage would not—"

"Sure is it ye are! Ha! ha! Whoy, it's thot th' old gintlemon wur thtravelin' fer more than fer th' hilt av him."

"Barney, I can't believe this."

"Belave it ur not, it's the truth, an' he wur afther makin' her marry Lord Stanford."

"What an outrage—what an outrage!" shouted Frank, springing to his feet and excitedly pacing the floor. "Don't tell me he succeeded in forcing her into

such a marriage!”

“He would have sudsaded av Oi hadn’t sane her.”

“And you, Barney—what did you do?”

There was a twinkle in the eyes of the Irish youth.

“Oh, Oi did nivver a thing!” he chuckled. “She told me iverything about it.”

“And then—then what?”

“She wanted me to hilp her run away.”

“Did you?”

“Did Oi? Well, say! Did ivver a swate girrul appale to Barney Mulloy thot he wur’n’t ready to break his neck fer th’ loikes av her?”

Frank’s excitement grew.

“Barney, you are a trump!” he shouted. “I could hug you! What did you do? How did you do it?”

“She told me she had some money av her own with which she could pay her way back to th’ Unoitied Shtates.”

“Yes, yes!”

“All she wanted wur to get away widout her fayther ur th’ lord knowin’ a thing about it.”

“And you aided her?”

“Me b’y, she didn’t know how to do th’ thrick, an’ so I was afther securin’ passage fer her on a steamer bound fer San Francisco.”

“And did you—were you able to get her away? Did she get on board without being stopped?”

Barney nodded.

“She has an aunt in Sacramento, an’ she said she would be all roight av she could rache thot lady.”

“In Sacramento? And she is there now? You aided her in getting to her aunt? Barney, you should have a gold medal!”

“Waid a bit, me laddibuck; you’re gettin’ ahid av me shtory. Oi got her onto th’ stamer, an’ Oi took passage on th’ same craft. As Oi didn’t have money to burrun, Oi come in th’ sicond cabin, whoile she came firrust class. All th’ same Oi found a chance now and thin to chat wid her. She told me all about her aunt. She said her aunt could make th’ fayther av her give up th’ skame to marry her off to the English lord.”

“Blessings on that aunt!”

“Wait a bit! wait a bit!”

Frank showed alarm.

“Don’t tell me she could not find her aunt, or that the woman refused to aid her!”

“Nayther thing happened. It war loike this: Another stamer sailed fer San

Francisco the day aafter us.”

“What of that?”

“It wur a fasther stamer than th’ one we wur on, Frankie.”

Merriwell’s fears were fully aroused.

“Go on! go on!” he cried.

“Av course her fayther an’ th’ English lord diskivered she had run away, an’ they found out she had taken a stamer.”

“They followed on the other?”

“They followed a pace.”

“Followed a piece? Why, how were they to turn back?”

“Nivver a bit did they do thot, but th’ last parrut av th’ trip we wur folleyin’ thim, an’ nivver a thing did we know about thot.”

“They passed you without your knowing it, you mean.”

“Thot is phwat Oi mane.”

“And then—then—”

“Whin we lift the stamer at this port, they wur there to receive us.”

A cry of dismay broke from Frank, and then he suddenly became quite cool in his manner, the change being so pronounced that it was startling.

“I presume they took charge of her?” he said, grimly.

“Thot’s phwat, an’ they nearly took charge av me whin they found me wid her. An officer wur called to arrist me, but it’s a roight loively pair av legs Oi have, an’ th’ polaceman nivver got his fingers on me collar, though it wur some high dodgin’ Oi did.”

“What became of Inza?”

“Thot is phwat Oi’d loike ter foind out, Frankie, an’ it’s two days Oi’ve been thryin’ to do so.”

CHAPTER III—IN A QUANDARY

Frank took a turn twice the length of the room, and then stopped before Barney and the others, who were watching him in silence.

“Fellows,” he said, his voice firm and steady, “Inza Burrage is a girl whom I admire very much. When I attended school at Fardale we were sweethearts. I

fancy the most of you know what it is to have a sweetheart at school. Circumstances may separate such sweethearts in after years, but nothing ever makes them forget each other. They are sure to think of each other with tenderness and respect. A thousand times have I thought and dreamed of Inza. I have felt that I was ready to make any sacrifice for her—ready to do anything in my power for her. I have said that, if the time ever came when she needed a true friend, she could depend on me. That time has come. She is in need of a friend, and I must find her and aid her. It may be possible that I shall need the assistance of my friends. Who may I count on?”

In a moment every boy in that room was on his feet and declaring his eagerness to stand by Frank through anything and everything.

Frank did not smile; he was very grave and stern, although something like a look of satisfaction passed across his face.

“I thought so,” he nodded. “In fact, I knew it. The first thing is to find out where Miss Burrage is.”

“She may not be in San Francisco at all now,” said Browning, who showed unusual interest for him.

“That is quite true.”

“Oi think she is,” said Barney.

“What makes you think so?”

“Lord Stanford had a haythen Chinee for a servant.”

“What of that?”

“It wur thot same haythen me an Hans folleyed to th’ thayater in Chinatown this avenin’. Thot is how we happened to be there.”

“Yah,” nodded the Dutch boy; “dot vos der trute.”

“That is interesting,” admitted Frank. “I hope it may prove that you are right. Were you watching the Chinaman when you were attacked?”

“Hans was. Oi had sane th’ rat-’ater spake to another wan, an’ Oi felt sure he said somethin’ about us. Oi watched the other, an’ it wur a good thing fer me that Oi did.”

“The other was the one who tried to get a knife into your back?”

“Yis. Th’ dirruty rascal didn’t know Oi had me oie on him all th’ toime.”

“In the excitement that followed, you lost sight of the one you followed there.”

“Vale,” said Hans, “I don’d peen aple to keep vatch uf him afder efrypody shumps ub all aroundt.”

“That was most unfortunate. If you could have followed him without his knowing it, he might have led you straight to his master.”

“Thot’s phwat Oi thought, me b’y.”

Frank thought the matter over for a few moments, and then said:

"It seems to me that there is a probability of this Lord Stanford being in San Francisco, although Inza's father may have taken her away. If his servant had left him, it is not likely an attempt would have been made on Barney's life. The Chinaman's master must have told him to look out that he was not followed by Barney, and the heathen was going to stop it somehow."

"It seems rather remarkable to me," said Jack, "that they should care whether Barney followed them or not, for it is likely they now have the girl under such close watch that there is absolutely no chance for her to run away again."

"She may have been forced into a marriage already," Browning said.

"You do not know her," declared Frank. "She is a girl of such spirit that her father will find it extremely difficult to compel her to marry against her will."

"Yah," nodded the Dutch boy, "you pet me my poots on dot!"

"Begorra! she has th' clane grit in her," agreed Barney.

"That is certain," admitted Bruce, "else she would not have dared run away as she did. Not one girl in a thousand would have the nerve to do a thing like that."

"I am greatly interested to see this remarkable young lady," said Diamond. "I like girls of spirit."

Frank paid no heed to what the others were saying. He was walking the floor, the expression of his face showing that he was in a brown study.

"Shust look ad him," whispered Hans. "Uf he geds dot Lort Sdanfort holdt uf—vale, dot feller don't know vere he vas at purty queek alretty."

After a time, Frank paused to say:

"This is a case on which no time is to be lost, as Inza may be forced into a marriage if she is not soon given aid in some manner. Unfortunately, it seems to me that there is no clew to begin work on immediately. We are at sea."

"Av you don't foind a way out av it roight off it will be th' firrust toime ye ivver wur balked," said Barney, admiringly.

"There is always a first time, but we will hope this is not one. I am going to give the matter some thought. Talk it over, fellows, and see if you can't devise some plan."

As Frank was passing into an adjoining room, Hodge approached him, saying in a low tone:

"You must not forget that I am in constant danger every day I remain in California, Merriwell. I must get out as soon as possible."

At first a shadow of annoyance seemed to rest on Frank's face, but it quickly passed, and he said:

"You are right, Bart. A steamer leaves for Honolulu day after to-morrow. To-morrow I will secure passage on her for you."

Then he passed on into the room.

Two hours later Rattleton found Frank alone.

"Well, Merry," said Harry, "what is to be done? Have you decided yet?"

Frank shook his head.

"It is a most perplexing and puzzling situation," he confessed. "If I knew where to find Inza it would not be long before I would have a plan. But to find her—that's the rub."

"What would you do then?" asked Harry. "You could not take her away from her father."

"That is true. But her father is an invalid, and I believe this Lord Stanford has used undue influence in persuading him to force Inza into this marriage. In London I was able to save Mr. Burrage and Inza from being blown to pieces by an anarchist's bomb. It is not likely that he has forgotten this. It may be that I would have some influence with him myself."

"It is possible," admitted Harry; "but even your influence might fail."

"In that case," declared Frank, "I should try to resort to more desperate means."

"It is dangerous, Merry—very dangerous. Since reaching California we have escaped from one danger by the tin of our skeeth—I mean by the skin of our teeth. Even now there is a possibility that Hodge may be arrested."

Frank scowled a little, but nodded slowly.

"I know it," he acknowledged, "but in two days Hodge will be on the sea bound for Honolulu. He is to take passage on a steamer that leaves day after to-morrow. It is this girl I am thinking about, now, Rattle."

"Girls have caused you any amount of trouble, Merry."

"I know that, and I am willing that this girl should cause me any amount more."

"Then it must be that you are still in love with her. This is the girl you care about more than any other."

"I don't know," said Frank, slowly. "It may be. I have not seen her in a long time, and I have seen many other girls, for some of whom I have had more than a passing fancy."

"It is certain that some of them have had more than a passing fancy for you, Frank," laughed Harry.

Merriwell did not smile.

"Harry," he said, gravely, "my thoughts are now of Inza alone. All other girls are forgotten. She always had the utmost confidence in me. She trusted me, and she believed I could do anything. If she knew I were in San Francisco she would find a way to appeal to me for aid. I can fancy her alone with her invalid father, whose one ambition is to make a good match for his child before

he dies. I can fancy her appealing to him, begging him not to force her into this odious marriage. She is not the girl to cringe or cry. She is impulsive, hot-blooded, passionate, and, as a last resort, to escape this English lord, she might do something desperate. Nay, she might commit suicide."

Harry was inclined to laugh at this, but he saw that Merriwell was very grave and earnest, and he refrained. He shook his head, however, saying:

"You cannot be in earnest, old fellow. Girls do not commit suicide nowadays."

"I assure you there is no telling what a girl like Inza Burrage might do. That is what worries me. I feel that it is my duty to aid her, but how—how can I reach her?"

"Pive it gup—I mean give it up, old man. Let us sleep over it to-night."

"Sleep—sleep after hearing this? Impossible!"

"But you can do nothing until daylight comes."

"That is true, and I am wondering what I shall be able to do then. That is why I cannot sleep."

In vain Rattleton urged Frank to lie down and rest. At last he gave it up and went into the other room to tell the boys how hard hit Frank was by the news concerning his old sweetheart.

"I don't doubt me," nodded Hans. "Thot am shust like Vrankie. He vos always thinking a great deal more of somepody else apout, than he vas himself of."

"Begorra," put in Barney, "it is no more than nacheral he should think a great dale av thot girrul. They wur the bist av swatehearts at Fardale. Although they sometimes jist quarreled a bit it's true love thot nivver did run smooth at all, at all, and there's no telling what may happen betwane thim. For sure there is very little smoothness in their love affairs."

"Ah, Merriwell is always falling in love," said Diamond. "I do not believe it goes very deep with him."

"An' if it is yersilf thot thinks so!" cried Barney, contemptuously, "it's little ye know about him, thin!"

Jack flushed, and seemed on the point of resenting this plain speech, but bit his lip and remained silent, although he gave Barney a black look.

The Irish lad did not mind looks, however, and as for words, he had a proverbial Irish tongue that could send back a witty and cutting reply for any sort of speech.

After meeting Hans in San Francisco, Barney had been stopping with Hans at a boarding house to which they now decided to return for the night.

Before leaving, however, they had a few words with Frank, who made them promise to come around early in the morning.

“I may have thought of some plan of action by that time,” he said. “Think the matter over yourselves, boys, perhaps you may be able to aid me. You know Inza, and—well, you know me. You must know I would give anything I possess to locate her now.”

“You pet mine poots we know dot,” nodded Hans.

“Begorra, you’re th’ roight stuff, Frankie, an’ Oi’m riddy to foight wid yer bist frind if he maloints ye,” said Barney, thinking of Diamond.

Frank pressed their hands and bade them good-night. Then they departed.

CHAPTER IV—INZA’S LETTER

Barney and Hans did not turn up on the following morning as soon as Frank expected they would, and as he had forgotten to ask where they boarded, he could not go to find them.

Merriwell had spent a restless, almost a sleepless night. But, although his face was pale, he seemed as full of energy as ever.

He had conceived a plan by which, with Barney’s aid, he fancied he might find Inza. But Barney—where was he?

It was past nine o’clock when the Irish lad came tearing up to the hotel, followed by Hans, who was puffing and blowing like a porpoise, his eyes bulging from his head, his face expressing the wildest excitement.

“Frankie!” gasped Barney.

“Vrankie!” panted Hans.

“What is it?” asked Frank, seeing something unusual had happened.

“It’s news, we hiv’, me b’y!”

“Yah! id vas news we haf!”

“News!” exclaimed Frank, “what sort of news? Have you found Inza?”

“It’s not found her yit we hiv’, me b’y, but we’ll foind her soon, or Oi’ll ate me boots!”

“Yah! and I shall make a square meal mit mine coat off!”

Frank grasped Barney by the shoulder.

“You have found a clew—is that it? Why didn’t you come to me sooner?”

“Begorra, it’s a bit loait we stayed up last night, Frankie, an’ Oi overslipt

this morning. As for this Dutch chase, he nivver would, wake up at all, at all, av it wur not fer me. He would slape roight on fer a wake.”

“Oxscuce me,” said Hans. “No wake in mine. Vhat you took me for—an Irishmans, aind’t id?”

“Tell me what it is you have found out,” cried Frank, sharply.

With frantic haste Barney tore something from his pocket and waved it wildly in the air.

“Here it is, me b’y!” he shouted.

“Yah, thar it vas!” squealed Hans.

“What is it? Give it to me!” commanded Frank.

Then he snatched the object from Barney’s hands.

It was a letter.

“Inza’s writing!” said Frank, hoarsely, as he glanced at it. “I would know it anywhere! A letter to you, Barney! When did you receive this?”

“In th’ mornin’ mail, me b’y, afther Oi got up. So ye say it is well Oi overslipt mysilf, or Oi would not have bin there to recave th’ mail whin it was delivered.”

The envelope had been torn open in a ragged manner, showing Barney had opened it with great haste.

Frank lost no time in drawing forth the letter. In a moment he was reading it. It ran as follows:

“DEAR BARNEY: I am writing this on the sly, hoping to find an opportunity to mail it to you. I am to be taken from the city in the morning by my father and this horrid Lord Stanford. How I despise him! But he seems to have plenty of money, and father is all taken up with him. Somehow, I fancy he has not as much money as he pretends to have. I am sure he thinks me an heiress, although I have told him a hundred times I am not. Father, however, has caused him to think we are very well to do, financially, and that is enough to lead the scheming scoundrel on. It seems to make no difference to him when I tell him how much I dislike him. He simply laughs and says I will get over that by and by when we are married. That will never be. I would not marry him if he were the last man in the world—so there!

“But I am forgetting to tell you what I started to say. Lord Stanford has bought a yacht, and he is going to take us away on it tomorrow morning. I have refused to go. Father says I must. Oh, dear! I wish I had some one who could help me escape from this horrid Englishman. If Frank Merriwell were here—dear old Frank! I could call on him. Oh, what would I give to see him now? But he is far away—so far away.

"If I could get another good chance, I would run away. I may get a chance. I am afraid you cannot help me again, for you have been watched. To-night I heard Lord Stanford tell father where you were, and that is how I know your address.

"Stanford's yacht is somewhere out toward North Beach or Black Point. I know this from overhearing his talk with father. In the morning, unless I am fortunate enough to give them the slip, he will take me on board for the cruise. Where they are going I do not know. Oh, if you could aid me to get away from them once more; but I know it is too much to ask you to try this again. If I had been able to reach my aunt in Sacramento, I think she would have persuaded father to drop his scheme of marrying me to Lord Stanford.

"Good-by, Barney. You were always Frank's staunchest friend and admirer, and that is why I have thought so much of you and trusted you so fully. Dear Frank, where can he be? Oh, wouldn't he give it to this horrid Englishman if he were here and knew the truth? He would not be afraid of a hundred Lord Stanfords. He never was afraid of anything in his life! I dreamed of him last night, and I thought he had come to aid me. When I awakened and found it was only a dream, I cried myself to sleep again.

"Oh, Barney! father came so near catching me writing this letter just now! I was barely able to conceal it from him in time. He asked me what I was doing, and I fibbed by saying, 'nothing at all, father.' He was so suspicious, and I am taking desperate chances in adding these few lines. I shall try to bribe the bell boy to post this letter for me, and I hope it will reach you all right. Farewell, INZA."

To the astonishment of both Barney and Hans the reading of this letter did not seem to excite Frank at all. There was a slight movement of the muscles of his face when Inza mentioned him, but that was all.

When he had finished, he folded the letter quickly and put it into his pocket.

"Barney," he said, sharply, "order a cab without delay. Have it at the door in five minutes."

"All right, me b'y!" cried Barney, and he made a rush to obey,

Frank disappeared in the other direction, and Hans was left alone.

"Well, I vender vere I vas at," said the Dutch boy, as he stared around him in a bewildered manner. "Vat vas it Vrankie's going to done alretty yet? It don't took him more than vive hours to make oop his mind he vas going to do someding. I pet me your life he yas going to git after dot Lord Stanford like a kioodle dog after a pone."

Before five minutes had passed Frank came rushing from the hotel and found Barney waiting at the door, while the cab was standing near the curb.

"Here ye are, me b'y," cried the Irish lad.

"Good!" exclaimed Frank, with satisfaction.

Then he addressed the driver.

"How far is it to North Beach?" he asked.

"Two miles, sir," was the answer.

"Can you make it in twenty minutes?"

"I doubt it, sir."

"Here is five dollars," said Frank, handing the driver the money. "Get me to North Beach in twenty minutes and you shall have five more."

The man seized the money eagerly, and then asked:

"What part of North Beach do you want to go to, Sir?"

"I don't know," confessed Merry.

The driver looked surprised.

"Don't know!" he exclaimed in a puzzled way. "Well, that is strange."

"Is Black Point anywhere near North Beach?" asked Frank, hurriedly.

"Sure," nodded the driver.

"Then take us out that way," ordered Frank, as he bundled Barney into the cab, followed himself and slammed the door.

The driver whipped up his horses, and away they went with a rattlety-bump just as Hans came waddling out of the hotel, crying for them to hold on.

Frank looked at his watch.

"Five minutes of ten," he said. "We shall get there at a quarter after ten. Even that may be too late."

"Howly Mowes!" exclaimed Barney. "It's the divvil's own rush ye do be in, an' ye don't same to be in a hurry, ayther. But how are we going to foind Lord Stanford's yacht, afther we get there, Frankie? Oi'd loike to have yez explain."

"That's something—I can't tell—yet," acknowledged Frank, as the cab dashed around a corner and pitched them into a heap against one side. "We'll have to—hunt for—it."

"Musha! musha!" gasped the Irish lad. "It's a sure thing thot droiver manes to earn the other foive dollars."

For Barney it was a somewhat exciting ride at first, as the street was filled with cars, carriages and trucks, each one of which seemed trying to get to some destination regardless of all the others. In and out, here and there, dodging in front of a car, narrowly missing the wheel of a truck, slinking through a narrow space between two heavy teams, turning to the right, turning to the left, on rattled the cab. The boys were thrown about as if they had been seated in a small boat that was at the mercy of an angry sea.

At length the streets were less obstructed, and the driver made greater speed. He wielded the whip mercilessly.

"This is fun aloive," gasped Barney. "Oi'll not hiv' a whole bone in me body whin Oi git there."

Frank said nothing, but looked at his watch, after which he nodded in a satisfied manner.

"Is it fast enough fer yez—we are going—Frankie?" asked Barney, with a bit of sarcasm in his voice.

"If it is only two miles to North Beach we will get there in less than fifteen minutes," said Frank.

"But it's did we may be whin we arrove, me b'y."

Crack! crack! crack! sounded the driver's whip, each snap being like the report of a pistol. Clatter! clatter! co-lat-ter! sounded the hoofs of the galloping horses.

"Oi've played football a little in me loife," said Barney, as he picked himself up from the bottom of the cab, only to be thrown down again with greater violence, "but Oi'll admit this takes th' cake. Football is not in it, at all, at all."

Still Frank was silent. Now he held his watch in his hand his eyes fastened upon it. Montgomery Avenue was reached, and they turned into it.

At the corner of the next street they nearly ran down another carriage. By a sharp turn to the right, the driver whirled alongside of the cab into which he had nearly crashed.

Looking from the window, Frank gazed directly into the window of the other cab.

A cry escaped his lips:

"Inza—there she is!"

There was an answering cry, and the face of a beautiful girl appeared at the window of the other cab.

"Frank!" she almost screamed. "Frank, is it you?"

Then a pair of hands grasped her, and pulled her back from view.

But Frank had seen enough, and now his very heart was on fire with excitement. Inza—he had found her.

CHAPTER V—TO THE RESCUE

Both Frank and Barney saw that a struggle was going on in the other cab. They could hear Inza crying for some one to let her go, and the sound of her voice made Frank more desperate than ever.

"The scoundrel!" he panted, trying to tear open the door and spring out. "I'd like to choke the breath of life out of him! If he harms her, I will."

"That's roight, me b'y!" shouted Barney. "We'll give it to th' spalpeen!"

Then the driver of the other cab whipped up his horses, and away they dashed getting in ahead of the one carrying Frank and Barney.

"They are making for the harbor!" grated Frank. "That is how it happens we came upon them."

"Roight again, as ye always are," agreed Barney.

Frank thrust his head out of the window and shouted to the driver.

"After them! after them! Don't let them get away, on your life!"

"After who?" asked the driver.

"That cab!" flashed back Frank. "Are you dazed or drunk? Whip up, man— whip up!"

"They didn't do nothing," declared the driver. "It was me who came near running into them."

"Hang it!" burst from Merriwell. "I don't care about that! I want you to follow them!"

"What for?" asked the driver.

"Because I tell you to, you stupid blockhead!" Frank almost roared. "It will be worth ten dollars to you if you keep them in sight."

"I will do it or kill my horses!" declared the man.

The other cab had obtained quite a start while Frank was urging the driver to start in pursuit.

"It's a hot toime we're in fer, me b'y," said Barney.

"It's a hot chase I propose to give them," came determinedly from Merriwell's lips. "Fortune has favored us, and now we must not let them get away."

"Pwhat do yez mane to do afther ye catch thim?"

"Don't know now. I'll be able to tell better when we catch them."

"It's Inza's father that's in th' cab."

"It was not her father that pulled her back from view."

"Whoy?"

"Because he has not the strength to handle her with such ease. The last time I saw him he was a weak and broken old man."

"It's betther he is now, Frankie. Thravel sames to hiv' done th' ould duck good, so it does."

"It is probable that both her father and Lord Stanford are in that cab."

"An' it's not yesilf that will think av throying to take th' girrul away from

her fayther, is it?"

"I don't know," said Frank, his face hard and stern. "In this free country fathers who try to force their daughters into odious marriages are not popular, and, should I be arrested for interfering, it is almost certain I would have the sympathy of the public."

He looked out of the window and urged the driver not to lose sight of the other cab if he had to kill his horses in pursuing.

"Kill both your horses if necessary!" he cried. "I can pay for them! Remember it is ten dollars anyway if you keep them in sight."

"They'll not lose me," declared the driver, shouting to make his voice heard above the rattling rumble of wheels.

At the very next corner the cab in advance swung sharply around into Beach Street, and now they were in sight of the bay that was but a few blocks away.

The driver of the pursuing cab attempted to make a sharp turn at the corner, but he did not do it skillfully, and a catastrophe occurred.

Over went the cab!

Crash—smash!

The driver was flung to the ground, and Frank was shot out through a window.

By the rarest kind of luck Frank was not injured severely, and he quickly leaped to his feet.

The frightened horses were plunging and rearing, but the driver had clung to the reins, and was holding them from running away.

Frank wondered if Barney had been hurt, but there was no time for him to stop there, if he meant to keep the other cab in sight.

Frank was a sprinter, and he started after the cab at a run.

Two men tried to stop him, thinking he must have caused the smash and was running away to escape arrest.

"Hold on!" they shouted, grabbing at him.

"Hands off!" he flung back, dodging them.

A policeman appeared at the opposite corner and yelled across the street for the running lad to stop.

Frank did not heed the command.

Seeing the driver struggling with his frantic horses the officer hastened to his aid, letting Frank go.

Round to the left the cab turned at the next corner.

Frank saw a head thrust out of a window, and he knew one of the occupants was looking back.

Round the corner darted Frank.

Out upon a long pier the cab was being driven.

Setting his teeth the pursuer made a last great burst of speed, and went racing out upon the pier.

The cab stopped, and a young, red-faced man flung open the door and sprang out. Then he reached back and pulled the girl out after him.

A short distance from the pier a handsome white yacht lay at anchor. At the foot of the stone steps that ran down to a small floating landing lay a rowboat. In the boat was a sailor in yachting costume, while another sailor stood on the pier, as if he had been waiting for the appearance of some one.

"Here, Bush!" cried the man who had pulled the girl from the cab; "take her—hold her! I must have it out with this blooming young idiot who is coming."

"Drop that girl!" cried Merriwell, with one hand outflung, as he came straight on.

Inza's father was slowly getting from the cab, shaking with excitement, his face being very pale.

Lord Stanford tried to hand the girl over to the sailor, but at this juncture Inza showed her spirit:

"Don't touch me—don't you dare!" she cried to the sailor, her eyes flashing at him in a manner that made him hesitate.

Then she broke from all detaining hands and ran toward Frank, who met her and placed an arm about her shoulders.

"Oh, Frank!" she panted; "is it you—can it be?"

"Yes, Inza," he answered, as he held her close and kept his eyes on the Englishman, whose flushed face had grown white with rage. "It is I."

"And you have come to—to save me from that horrid wretch?"

"Well, you should know I am ready to do anything in my power for you, Inza. Have I ever failed to respond when you have appealed to me for aid?"

"Never—never, Frank! Don't let him come near me again! I am afraid of him!"

"Release that young lady!" cried Lord Stanford, his voice hoarse and husky. "Who are you that you dare interfere here?"

He took a step toward Merriwell, but was halted by a look from the Yale lad's flashing eyes.

"I am the friend of Miss Burrage," answered Frank; "and I shall protect her from you, sir."

The Englishman forced a husky laugh.

"That's a blooming good joke!" he sneered. "Miss Burrage is in her father's charge, and I scarcely think you will have the impudence to interfere."

Bernard Burrage looked on in a helpless manner, leaning heavily on his cane.

"Her father has no right to force her into an odious marriage against her will," declared Frank. "It is possible that she needs protection from him."

"What insolence!" fumed Lord Stanford. "I never heard anything like it! There's not an English boy living who would dare think of attempting such a thing."

"Possibly not; but you are not dealing with an English boy, sir. I am American to the bone."

"And what you need is a good sound drubbing."

"Possibly you think of giving it to me? If so, I advise you to take off your coat, as you will find it warm work, I assure you."

Inza clung to Frank, looking up at his handsome face with an expression of admiration in her dark eyes.

"You young scoundrel! Perhaps you do not know whom you are addressing?"

"It makes no difference to me, sir."

"I am Lord Stanford, of—"

"I don't care if you are the lord of all Europe! You are on American soil now, and dealing with a full-blooded American."

"Bah!" cried the Englishman. "You are nothing but a young braggart! You are trying to pose as a hero before the young lady, but it will do you no good."

"Do you think so? That makes not a bit of difference to me."

Frank regretted very much that he had not been able to follow them to the pier with a cab, for then he would have made an attempt to hurry Inza into it and carry her away.

Now he fully realized that, should he attempt to walk away with her, if Lord Stanford found no other manner of stopping him, he could follow and order the first policeman he met to arrest Frank.

Merriwell saw that Bernard Burrage was shaking with excitement, showing the old man's nerves were quite unstrung.

Stanford appealed to Inza's father.

"Mr. Burrage," he said, "why don't you order that young man to unhand your daughter? Is it possible you mean to let him carry on this outrage in such a high-handed manner?"

"Let her go! Let her go!" cried the invalid, weakly, lifting his heavy cane and shaking it in a feeble manner at the youth.

"I will do so when she commands me, not before," declared Frank, calmly. "I am astonished at you, Mr. Burrage! I never dreamed you would attempt to force your daughter into a marriage against her will."

"Have you forgotten?" whispered Inza. "This is not the first time. He tried to make me marry my cousin in New Orleans."

"It's nothing to you—nothing, sir, nothing!" excitedly shouted Bernard Burrage.

"Take her away from him, why don't you?" fretted Lord Stanford.

Frank laughed with a cutting sound.

"That is very fine, noble sir!" he sneered. "It seems quite appropriate that you should stand still and order this feeble old man to take her from me."

"He has the right to do it, don't you know?"

"You do it, Lord Stanford—I give you the right to do it," said the old man.

"Yes, come and do it!" urged Frank.

"Oh, can't we get away!" whispered Inza. "We must!"

"If Barney would appear with the cab!" thought Frank. "I am afraid he was badly injured."

Once more he looked around, but the one he wished to see was not in view.

Frank longed to have several of the boys on hand, for then he could have looked after the Englishman and the girl's father while they carried Inza away.

As Frank turned his head, Lord Stanford stepped swiftly forward and grasped Inza's wrist, attempting to draw her away.

She gave a scream.

Merriwell turned like a flash, saw what was occurring, and swung his fist at the Englishman.

Crack!—the blow caught Lord Stanford fairly on the left ear.

Down he went, measuring his length on the planking in a moment.

The sailor who had been standing on the pier was near at hand, and he hurried to assist the fallen nobleman.

But Stanford was not hurt, and he got up quickly.

The blow was sufficient to arouse his anger fully, and he made a blind rush for Frank.

Merriwell saw he was in for a struggle with the enraged nobleman, and he quickly placed Inza behind him, keeping his eyes on Stanford all the while.

The furious fellow struck at Frank, huskily crying:

"Take that, you young ruffian! It's a bobby I'll call and have you arrested for what you have done!"

But Frank avoided the blow with ease.

He did not strike Stanford again.

"You are a mark," he laughed. "I'm ashamed to give you what you deserve. Why, I could break your nose in a moment if I wished."

"Bragging again! You Americans are always bragging! That is all you know how to do!"

"Really! History shows we have done up Johnny Bull twice, and done him good. If necessary, we can do him up again."

Again Stanford rushed, and again Frank ducked and dodged aside, thrusting out his foot and tripping the Englishman.

Down upon the planking plunged the angry nobleman, striking his nose hard enough to scrape it quite severely.

When he got up he was blind with rage—almost frothing.

He made such a swift rush at Frank that Merry was not able to dodge again, and he received a slight blow on the cheek.

Frank's eyes flashed, and he grappled with Stanford.

Whirling the fellow about, he grasped him by the collar and a convenient portion of the trousers he wore.

"You are excited, my dear sir," said Merriwell, gently. "What you need is a nice chance to cool off. I think I will give you an opportunity to do so."

Then he ran the frightened and frantic nobleman to the edge of the pier and kicked him off into the water.

"There," said Frank, as he stood looking down, having thrust his hands into his pockets, "that will be a fine thing for you."

Lord Stanford came up, spouting like a whale.

"Murder!" he cried. "He means to drown me!"

"Oh, no; only give you a bath," said Frank, soberly.

Then he heard a shrill cry of fear behind him, and whirled to see that the sailor had seized Inza.

Like a leaping panther the young athlete went for the man.

"Help!" appealed Inza.

The sailor saw Frank coming, and prepared to meet the attack. He was a thick, muscular-appearing fellow, and he did not seem in the least afraid of Merriwell, for all that the latter had handled Lord Stanford with such ease.

"You won't find a snap with me," said the man, showing eagerness for the struggle. "I can handle two or three of you."

He looked as if he fully believed it. Indeed, he had the appearance of a prize fighter, and ninety-nine boys out of a hundred would have hesitated about tackling him.

Not so with Frank. He was ready to tackle an army of giants in defense of Inza, and he grappled with the sailor.

But he was given no time to see what he could do.

It seemed that a thunderbolt from the clear sky descended and smote him on the head. There was a flash of light as if something had exploded in his head.

Darkness followed.

CHAPTER VI—FRANK BUYS A YACHT

Frank sat up and looked around. Deep-toned bells seemed to be ringing in his head, which throbbed with a pain that made him weak and faint.

He was on the pier, and a man in yachting dress was approaching him. There seemed to be something familiar in the appearance of the man.

Frank wondered what had happened, for his wits were so scattered that he could not pull them together readily.

“That was a decidedly rough deal you received, Mr. Merriwell,” said the man in the yachting suit. “I saw it all, and you did not have a fair show.”

Frank looked at him stupidly.

“You know me,” he said, speaking with an effort; “but you have the advantage of me. Somehow, though, your face does seem familiar. I believe I have seen you before.”

“Sure you have! Why, have you forgotten last night in Chinatown?”

“No. I have not forgotten. You are Mr. Chandler.”

“Yes. Permit me to assist you to rise. I hope you are not badly hurt. It was a wicked blow, delivered with all the strength the old man could muster.”

“Blow?” muttered Frank, as he was aided to his feet, but found that at first he was unable to stand without aid. “Was I struck? It seems that somebody hit me on the head.”

“You’re dazed. Somebody did hit you. I saw you toss one chap into the water and grapple with the other. Then the old man knocked you down with his cane.”

Frank grew excited.

“I was fighting for Inza!” he exclaimed. “I remember it now! So her father knocked me out? Where have they taken her?”

“They took her away in a boat, although she struggled to break away and reach you,” answered Chandler. “They are on board that yacht out there now.”

He pointed toward Lord Stanford’s yacht, where it was seen that sailors

were making hasty preparations to get under weigh, but no sign of the Englishman, Inza, or Mr. Burrage could be seen.

Frank Merriwell straightened up with a sudden return of strength that was, to say the least, astonishing.

"So they have carried her on board?" he said, quickly. "And it is plain they will be away directly. Mr. Chandler, I believe you have a boat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

"There it lays."

The man pointed to a small but handsome single-sticker that lay within a short distance of Lord Stanford's boat.

"It seems to me that you said last night that you wished to sell her."

"I do."

"How much will you take for her as she lays?"

"She cost me fifteen hundred dollars, but I am anxious to sell, and I will take a thousand."

"I'll take her."

John Chandler gasped for breath, and then smiled doubtfully.

"That is easily said, but I must have ready cash for her, and—"

"You shall have ready cash. I will give you a check on the Nevada Bank, where I have an account. My guardian fully expected I would need plenty of money by the time I reached San Francisco, and he arranged it for me, so I am able to secure almost any reasonable sum. There will be no trouble or delay in getting your money."

Chandler still looked doubtful, as it seemed rather improbable that this lad could draw so much money on short notice.

"How many men have you on your yacht?" asked Frank, as if the matter were settled.

"None now. The two friends who were with me last night were the last of my party, save the cook, and even the cook left this morning."

"Is she fitted up for a cruise?"

"I should say so! I expected to spend four more weeks on board, but business changes have knocked me out on that."

"Remember, I have bought her just as she lays."

"Certainly."

"That includes everything on board, save your personal property, Mr. Chandler."

"Exactly."

"I shall take possession, with a full crew, before noon."

"Great Scott! You do things in a hurry, young man."

"This occasion makes it necessary. I am going to follow that other yacht."

"I am afraid she will get off ahead of you, and you may have some trouble in following her."

"Well, I shall attempt it. Come; we'll get a cab, and go to the bank at once. The transfer must be made in a hurry, and I must get my party together without the loss of a moment."

They hastened off the pier.

Coming toward them they saw a cab that looked somewhat bruised and battered, one of its lamps having been smashed and one side damaged.

"I believe it is the very cab in which I pursued Lord Stanford!" cried Frank. "Yes, I know it is! And there is Barney coming, too!"

The Irish boy was on foot, limping along painfully, but he waved his hand in a cheerful manner when he saw Frank, shouting:

"Hurro, me b'y! It's nivver a bit can yez kill Barney Mulloy at all, at all!"

Then the Irish boy hurried forward, still limping, and excitedly asked:

"Pwhere be they, Frankie? Is it th' shlip they gave yez, me lad? Musha! musha! it's bad luck we had!"

"They got away for the time," said Frank, swiftly; "but I am going to follow them in a yacht I have just bought."

"A yacht? Ye've bought a yacht? It's jist loike yez! Ye'd be afther buying a stameboat av it wur necessary!"

Then Barney recognized Chandler as one of the men who had hastened to their aid in the Chinese theatre.

"An' is it your yacht he's bought?" asked the Irish lad. "It's nivver Oi saw th' bate av this! An' th' droiver says ye'll have ter pay fer his smash, though it's littlde his cab wur damaged."

The driver stopped at the curb and began to bemoan the fate that had befallen him.

Frank cut him short.

"Give us a rest!" he exclaimed. "You were paid to take chances, and it is not my fault if you upset by turning a corner too sharply. It's a wonder you escaped arrest for reckless driving."

"I should have been pulled, sir," said the driver, "but it happened I knew the officer who saw the affair. But I'll have to pay for the damage done to the hack, sir, and I'm a poor man with a wife and five children to support."

"Here is the ten dollars I promised you if you would get me to the water front inside of twenty minutes," said Frank, as he handed over a bill, which the driver eagerly grasped. "Do you want to earn ten more? That will make twenty-five, and will pay you well for everything, damage and all."

"Tell me how I can make ten more."

“By taking us to the Nevada Bank in a hurry.”

“Get in.”

The door of the cab was jerked open, and Frank urged Chandler and Barney in. He paused to say to the driver:

“Every minute is precious. You know I pay right off the reel if you give satisfaction. Do your best.”

The door slammed, and away went the cab.

“Barney,” said Frank, when they were started, “this cab will land us at the corner of Montgomery and Pine streets, where I shall leave it to complete my business with Mr. Chandler. I want you to stay in the cab, which will take you to my hotel. You are to tell the boys I have bought a yacht, and every man must be on board ready to sail before noon. Get them together, have Rattleton settle the hotel bill, and see that they are all ready to get out of the place, for I shall want them to start the instant I appear.”

“Did yez ivver hear th’ loikes av it?” gurgled the Irish lad. “Oi nivver knew anybody to do anything in such a rush in all my loife.”

“A rush is required in this case, or Lord Stanford will get too much the start of me.”

Frank finished giving Barney instructions during the ride, and before the bank was reached, the Irish lad knew exactly what was expected of him.

When the bank was reached, Frank and Chandler got out. Frank gave the driver the promised money, and added something to pay him for taking Barney to the hotel.

This was done without waste of time, and then Merriwell led the way into the bank.

Business in the bank was soon concluded, and when Frank again reached the pier at the foot of Taylor Street, having in his pocket a paper that showed he had paid one thousand dollars for the yacht *Greyhound*, seven boys were there to greet him.

Jack Diamond started in to grumble, but Frank cut him short.

“Not a word!” he said, sharply. “All who wish to go with me without question are welcome; any who do not wish to do so are at liberty to remain behind.”

As he spoke he was eagerly looking for Lord Stanford’s yacht, which was gone from its place of anchorage. An expression of great satisfaction, of positive joy, escaped his lips when he saw far out toward the Golden Gate a sloop-rigged craft that he believed was the Englishman’s boat.

“Thank goodness the breeze has fallen!” he muttered. “She has not been able to get out of the harbor.”

Three minutes later Frank had bargained with a boatman to set the whole party on board the *Greyhound*.

This was not necessary, however, for he discovered the small boat beside the pier, Chandler having come off in it.

However, as the bargain was made, the man took off all but three of the boys. Frank, Bart and Barney used the small boat.

Frank was wondering at the non-appearance of the former owner of the yacht, as Chandler had stated he would be on hand to see if there was any of his personal property on the *Greyhound* that he wished to take away.

"I can't wait for him," Merry decided. "It was odd he did not keep with me. As I had a little business to look after, and was in a rush, I presume he did not care to chase me around, and he thought I would not be able to get here as soon as this."

Immediately they were on board, Frank set each one at some task, and put them on the jump.

"Do you see that small white yacht that is trying to beat out past the point?" he asked.

"Yah," nodded Hans, "we seen dot."

"Yah!" exclaimed Frank, whose spirits were rising now they were on board the *Greyhound* and Lord Stanford had not been able to get out of sight and give them the slip. "What do you mean by addressing the captain in that manner, sir? Yah! Who ever heard of a sailor saying 'yah' to his superior officer! You should say, 'Ay, ay, sir.'"

"Vale, I dinks me I said dot der next times, Vrankie."

"Vrankie," shouted Merriwell. "Who ever heard anything like that? Think of a common sailor addressing the captain of a vessel by his front name! Have a little more respect, young man!" he suddenly thundered, as if greatly enraged. "If you are not careful, you shall be placed in irons and thrown into the hold!"

Hans gasped for breath and began to tremble.

"Dunder und blitzens!" he murmured. "Vat vos der madder mit dot poy! Uf dis been der vay he done as soon as we get der vater on, der next time I took a sail mit him I vas goin' to sday ad home. Yah!"

Frank pointed out Lord Stanford's yacht to the boys, and told them that he did not wish to lose sight of it.

He set Toots and Hans to hoisting the anchor, while Harry, Bart and Jack shook out the sails.

The jib was run up first, and then the mainsail was hoisted, Barney, who was a skillful sailor, having taken the helm.

Strange to say, it seemed as if the wind had been waiting for them to make sail, for it arose promptly and filled the sails so that the *Greyhound* soon bore away on the starboard tack.

Out beyond the point the *Fox*, Lord Stanford's yacht, had felt the wind first,

and was already tacking close under the northern shore.

Frank went aft and stood near Barney, while he watched the actions of the *Greyhound* with no little anxiety.

He had no idea what sort of a boat he had purchased, and he could see that the Englishman's yacht had a rakish, saucy look, as if it might be able to show him a clean pair of heels in a fair breeze.

Under Frank's directions, the sails were trimmed and the *Greyhound* close hauled, as he wished to see how near he could run to the wind without falling off.

Although the wind was unfavorable, as it was not steady, coming in gusts now and then, Frank waited till fair headway had been obtained, and then had Barney luff till the course was close into the wind, which was held long enough to convince him that the *Greyhound* did not jibe easily.

"Good!" he exclaimed, with satisfaction. "I was afraid she might prove cranky. Hold her as close as you can, Barney, and not let her yaw. I believe she is a dandy against the wind. If she proves all right before the wind, we'll give Lord Stanford a hot little run of it."

CHAPTER VII—THE STORM

After a while Frank went below to examine the interior of the yacht. He found it very comfortable and well furnished with all necessities and not a few luxuries.

"She's a little boat," he said; "but she's a peach! There won't be any room to spare on board, but we'll manage to get along somehow. It is plain she was built for not more than five or six, and there are eight of us."

Bart Hodge came down.

"By Jove!" he said, dropping on a cushioned seat, "I am feeling better, don't you know. I hated to sail for Honolulu, and now we'll soon be so far from San Francisco that there'll not be much danger of arrest. I want to stick by you, Merry."

"And I hope we'll be able to hang together, old fellow," assured Frank. "You have been beating about for yourself far too long."

"I know it—I can see it now. It's lucky you turned up just as you did, for I was going to the dogs."

Frank examined the wardrobe, and a cry of satisfaction came from him.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "Here are a number of yachting suits. Perhaps we can dig out suits for all of us."

They overhauled the clothing, and Frank and Bart soon found suits which fitted them very well. In fact, Merriwell was so well built that he obtained a splendid fit, and remarkably handsome he appeared in the cap, short jacket and light trousers of a yachtsman.

"We are strictly in it," he smiled, surveying Bart. "I'll go on deck and send the others down for suits, while you remain here and assist them in the selections. I want to keep my eye on Lord Stanford, anyway."

So Frank ascended the companion way, and soon took Barney's place at the helm, sending him and Bruce below.

The boys were much surprised to see Merriwell appear in a yachting suit, and he explained that he had purchased everything on board the *Greyhound*, which included the suits in the wardrobe, as they plainly were not all Chandler's personal property, having been designed for men of different build.

"Vale, uf dot don'd peat der pand!" muttered the Dutch boy. "Uf dere peen a suit der lot in dot vill fit me, I vill show der poys vat a dandy sailors der Dutch makes. Yaw!"

Barney soon returned to the deck, having found a very good fit, but he said Bruce was having more difficulty.

"Begorra! there wur a fat mon on borrod, an' he's lift a suit thot will fit this Dutch chase," grinned the Irish lad.

"Why you don'd drop id callin' me dot names, Barney!" cried Hans. "I don't like dot, you pet!"

The other lads went below to see what they could find in the way of clothes as Frank sent them, Toots being the last.

Every boy found a suit, although in some cases the clothes were too loose. Hans came swelling on deck, wearing a suit with the legs of the trousers turned up several inches and the wrists of the coat sleeves rolled back.

"Say!" he grinned; "I vos a pird! Did you efer seen der peat me of now, I don't know?"

Toots had discovered an ordinary sailor's suit, with white anchors worked upon it, and he was proud as a peacock.

The very first leg across had carried them out past Black Point, upon which Fort Mason frowned down upon them when they swung close under the shore and went about on the other tack.

At first the *Greyhound* gained on the *Fox*, as Merry could see; but as Lord Stanford's yacht approached the open ocean she found a stronger breeze and danced along in a lively manner.

Other vessels were in the narrows, but there was plenty of room for them all.

Frank had brought a marine glass from below, and he used it to watch the *Fox*, having permitted Barney to take the helm again.

Merry could see Lord Stanford standing on the deck near the companion way, talking to one of his men. From the manner of the Englishman, it was apparent that he did not suspect he was being pursued.

“So much the better,” muttered the new owner of the *Greyhound*. “If he does not catch on right away we may be able to overhaul him and lay alongside without being suspected.”

He watched the *Fox* till it shot out past Fort Point and disappeared beyond the point of land on which the fort was located.

“So they are bound southward,” muttered Merry. “Ten to one they are going down the coast to Santa Cruz—possibly to Santa Barbara, although that is quite a cruise.”

Half an hour later the *Greyhound* ran out past Fort Point, and the *Fox* was discovered far away along the coast, steadily bearing to the south.

“We’re after you, my boy,” muttered Frank. “I don’t believe you’ll be able to run away from us in a hurry.”

There was a heavy swell on—an “old say,” Barney called it. It was seen that the *Fox* was rolling a great deal.

“They are sure to hug the coast pretty close,” Merriwell decided. “I don’t believe Lord Stanford cares about getting far from land in that boat. The *Greyhound* will sail anywhere he can go.”

It became a steady sail to the south, and Frank cracked on every stitch of canvas, hoping to come up with the *Fox* hand-over-hand. In this he was disappointed, although it was plain that they gained somewhat.

The afternoon sun sank lower and lower. Toots was appointed steward, and prepared a meal from the supply of provisions on board.

At sunset the *Fox* was seen rounding a distant point of land and making into a bay.

“I rather think she means to stop there to-night,” said Frank.

He examined the chart and decided that it was Half-moon Bay.

“If the wind holds,” he declared, “we will come upon them there to-night.”

But as the sun sank in a reddish haze that seemed like a conflagration far out on the open ocean, the wind died entirely and the *Greyhound* lay becalmed, rolling helplessly on the “old sea.”

“But it’s a good bit av a brase we’ll be afther havin’ before mawnin’,” Barney declared. “Oi nivver saw th’ sun go down thot way when it didn’t poipe up lather on.”

The Irish lad was right. Frank believed this, and he ordered everything made tight, while both mainsail and jib was double-reefed, and the topsails taken in.

"I don't see the good of all this work," grumbled Diamond. "Here we are rolling around without a breath of wind, and yet we're taking in sail as if it were blowing a hurricane."

Frank paid no attention to Jack, who, in a most astonishing manner, had developed into a grumbler since starting out on the bicycle tour across the continent.

Barney, however, was not pleased with the Virginian's remarks, and he snorted:

"Pwhat's th' matther wid yez? It's a roight shmart bit av a sailor ye'd make—Oi don't think! Ye'd wait till th' wind blew, an' thin ye'd be afther rafing."

Jack did not fancy being talked to in this manner by the Irish lad. He flushed hotly, and seemed on the point of assaulting Barney, but Mulloy gave indications that he was ready and anxious for a "scrap," and Diamond thought better of it.

The rolling swell proved decidedly trying for some of the boys, and Diamond was the first to get sick. In fact, he had begun to feel ill when he grumbled about shortening sail.

"Dot poy vas opeyin' der Pible," grinned Hans, pointing to Jack, who was leaning over the rail. "Der Pible says, 'Cast your pread der vater on,' und py shimminy! he vas doin' dot, ain'd id!"

Then the Dutch boy opened wide his mouth and laughed heartily. Suddenly he pressed his hands to his stomach and stopped laughing, a queer, troubled look coming to his fat face.

"Shimminy!" he muttered. "I vonder vot der madder mit me vas, don'd id? I nefer felt so queer all mein life in."

Then, as the *Greyhound* fell away into the trough of the sea, with a peculiar sinking motion, he gasped:

"Dot subber vot I ate don'd seem mit me to agree. I pet you your life dot canned chickens vas sboilt. I peliefed all der time dot chickens vas a hen, but id vas der first hen I efer seen as didn't vant to set."

"Begorra! it's saysack ye are alriddy," chuckled Barney. "You'll be kapin' company wid Diamond dirictly."

"Yaw," gasped Hans. "I pelief you, Parney."

Then he made a rush for the rail, and followed Jack's example.

Darkness came on, creeping in a blue haze across the water. Shortly after nightfall there was a faint, weird moaning away on the surface of the sea, which glowed like liquid fire under the rail of the yacht.

"It's the auld nick av a blow we'll have," declared Barney to Frank. "Oi don't loike it at all, at all."

"You like it quite as well as I do," admitted Merriwell. "I am not familiar with these waters, and I do not fancy the idea of piling up on lea shore."

The moaning arose to a shrill cry, and then the wind came with a sudden rush, catching the *Greyhound* and knocking her on beam ends in a twinkling.

Frank assisted Barney at the helm, shouting:

"Hold fast, everybody!"

The little vessel righted, and then away she leaped, laying hard over to port, with the rail awash.

Like a frightened race horse the *Greyhound* sped away, with the wild wind beating upon her and shrieking through her rigging. The mast bent with a snapping sound.

"Ease off the sheet!" shouted Frank. "We're in danger of losing that stick, and we'll be finished if we do!"

So the boat was allowed to run free, which eased the strain somewhat.

Now the wind was shrieking as if all the demons of the deep had been set loose in a moment and were making an assault on the little yacht that had been caught in the midst of the tempest.

At nightfall Frank had taken precaution to see that the proper lights were set, green to starboard and red to port.

The sky was covered with flying masses of clouds, between which the cold stars blinked and vanished, like the flashes of guns seen through masses of rolling smoke.

After a little the moon rose and leaped up into the mass of clouds, as if eager to be in the midst of the wild delirium of the reeling sky.

The *Greyhound* leaped along the crests of the waves, plunged into the depths of the watery valleys, and tore her way through the seething, boiling sea.

Frank was watching her with the greatest anxiety, wondering what sort of storm boat she would prove to be.

Diamond, Browning, Hans and Toots got below. Rattleton and Hodge remained on deck with Frank and Barney.

When the moon shot out through the clouds the boys could see a great waste of water heaving and plunging all around them, like a sea of snow.

But the moon appeared and disappeared in such an erratic manner that it was extremely irritating, making the whole world seem a place of troubled shadows and awesome shapes.

"It's dead lucky we reefed down for this, Barney," cried Frank, placing his lips close to the Irish lad's ear.

"Roight ye are, me b'y," Mulloy called back, cheerfully. "It's a good bit av a

braze she's blowing now, an' Oi think there's more comin'."

"Will she stand, it?"

"Av it ain't too sthiff. It's a roight tight litttle boat she is, an' all we made is to kape off shore an' let her go."

Beginning to feel satisfied with the behavior of the yacht, Frank felt a wild thrill of delight in the fury of the tempest. He knew something about managing a large boat himself, and he felt confidence in Barney's qualifications as a sailor.

The moon leaped from the edge of one cloud to the edge of another, as if it, too, were running a race across the sky and taking all sorts of desperate chances.

There was the sound of sullen thunder in the tumbling sea, which swished and swirled about the little vessel like hissing serpents.

Now and then Frank strained his eyes to port, for he knew the coast lay there to leeward, and he had no fancy for suddenly coming upon some rocky point that might project far out into the sea.

He fully understood that, in case the *Greyhound* should become disabled, it would not take the wind long to pile them upon the shore, where the seas would beat out their lives on the rocks.

There was danger in the tempest, and it was just enough to keep Merriwell's blood rushing warm in his veins.

"If Stanford's yacht has found shelter in Half-moon Bay, we'll be a hundred miles below them in the morning," he cried to Barney.

"Sure," agreed the Irish lad. "But nivver a bit can we hilp thot, Frankie."

The first half of the night was wild and boisterous. Near midnight the wind fell somewhat, but it still blew so strong that the *Greyhound* held on its course.

Toward morning the tempest died out, and sunrise found them rolling helplessly on the long swells, without enough breeze to steady the boat.

Diamond had been sick all through the night, and he was in a pitiable condition, looking pale and weak.

"If I ever get ashore, I won't take another cruise for ten years," he faintly declared. "It didn't make much difference to me last night whether we went to the bottom or not. In fact, there was a spell when I rather hoped the old boat would go bottom up, and I'd been glad to take a chance by having her run ashore."

"Vale," said Hans, "I feld someding like dot meinself: but I peen petter now. All der same, I pelief I strained me der roots my toenails of, und I vas lame all ofer."

When the breeze rose, after breakfast, Frank set their course due east. At noon they ran into Monterey Bay and anchored off Santa Cruz.

By that time Diamond had recovered from his sickness and was beginning to take some satisfaction in the life on board the yacht.

Frank felt sure the *Fox* would run into Santa Cruz, and so he kept watch for

her appearance.

It was mid-afternoon when a bark came in from the south and reported seeing at sun rise a small yacht that was in a battered condition, evidently having been in the blow of the previous night. She had lost her mainsail, but seemed to have been prepared for such a misfortune by having an old sail on board, and this her men were setting.

The bark had spoken the yacht and asked if she needed aid, but she declined assistance. The name of the yacht was the *Fox*.

Barney, who had gone ashore, heard this statement, and he made all haste to get on board the *Greyhound* and report to Frank.

Merriwell was astonished.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Lord Stanford did not lay to in Half-moon Bay, and the *Fox* was out in the storm last night. She was used worse than the *Greyhound*, but, instead of being ahead of her, we are still behind! That is an interesting discovery, I must confess! All the same, the loss of her sail has delayed her so she will not have such a great start on us. It's lucky she did not lose all her canvas, or she might be high and dry on shore now."

"What are you going to do?" asked Hodge.

"Do? I am going to get up the anchor and get after the *Fox* instanter. I'll catch her if I have to chase her around Cape Horn!"

"That's the *Fox* sure enough, Frank," declared Bart Hodge, who had been watching the distant sail for some time.

It was three days after the night of the storm, and the *Greyhound* had entered the Santa Barbara Channel.

In all that time they had not sighted the yacht they were pursuing, although they heard of her several times from vessels they had spoken.

With bulldog tenacity Frank had continued in pursuit of Lord Stanford's boat, and now, at last, he was rewarded by sighting her in the distance.

A steady breeze was blowing from the northwest, and the *Greyhound* was carrying every stitch of canvas with which she was provided.

"She does not seem to be heading for Santa Barbara, if I am right in my reckoning," said Merriwell, in a puzzled way. "She should be setting her course southeast and she is bearing directly south. I wonder where Stanford is taking Inza and her father? I really do not understand it."

The others were unable to offer a solution for the Englishman's peculiar behavior.

Both boats were running almost dead before the wind, and the *Greyhound* was able to spread the most canvas, so she gained steadily on the other yacht.

Within an hour she was quite near the *Fox*, which seemed to be heading for a wooded island that lay straight ahead.

The boys could see that the steady manner in which the *Greyhound* held in pursuit of the boat in advance had created some stir aboard.

Looking through a glass, Frank saw Lord Stanford come up from below and take a survey of his pursuer. Then one of his men brought him a glass, and he took a look through that.

Immediately the Englishman grew excited. He turned to the man who had brought the glass and said something, waving his hand in a manner that betrayed agitation.

“At last he has discovered who is following him,” smiled Merriwell. “But it is too late to get away. We are walking up on him in great style.”

“An’ it’s a bit av a shcrap we’re loikely to be in directly,” grinned Barney. “Oi don’t moind thot at all, at all!”

“You like the prospect, you rascal!” laughed Frank. “Well, I must confess that I do not mind it myself.”

Nearer and nearer the *Greyhound* drew to the *Fox*.

Lord Stanford came aft and shouted to his pursuers.

“Keep off, you blooming duffers! If you come near us you will get into trouble!”

“Ahoy, the *Fox*!” Frank shouted back. “Lay to. I wish to come on board.”

“I’ll brain you if you try to come over the rail of this yacht!” frothed the excited nobleman.

“You will be sorry if you try that trick,” asserted Merriwell. At this moment Inza appeared, hurrying up the companion way and reaching the deck of the *Fox*. She saw Frank on the pursuing boat, and waved her hand to him.

With an exclamation of anger, Lord Stanford hastened to her side, and seemed to be urging her to go below again. It was plain that she refused to do so, and the Englishman grew still more angry.

“Begobs! th’ spalpane acts loike he wur goin’ to shtrike her!” exclaimed Barney.

“If he does, I’ll make him regret the day he was born!” grated Frank.

“Dot vos der stuffs!” nodded Hans; “und you vos der huckleberry to done dot, Vrankie.”

The *Fox* was now on the port quarter of the pursuing yacht, and it was plain the *Greyhound* would soon weather the other boat. The two yachts were quite near together.

Lord Stanford was seen to suddenly grasp Inza’s wrist, as if he thought of forcing her to go below.

Then it was that, without warning, the *Fox* changed her course to starboard, and the *Greyhound* crashed into her.

There was a severe shock, a sound of splintering wood and rending sails,

and the *Fox* careened violently, as if she was going over.

“That must be a clumsy lubber at her helm!” cried Frank. “Make fast to her, boys!”

With those words he rushed forward, sprang out on the jib-boom and leaped to the deck of the *Fox*.

A moment later he confronted Lord Stanford, who was still clinging to Inza.

“Break away, you villain!” were the words that shot from Merriwell’s lips.

Then he caught the Englishman by the collar, broke his hold on Inza, and sent him sprawling his full length on the deck.

“Oh, Frank!”

“Inza!”

He held her close in his arms.

“I knew you would come! Something told me you would find a way to follow!” she declared.

“I would follow you to the end of the world!” he whispered.

With the aid of boat hooks the boys had made the *Greyhound* fast to the *Fox*, and they lost no time in boarding the yacht they had run down.

There were but three sailors on board the *Fox*. Stanford urged them to attack the boys, but one of them, the fellow who had been at the helm when the collision occurred, coolly drawled, his voice having the nasal twang of a genuine down East Yankee:

“Wal, not by a gol darn sight! I know some of them fellers, by gum! an’ ef there’s goin’ to be enny fightin’, I’ll hev ter fight with them an’ ag’in yeou, Mister Lord Stanford.”

“Great goodness!” cried Bart Hodge, staggering with surprise. “Is it possible—can it be Ephraim Gallup?”

“Kainder guess it be, b’gosh!” grinned the tall Yankee youth. “I ain’t seen some of yeou fellers since I left Fardale skewl, an’ I’m slappin’ glad ter clap peepers onter ye, by chaowder!”

“Be me saoul! it’s th’ Yankee bane-’ater!” shouted Barney.

“Shore’s yer born, Mister Mulloy. I’m ’tarnal tickled by this air chance ter meet ye all.”

“Ephraim Gallup!” squealed Hans. “Dot vos der poy *I* von times fought a deadly tuel mit at Vardales! Shimminy Gristmas! Uf dees don’d peen a regular surprise barty!”

CHAPTER VIII—A CHANGE OF SCENE

Ephraim Gallup possessed a roving disposition, although when away he often longed to be “back hum on ther farm,” and, after returning from his travels abroad with Frank, he did not remain long at his Vermont home.

Drifting to California in search of fortune, a peculiar combination of circumstances had caused him to become a sailor, and he had finally shipped on Lord Stanford’s yacht. He was on board when Frank and the Englishman had the encounter on the pier in San Francisco, but was unable to render Merriwell any assistance.

Inza had seen and recognized Ephraim, but he had signaled for her to keep still, and so she had pretended that she did not know him.

However, they found opportunities to speak together, and the Yankee youth assured her that she could depend on him. When the opportunity came he would do his level best to help her escape from Lord Stanford.

The tossing about of the *Fox* in the storm had made Bernard Burrage very ill and repentant. He began to think he was sure to die before they reached land again, and he begged Inza’s forgiveness for trying to force her into a marriage against her will.

“I thought I was doing it for your good,” he said. “I see now that I was selfish and cruel, but I have pledged you to him, and it is too late for any backing down.”

To this the girl had said nothing, but she felt that she would prove it was not too late when they went ashore.

Lord Stanford had seen things were going against him, and he had threatened to take the girl to one of the islands off Santa Barbara and keep her till a minister could be brought there to marry them.

But the appearance of Frank upset the desperate nobleman’s plans.

Lord Stanford was thoroughly disgusted.

“Deuce take the blooming girl!” he said. “She has caused me more trouble

than she is worth, and I wouldn't marry her now if she'd have me!"

He thought of having Merriwell arrested for running him down, but thought better of it, as he realized the accident had happened because his own helmsman had swung directly into the course of the *Greyhound*, which Merriwell would not have trouble in proving.

He suspected that Ephraim Gallup had done the trick intentionally, but that was something he could not prove.

In less than an hour Inza and her parent were ready to leave the yacht, and with them went Frank and his friends, including Ephraim.

"Won't stay another minit, b'gosh!" said the Yankee lad.

It was not long after this that the two boats separated, and Frank's yacht was headed for Santa Barbara.

As they parted Lord Stanford shook his fist at Frank, at which the boy from Yale simply laughed.

The run to Santa Barbara was made without special incident, and here Frank and Inza separated for the time being.

The weather proved delightful, and the boys concluded to take it easy at this ideal spot in the land of sunshine and flowers.

"We need a rest after such a chase," said Frank, to the crowd, as they rested under some trees, two days after landing.

Just then came a cry of pain from Hans.

"A rest!" howled the Dutch boy. "Dis don't peen no rest. I bet me your life dot vos annudder flea der small uf mein pack on! Und I vos pittin all ofer in more as zwei tozen places alretty yet! Murter!"

Hans' companions laughed heartily as the fat Dutch lad made a frantic effort to reach over his shoulder and scratch the itching spot on his back.

They were reclining beneath the shade of a large tree that stood near the flat, sandy beach, watching the surf roll in and shoot up in snowy spouts around a distant rocky point.

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Ephraim Gallup. "Gol darned ef yeou don't make me lawf! What's a little squint of a flea amaount to?"

"Oh, vot vos der madder mit you?" snorted Hans. "Suppose you mind mine business, aindt it."

Then the fat fellow got his back against the tree and scratched it in that manner, making up a face that was expressive of mingled feelings of intense agony and acute satisfaction.

"You chaps make me tired!" grumbled Diamond, in a rather surly manner. "You are all the time quarreling. I'd wish you'd drop it and give us a rest."

"Is that so!" came sarcastically from the Yankee lad, as he stiffened up. "Wal, I want tew know! Who be yeou, anyhow?"

"I'll mighty soon show you, if you want to know!" grated Jack, giving the boy from Vermont a savage glare.

Ephraim spat on his hands.

"Sail right in!" he cried, as he got on his feet. "I'm all reddy. Whar be yeou frum, anyhaow?"

"I am from Virginia, one of the finest States in the Union," answered Diamond.

"An' I'm from Vermont, ther finest State in ther Union," flung back Gallup, "Vermont kin lick Virginy four times aout of four, an' don't yer fergit it!"

This was too much for Jack to stand. He got up quickly, his dark face having grown pale with anger.

"We'll see about that, you Yankee clown!" he hissed. "We'll settle it right here!"

The affair had suddenly assumed a very serious aspect, and Frank sprang to his feet, quickly stepping between them, saying as he did so:

"Here, you fellows! I am ashamed of you both! Stop it!"

"Git out of the way, Frank!" cried the Yankee boy. "If he wants ter fight, I'm all reddy, b'gosh!"

"Don't interfere, Merriwell!" exclaimed the Southern lad. "I must teach this insolent chap a lesson."

"There will be no fighting here," said Frank, his face stern and his air commanding. "I forbid it!"

"He called me a clown!" burst from Ephraim.

"He insulted me!" grated Diamond.

"Let him take it back, darn him!"

"Let him apologize, confound him!"

"I tell you to drop it!" said Frank, firmly. "What sort of chaps are you that you can't get along together and overlook trifles? I am ashamed of you fellows!"

The manner in which Frank said this brought a flush of resentment to Diamond's cheeks. He drew himself up to his fullest height, and coldly said:

"Very well, sir; you will have no further cause to be ashamed of me. I will not give you the opportunity."

"What do you mean?"

"That I see you are beginning to get down on me lately, since you have met your old friends from Fardale, and I will not trouble you any more. I will withdraw from the party and take the next train for the East."

Frank looked astonished.

"It can't be that you are in earnest, Jack?" he said.

"I am."

"I can't believe it! You know I am not down on you. I do not get down on

any one in such a way. I have proved to you in the past that I am your friend. I have not changed in the least. It was no more than natural that I should be overjoyed to see my old chums, but their appearance has not caused me to change toward you in the least."

Jack looked sulky.

"That's easy enough to say," he muttered.

Those words brought the color to Merriwell's face.

"Jack Diamond!" he cried, and his voice rang out clear and cutting, "did you ever know me to lie?"

"No, but this is a case where—"

"Do you wish to insult me? It can't be that you do, Jack! Your words were thoughtlessly spoken. I know it. You have not been well of late, and that is why you are unlike your old self."

"If I have changed so much, it is best that I should get out, and I will do it. I didn't mean to insult you, Merriwell, and I take back anything that seemed like an insult. I never knew you to lie, and I do not believe you could be forced to tell an untruth."

Instantly Frank seized Jack's hand.

"I knew you didn't mean it, old fellow!" he cried, his face lighting up with a sunny smile, as he gave the hand of the Virginian a warm pressure. "We have come to know each other too well for you to think such a thing of me."

"It's natural that you should think a great deal of your old friends," said Jack, unsteadily; "and I was a fool to notice anything. I think there is something the matter with me, and I believe it will be better for all concerned if I get out of the party right away."

"Nonsense, old fellow!"

"But I can't get along with Gallup."

"You can if you'll try."

"It's no use. I'm going home."

"All right," said Frank, slowly; "that spoils the scheme I had in my mind. It ruins my plans, and will mean the breaking up of the whole party."

"I don't see how that comes about."

"Never mind; it's no use to talk about it, if your mind is made up. It's too bad, that's all!"

Jack wavered.

"Won't you tell me what your plan was?" he asked.

"It was a scheme for a trip back East, in which we could have any amount of sport. But what's the use? You are going, and that spoils everything."

Diamond looked conscience-stricken, but he was proud, and he disliked to yield. However, his curiosity was aroused, and he urged Frank to divulge his

scheme.

"I'll do it if you'll shake hands with Gallup and promise to stick by the party. I am sure Ephraim will shake hands."

"Why, 'course I will!" cried the Vermonter, cheerfully. "I ain't no darn fool ter git my back humped up inter ther air an' keep it there till it gits crooked like a camel's jest 'cause I think I'm spitin' somebody. Shake? Why, sartin'!"

Then, before Jack could realize it, the quaint down Easter had him by the hand and was working his arm up and down as if it were a pump handle.

CHAPTER IX—A DISCUSSION ABOUT GIRLS

Diamond could not resist Ephraim's heartiness, and his face cleared despite himself. The Yankee boy was so good-natured and ready to meet him more than half-way that he was conscience-stricken.

"I am a fool!" he muttered; "and I'm the only one to blame. It is in my nature, and I don't seem to be able to help it."

"It's all right now, old fellow!" laughed Frank, as he passed an arm around Jack's shoulders in a most friendly way. "I hardly thought you would go back on me and spoil my scheme."

Having watched all this, Rattleton edged a bit nearer Bruce Browning, who was stretched flat on his back, and had seemed to take no more than a slight interest in what was going on.

"Isn't it strange how much Merry will stand from Jack?" said Harry, cautiously. "Diamond has been growling and kicking and making things as unpleasant as possible for some time, and yet I swear Frank seems to think more of him than ever before. The more I know Frank Merriwell the less I know him!"

Browning grunted.

"You're not the only one; there are others," he said.

"Say, fellows," called Hodge, "there goes a party of pretty girls into the surf."

"Begorra!" exclaimed Barney. "It's niver a bit ye'll miss seein' them at all, at all."

"Dot peen so," nodded Hans. "Partly always seen all der britty girls dere

vas, you pet my poots!”

Four girl bathers had come down to the beach, without seeing the little party of lads lolling beneath the wide-spreading tree. There were four of them, and they all were dressed in tasty and modest bathing suits.

“One of them is Inza Burrage,” said Frank, whose eyes never failed to recognize the girl he admired so much.

“And the one standing with her near the edge of the water is the young lady to whom she introduced us last night, Frank.”

“Miss Random.”

“Yes.”

“She is a charming girl.”

“That’s right,” agreed Hodge, his admiration showing in his eyes; “but I don’t suppose you think her quite as charming as Inza?”

“Oh, I don’t know! There is a great difference between them. Miss Random is more quiet and less bubbling and full of spirits. She has blue eyes that are soft as the California skies, and she is very gentle and ladylike. Although Inza has developed into a young lady, she still has many of her girlish ways. She is quick and impulsive, easy to take offense and ready to forgive. It is hard to compare two girls who are so dissimilar.”

“Of course I know which one you admire most,” said Bart, with something like the ghost of a smile on his dark face; “and I am quite willing that you should. There is something about Effie Random’s blue eyes and subdued manner that captivates me.”

“Here! here! here!” cried Frank, laughingly. “Is it possible you are falling in love again, Hodge? Be careful! You know what sort of scrapes your love affairs get you into.”

Bart flushed.

“Don’t worry about me,” he said, sharply. “I don’t propose to make a fool of myself again. I have done that enough. I’ll not get so much stuck on any girl that she’ll be able to make me do anything dishonorable.”

“I don’t believe you will again, old man. I think you have learned your lesson, and learned it well.”

Browning had slowly rolled over on his side, so he could watch the girl bathers without lifting his head to do so.

“I don’t know,” he said, slowly, in his peculiar lazy manner. “I was not introduced to Miss Random, but I have seen her in her street dress, and now I see her in bathing costume. I don’t know; I don’t know.”

“Don’t know what?” asked Rattleton.

“Don’t know but she could tempt me to do almost anything. She is out of sight!”

"There is one thing she could not induce you to do."

"Name it."

"Hurry."

"Well, she could induce me to try, and that's a great deal."

"Begorra! it's nayther av you chaps nade worry about het," put in Barney. "It's nivver a bit she'll throuble her purty head over yez. She's lookin' fer bigger fish, me b'y's."

"I suppose you know all about it?" grunted Bruce, sarcastically.

"Ah, Oi know a thing ur two," returned the Irish lad, serenely, quite unruffled by Browning's manner. "Santa Barbara has a distinguished visitor, av ye'll plaze remimber, an' all th' gurruls are afther castin' shape's-oies at him."

"Do you mean Lord Stanford?"

"Av course."

"It is not possible Miss Random has been attracted by that whiskey-drinking wreck of the English peerage!"

"Whoy not?"

"Miss Burrage is friendly with Miss Random, and she would tell her all about Lord Stanford."

"She has thot, but it's quare fools some av th' American gurruls do be whin they see a furriner wid some sort av a toitle. It's crazy they git intirely, an' divvil a bit do they look at th' man at all, at all. It's th' toitle they're thinkin' av. They're riddy to take any koind av an old thing, av it has a toitle hung to it."

"I don't believe Effie Random is that sort of a girl," warmly declared Hodge. "She seems to have more sense than that."

"It's not always their since ye can measure by th' looks av their face, me b'y."

"I think you are insinuating things about Miss Random without having the least reason for doing so, and I don't like it," came warmly from Bart's lips.

"Oll roight, me laddybuck," nodded Barney. "It's nivver another worrud will Oi say at all, at all."

"I am sure Barney did not mean any harm," smiled Frank. "It's a mistake to take too seriously anything he says."

The Irish boy opened his lips, as if to say something, but quickly closed them again.

"Why is Stanford hanging around here so long, anyway?" asked Jack, who had grown interested in the conversation. "After we took Inza away from him, the fellow seemed to throw up the sponge, and I thought he would get out in a hurry."

"That's right, but he seems very much fascinated with Santa Barbara and the young ladies here."

“Dot shows he haf a leedle sense,” cut in Hans. “Sandy Parpery peen a tandy blace, und der girls here—um-um-er-um!—dey vos pirds!”

“California is full of pretty girls, anyway,” declared Rattleton.

“By gum! that’s jest so!” Ephraim cried. “There’s only one place I know of where there’s more pritty gals.”

“Where is that?”

“Up in Varmont, b’gosh! Never see no gals as could hold a candle tew the Varmont gals, b’ginger!”

“That’s right,” laughed Frank; “stand by the girls of your own State. I don’t blame you. I never was in Vermont in my life, but I’ll wager there are as pretty girls in that State as can be found anywhere.”

“There are different types of beauty in different parts of the country,” said Diamond. “To a Virginian, Virginia girls are the handsomest on the face of the earth; but I presume it is because there is something distinctive in the type they represent, and, by familiarity with it, we have come to consider it superior to anything else.”

“Begorra!” broke forth Barney; “it’s no tuype Oi care fer, but Oi’ve thraveled th’ whole worruld over, an’ Oi swear it’s nivver a bit av use to look fer purtier girruls thin can be found in ould Oireland.”

“It’s not girls we were to discuss,” said Diamond. “Merriwell spoke of some kind of a scheme.”

“And came near forgetting it. Never mind the girls now, fellows. Gather around me, and I will lay before you my plan for a trip that is bound to be full of sport and adventure. I know you will be stuck on the scheme.”

He sat down on the ground, and the boys settled themselves in positions to listen.

“My scheme,” said Frank, smiling at the interest he saw expressed on the eager faces about him, “is to form an athletic combine and take in everything in the way of sports that we can strike on our way back East.”

There was a stir among the listening lads, all of whom were greatly interested in athletics and outdoor sports.

“We can begin right here in Santa Barbara day after to-morrow,” Merriwell continued, “for you know we have decided to wait over and attend the athletic tournament which is to take place here on that day.”

“Yes,” said Harry, hastily; “but we would not be allowed to pate tark—I mean take part in it.”

“Why not?”

“Why, isn’t it for Californians exclusively?”

“Not at all. California seldom does anything for Californians exclusively. They are the most liberal, broad-minded people in the world, and they like to

interest outsiders in their doings. This tournament is open to all non-professional athletes who may wish to enter it.”

The interest of the listening boys grew deeper.

“And you think it would be a good plan for some of us to take a hand in it, eh?” said Diamond, his face brightening.

“Yes.”

“Is that your scheme?”

“Part of it.”

“I fail to understand how it would be affected by my departure.”

“Wait; you have not heard all I have to say.”

“I beg your pardon. Go on.”

“In this crowd right here are fellows who can take part in almost any kind of an athletic contest.”

“That’s right.”

“We could form a club, and be prepared for anything we ran up against. Do you tumble?”

“You are right; but what would we run up against?”

“Plenty of hot times, if we looked for them. We could make a trip back East, taking time for it, as there is time to spare before college begins in September.”

“That’s so,” grunted Browning. “We’d want to take lots of time. I don’t see the good of hustling back East, anyway.”

“Nor I,” said Harry. “I agreed to spend some time in Bar Harbor this season, but I don’t suppose it will kill any one if I fail to get there.”

“Bar Harbor is a long distance from Santa Barbara,” laughed Frank. “Forget it. If my scheme pans out, you’ll have more fun than you could get out of Bar Harbor, with its dances and its tennis parties. Dancing and tennis are well enough, but here are other things more interesting.”

“Golf, for instance,” grinned Rattleton. “They say tennis won’t be in it at Bar Harbor this summer. Golf is bound to be all the rage.”

“Let it rage. It’s better than tennis in some respects, but there is not quite enough excitement about it for the average American lad. Baseball and football are the things to make the blood tingle.”

“You bet!” cried several of the boys in chorus.

“If my plan is adopted,” said Frank, “we can travel back East by easy stages, stopping wherever we hear there is anything going on in which we are interested, and getting into all sorts of sports and games. How does it strike you, fellows?”

“Pully,” shouted Hans. “Uf I peen aple to get me some footraces indo, I pet you your life I vos goin’ to make der natifs hustle.”

The Dutch boy’s one pet hallucination was that he was a great sprinter. He cherished the delusion with tender fondness, and nothing could convince him it

was a delusion.

“Begorra it’s a great skame, Frankie,” cried Barney. “It’s a roight jolly ould toime we’ll hiv.”

“Gol darned ef we won’t,” nodded Ephraim, bobbing his head up and down with his long supple neck.

The others, with the exception of Jack and Bruce, expressed themselves as greatly pleased with the idea. Browning grunted and groaned:

“Merry, you’re always getting up something to make a fellow work. Now our trip across the continent is over, I have been contemplating the joys of a lazy trip back home in a parlor car. Here you come with a scheme that knocks the wind out of my sails.”

Diamond was silent.

Frank knew that Bruce did not mean more than half he said, and so he simply smiled on the big fellow. To Jack he said:

“You haven’t said what you think about it.”

“I was wondering.”

“What about?”

“About your statement that it would spoil your plan if I left the party.”

“It would.”

“I don’t see how. There would still be eight of you.”

“But eight is not nine, and it takes nine men to play a game of baseball.”

“Baseball! That’s right! Why, we have enough here for a ball team.”

“That is it, exactly,” smiled Frank. “This is the season when baseball flourishes, and we will be sure to strike some games on our way back East. If there are nine of us, we’ll have a ball team of our own.”

“Mah gracious,” broke in Toots. “Dat am de stuff. If dar am anyfing I leks teh do it am teh play baseball—yes, sar.”

Diamond was satisfied, and he immediately proposed that they organize an athletic club without delay.

CHAPTER X—THE YALE COM- BINE

“This is as good a place as we can find to do the business,” declared Diamond. “And the first business is to appoint a temporary chairman, who will call the meeting to order.”

“I nominate Mr. Diamond,” smiled Frank.

Without loss of time, Jack was appointed temporary chairman, and he brought the meeting to order, compelling Bruce to sit up and pay attention to the business in hand, which caused the lazy fellow to grumble somewhat.

“Gentlemen,” said Jack, “the first business before this meeting is to appoint a president and permanent chairman. How shall he be appointed, by hand-vote or written ballot?”

“I brobose he vos abbointed by acclimatation,” put in Hans, which caused the boys to laugh.

It was decided to nominate a candidate and elect him by show of hands. Rattleton nominated Frank Merriwell for the office of president and permanent chairman, and the question was quickly put.

With the exception of Frank, every boy present held up both hands.

“Mr. Merriwell is elected,” said Jack, soberly, “and I now surrender the chair to him.”

Frank made a little speech, expressing his thanks, and then asked the views of the boys as to the proper name for the club. Several names were suggested, in all of which Frank’s name was included. He was not satisfied with any of them.

“What do you think would be a good name?” asked Hodge.

“Well, we have come across the continent representing Yale, and I don’t see why we shouldn’t go back carrying the Yale banner to victory wherever we can. Four of us are from Yale, and Hodge contemplates entering the college, while Toots has worn a Yale sweater during our tour. That leaves Ephraim, Barney and Hans. I wonder if they object to the use of the word Yale in the name of our club?”

“Gosh, no.”

“Nivver a bit av it.”

“Vot you took us for?”

“Then that point is settled. Of course we have no authority from Yale to use the name, but if we give a good account of ourselves in the contests in which we may participate, I hardly think that need trouble us. I propose the name, ‘The Yale Combine.’ How does that strike you?”

“Good!” cried Rattleton, with enthusiasm.

“Good! good!” echoed the others.

“Is it your pleasure that our club be called the Yale Combine?”

“Yes! yes! yes!”

“Then I declare that name formally adopted. Now I wish some assistant

officers—a vice, a secretary and a treasurer. How shall they be elected?”

“I motion they be elected by written ballot,” proposed Hodge.

“Second th’ motion,” said Barney, promptly.

“The motion is made and seconded that the assistant officers be elected by written ballot. If that be your minds make it manifest by a show of hands.”

Up went the hands of all.

“It is a vote. Please prepare your ballots for vice.”

“Hold on a jiffy, Mr. President,” said Ephraim, awkwardly, grinning a little.

“I want to wag my jaw a bit before we begin tew vote.”

“Mr. Gallup may speak.”

“I ain’t got much tew say; but it kinder seems tew me that as long as this is ter be called the Yale Combine it’s jest ababout the right thing that the officers should all be fellers who b’long ter Yale Collige. That would make the thing seem a site more reg’ler, an’ I don’t s’pose anybuddy will object to it.”

Hodge frowned a bit and looked disappointed, for he had desired a position of some importance, but he raised no objection to Ephraim’s proposal.

“If you think that is best,” said Frank, “it is very easy to elect my assistants from the three Yale men of the party.”

Then they balloted for vice. Diamond had five votes, Browning two, and Dunnerwust one.

“Holdt on!” cried the Dutch boy. “Vot somepody done dot for, aindt id? Some feller peen goin’ to had a coot time mit me—I don’d think! I know a choke ven I seen him, but dees vas peesness. Id was a plamed fool dot chokes apoudt peesness! Yaw! You vos velcome mein obinion to.”

Hans was red in the face and greatly excited, causing no small amount of merriment.

Merriwell declared Diamond elected vice.

When the vote for secretary was counted, Rattleton had seven and Gallup one. If possible, Ephraim was more excited than Hans had been.

“I know I’m gol darn green,” he said; “an’ I don’t seem to git over it, though I have traviled araound some; but I tumble when folks go to pokin’ fun at me, b’gosh!”

Hans chuckled:

“Dot peen a coot von on you, Efy! Haw! haw!”

“Oh, haw! haw!” mocked the Vermonter. “I don’t see where the fun comes in!”

Rattleton was pronounced secretary.

For treasurer Browning had seven votes and Toots one.

The colored boy laughed as if he considered it a good joke.

When the officers were elected, Frank said:

"To raise funds to carry this club through I propose to sell my yacht, for which I have no further use. Yesterday I received an offer of nine hundred dollars for her, and I hope the gentleman who wants her will add another hundred to-day. That is what I paid for her, and I got a bargain. She is easily worth fourteen hundred, and I could get something near that out of her if I had time to look for a customer."

"And you propose to put that money into the running of this club?"

"Why not? Prof. Scotch knew I would need money, and he provided a sum for my use. He will expect me to use it as I see fit."

"I don't suppose anybody here will raise an objection," laughed Rattleton.

"That point is settled. Now for the matter of getting into the tournament here. I have been invited to take part."

"So soon?"

"Yes. Miss Random introduced me to her brother, Wallace, who is a prominent member of the Santa Barbara Athletic Club. He is a great sprinter, and expects to carry off the honors in the hurdle race. He had heard that I am interested in athletics, and he urged me to enter for some of the contests. As he is a member of the committee on arrangements, his invitation goes."

"It would give him a black eye if you should go into the races in which he will take part and beat him out," said Browning.

"Merry can do it, too," nodded Diamond.

"That is not a sure thing, by any means," smiled Frank. "I never knew a fellow who was so good at anything that he would not run up against some other fellow that was a little better. They say Random is a dandy."

"He will have to be to get away from you, old man," said Hodge.

"Boys," cried Harry, enthusiastically, "we won't do a thing but have a glorious time on our way back East!"

Browning groaned.

"I did think you would be satisfied to drag me into a bicycle tour across the continent," he said; "but this is something a great deal worse. The next thing I know, you'll be getting me into a six-days' running match, or something of the sort."

"Now we have you worked down so you are in good condition, we mean to keep you so," declared Merriwell. "It will be—"

At this moment a shrill scream startled the boys and drew their attention toward the water, where the girls had been bathing in the surf.

They had been so absorbed in the business at hand that Inza Burrage and her companions were quite forgotten till that cry of fear and distress brought them to their feet.

"What's the matter?" gasped Browning, struggling up.

"The surf! There must be an undertow! One of the girls is drowning!" cried Diamond.

Both Hodge and Merriwell were already racing toward the beach.

As they ran, Frank and Bart saw two of the girls struggling in the water.

"It's Inza!" panted Frank.

"And Effie Random!" added Bart.

"Inza can swim."

"She is trying to save Miss Random."

"That's right! Miss Random is frantic with fear—she is dragging Inza down!"

"There they go under!"

"They'll both be drowned!"

"Run, Frank—run!"

Run both lads did as if their own lives depended on their efforts. The others came stringing along behind them.

As they ran the two boys threw off the light blazers which they had been wearing. Neither had on a vest, and both were lightly dressed for warm weather.

"Oh, if I had time to get rid of my shoes!" thought Frank.

But he knew seconds were precious, and he would not stop to get rid of his shoes.

He reached the water slightly in advance of Hodge.

Two of the girls had waded out and were standing on the beach, wringing their hands and sobbing.

Several times the girls who were struggling in the water disappeared beneath the surface, but they came up each time, and it was seen that one of them was doing her best to support the other, who seemed frantic with fear.

"Save them! save them!" cried the girls on the shore, as Merriwell and Hodge plunged into the water.

It is not likely that either Frank or Bart heard this appeal.

The knowledge that Inza Burrage was in danger nerved Frank Merriwell to do his very utmost.

"I will save her or drown with her!" he thought.

Straight through the surf he dashed, hurled himself headlong through the crest of a big roller, and began to swim.

Hodge did the same trick with equal skill.

It seemed that the struggles of the two girls were growing weaker, and once they were beneath the surface so long that Frank feared they would not come up again.

They did come up, however, and Inza's white face was turned for a moment toward the two lads who were swimming to their rescue.

There was something in that look of appeal that smote Merriwell to the heart and made him frantic to reach her. He tore at the water with his powerful arms, and even the strongest roller did not bear him back or seem to check him in the least.

To him it did not seem that he was making any progress at all, and he was furious at the slowness with which he got along. He felt as if weights of lead were attached to his feet.

"Oh, this infernal water!" he panted. "It drags at me! I never swam so slowly in all my life! If they go down again— Where are they?"

The girls had disappeared.

In a moment, however, they arose into view on the crest of a swell, still struggling.

"Hold on, Inza!" cried Frank. "Bear up a little longer!"

She answered with an inarticulate cry that seemed full of despair and turned Frank's blood cold.

"Have I saved her from that English puppy for this!" he gasped. "Is it possible that she is to die now? Oh, no, no!"

Then Frank Merriwell prayed as he swam. He asked God to give him power to reach her and give her strength to bear up till he could get to her.

He remembered how he had first met her at a picnic at Fardale, and how pretty she had looked in her short pink dress. He remembered how on that very day, by a wonderful display of nerve and strength, he had saved her from being bitten by a mad dog. And after that—oh, she had thought him such a hero! She had worshiped him as her ideal of all that was brave and noble. All that seemed years and years ago.

And now—could he save her again? or was she to perish before he could reach her?

Nearer and nearer he swam.

Close behind Frank, Hodge was exerting every muscle.

"We'll get to them, Merry!" he called, encouragingly. "We'll pull them out all right. We are sure to— They've gone down again!"

It was true!

"Merciful heavens!" came huskily from Frank's lips. "I fear this is the last time!"

He swam on—he reached the spot where the girls had last been seen.

Where were they?

He looked around for them, but could see nothing of them.

"Gone!" he groaned, his lips turning a blue-white. "My Heaven, they are both drowned!"

Hodge was at hand, swimming about and looking around. Now his face

was ashen white. He tried to speak, but his voice died away in a husky whisper.

The agony of soul that Frank experienced at that moment was such as he had never before known. It seemed as if he turned to be a very old man in a fraction of time.

“Poor Inza!” he gasped.

A cry came from Hodge!

“Look there!”

Something floated on the surface of the water for a moment, and then it disappeared.

Frank dived.

Down beneath the surface he went, where the water was green and shot through with streaks of sunshine. He kept his eyes open and looked about him.

Just ahead of him something was slowly sinking toward the bottom, making faint struggling movements.

The sunlight that came down through the green waves showed the white face of a girl upturned for a moment, the eyes wide open and staring.

Frank plunged at the object with remarkable speed, and he felt a wild thrill of hope as his arm closed around the waist of a girl.

That clutch seemed to arouse her, and, in a moment, she had fastened her hands about his neck.

It was the clutch of a drowning person, and the girl seemed to possess the strength of Samson.

Frank tried to break away, but she held fast to him.

Down they went toward the bottom.

“I must break her hold!” thought the youth. “If I do not, she will drown us both! It is the only chance!”

He understood how desperate the situation was, and prepared to make a last mad effort.

Then the girl folded him in her arms and drew him close to her with a frantic clutch that caused him to gasp, and the salt sea water poured down his throat.

He found he could not well exert his strength, as the girl held him in a position so that he could not get hold of her hands.

“It means death!” was his thought, as they sank still more swiftly. “Poor Inza! We will die together!”

CHAPTER XI—THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

It was growing dark down there beneath the waves. The golden sunlight had turned to a bluish gloom that lay dense beneath the boy and girl, who were slowly sinking into that mysterious region.

Those dark depths were suggestive of rest and peace. They seemed most inviting and alluring to the lad who was wearied and exhausted by his struggles to save the girl who was so dear to him.

Frank felt like ceasing to struggle—like giving over all effort and floating gently down into those cool depths, where he could rest.

Inza was with him, and they would rest down there together, still locked in each other's arms.

To his mind came a picture of them as they would look in the cool blue shadows, undisturbed by anything that was occurring in all the wide, wide world. He saw their pale faces and their closed eyes, and he fancied Inza's dark hair floating gently at the soft throb of the ocean. Oh, it was sweet as a dream!

Then he seemed to see the fishes that would come to look at them with wonder. He saw the fishes swimming about, darting over them and playing around the spot where they rested.

Then came another and a horrible thought.

The fishes would nibble at their flesh—would feast off their bodies. Inza's beautiful face would be disfigured.

It was that thought that brought him to himself.

With a last mad burst of strength he broke the girl's hold, and then they went mounting toward the surface.

Up, up, up from the dark blue shadows, which now seemed filled with horrible shapes, they mounted. Out from those shadows reached long, crooked arms with hands that tried to clutch them and drag them down again.

For the first time in his life Frank felt like shrieking with fear. A great horror was on him, and it made him frantic.

He saw bubble eyes that peered and glared at him from all sides, and shapeless forms hovered all around.

With all his strength he strove to reach the surface.

Up from the blue depths into the yellow sunlight he mounted, still clinging to the girl. Up from the yellow sunlight till their heads arose above the waves with a sudden splurge.

Frank coughed and strangled, ejecting salt water from his mouth.

He held the helpless, unstruggling girl in his arms, but he gave her little attention till he had raised not a little of the salt water that seemed to have gone down his throat.

Then Frank turned on his back, with the head of the girl resting on his breast and shoulder, and floated thus.

Frank had always been a marvelous swimmer, and he could float like a cork. Now he sought to rest on the surface of the swells till he could recover enough strength to swim.

The surface of the ocean was rolling gently in huge billows, which lifted and lowered them with a soothing motion and seemed to be sweeping them farther and farther from the shore.

But Frank felt a thrill of joy. He had reached Inza at last by a mighty struggle, and he was certain he would be able to save her, now he had broken her hold and escaped from the fascination of the blue depths beneath.

The sun shone down on the heaving sea as it always seems to shine along the coast of Southern California. The sky was blue and clear. A white-winged gull soared above them, having shot upward from the water as they reached the surface.

Frank watched that gull, and it seemed to fascinate him. It looked so white and pure and gentle as it hung there with outspread wings, wheeling slowly, and mounting higher and higher.

Somehow it seemed to Frank that the white bird had arisen from the head of the girl as it appeared above the water.

It was as if her pure white soul had been released and was soaring above them, pausing to look back lingeringly and pityingly before taking its flight to heaven.

Frank could see several figures running along the beach toward the cove where boats were to be found, and he knew some of the fellows were hastening to come to his assistance.

He looked at the face of the girl he had saved. It was quite pale, but a tinge of color began to show in her cheeks. All her curls were gone, and her light, fluffy hair was watersoaked; but still she was exceedingly pretty in a cool, icy way. To Frank at that moment, she seemed far prettier than when he had first met her.

And Merry's heart was so overflowing with joy at the knowledge of having saved her that he kissed her repeatedly.

Suddenly Inza's blue eyes opened and she looked at him in a dazed and bewildered manner.

Something like a faint smile fluttered across her face, and more color came to her cheeks.

"Where—where—what——" she vaguely began.

"Don't be excited, dearest," urged Frank. "If you get excited and struggle, I may not be able to save you. If you keep still, I may be able to keep our heads above the surface till a boat reaches us."

He was treading water as he spoke.

The girl seemed too weak to make much of a struggle, and he was relieved to see that she lay quite still.

"Oh, I thought I was drowning—I was sure!" she said, presently. "I was frantic, and then all my senses left me."

"It was a good thing they did, for you did not swallow much water while you were beneath the surface."

"Then I did go under?"

"Yes."

"I knew it—I knew I would."

He felt her trembling in his grasp, and he quickly said:

"You are all right now."

"Oh, but I must get up—up out of this water! I am so far down in it! Lift me up farther!"

"No!" he said, sternly; "you must remain as far down in the water as possible, for I shall not be able to save you if you don't. Try to lie on your back, and tip your head far back. In that way you might float alone, and you would be all right as long as your nose remained above the surface so you could breathe. The trouble always is with those who drown in water like this that they try to climb up out of the water, instead of sinking as far down in it as possible, and keeping perfectly still, and their efforts send them under the surface."

She understood him, and she murmured:

"Hold fast to me, and I will trust everything to you. You are such a brave and noble fellow!"

Inza suddenly remembered that Effie Random had been in the water, too, and she excitedly asked:

"Where is Effie now? Did I—did I do it?"

"Do what?"

"Drown her. She said I would drown both of us if I did not keep still, but every time I kept still a moment the water went over us, and that made me frantic.

Oh, I do hope she did not drown! She is such a splendid girl, and I think so much of her!"

"She is all right," assured Frank. "Mr. Hodge aided her in swimming to the shore."

The calmness with which he talked to the girl seemed to give her confidence in his power to save her, and she trusted him completely.

Farther and farther from the shore they were carried.

Soon Frank saw a boat put out and pull toward them.

He felt that the boat was coming none too soon, for he had been weakened by his immersion beneath the surface, and he found that the effort of keeping upon the surface and holding the girl up was telling on him, despite his wonderful power of endurance.

Already he had begun to fear that he would give out, but the girl suspected nothing of the sort, for he seemed calm and confident.

"I shall owe you my life, Frank," she said.

"We will talk of that later," said Frank, by way of saying something in an unconcerned manner, although it seemed that the effort to speak deprived him of strength.

He looked longingly toward the boat. Two pairs of oars were being used, and the rowers were making the small craft jump with each stroke. The oars flashed in the sunshine when the wet blades came up dripping, and the bodies of the rowers swayed and bent. In the stern somebody waved a cap at Frank and uttered a shout of encouragement.

"Hurry! hurry! hurry!"

It was with the greatest difficulty that Merriwell kept from uttering the words in a wild cry that would have betrayed his failing strength. He choked it back, however, and smiled encouragingly at Inza.

"They are coming," he said. "In a few minutes we'll be in a boat and quite safe."

"I don't care," she returned, in a significant manner. "They need not hurry."

"If she only knew!" thought Frank.

Once he went down, and the water filled his nostrils so that he strangled a little. Inza gave a cry of alarm, and, fearing she would get excited and struggle, he forced a short laugh.

Nearer and nearer came the boat. He could hear the rump-thump, rump-thump of the oars in the rowlocks.

"Howld on, Frankie, me b'y!" came the cheery call of Barney Mulloy. "We'll be wid yez in a minute."

Rump-thump, rump-thump—would the boat never reach them?

How heavy Inza was! And it seemed that a great weight was dragging at

Frank's feet—a weight he could not cast off.

“Hurry, Barney—hurry!” he tried to cry; but the words died in a hoarse gasp in his throat, causing the girl to turn her head to look at him.

“What is the matter?” she asked, in sudden alarm.

“Nothing,” he declared, faintly—“nothing at all.”

“Oh, I know there is! You are giving out!”

Then he saw she was liable to grasp him about the neck, which would be sure to sink them both, in which case he was certain they would never rise again.

“Don't do it—if you wish to live, Inza,” he pleaded. “I can hold you a little longer if you do not touch me; but we shall go down if you grasp me.”

She was filled with fear, but something in his words and manner caused her to obey him fully.

Suddenly there was a wild shout of alarm from the boat, and Frank saw Barney making frantic gestures, while he urged the rowers to greater exertions.

Merriwell wondered what it meant. He saw Barney swing his arm and point away toward the channel.

As they arose to the crest of a swell, Frank saw something that sent his heart into his throat.

At a distance the sharp back fin of a shark cut the crest of the water for a single instant and then disappeared.

A shark was coming!

“What—what is it?” asked Inza, who had been startled by Barney's cries. “Why are they shouting thus?”

“They are doing it to encourage us,” said Frank, believing he was fully justified in the falsehood.

“You are sure?”

“Why, of course!”

Rump-thump, rump-thump went the oars! jump, jump plunged the boat as it sped to the rescue.

The rowers were straining every nerve. They were Bruce Browning and Ephraim Gallup, and for once in his life, at least, the big collegian was doing his very utmost. Nothing but an effort to save his own life or that of Frank could have made him work thus.

It seemed that the shark was approaching with the speed of an express train. Fortunately the boat was far nearer, and so it came up first.

Even as the boat shot alongside the youth and maiden, with Bruce and Ephraim backing water to check its headway, there was a flash of a dark body in the water, a flashlike turn, the showing of a white belly, and Barney had dragged Inza into the boat just in time.

Yes, he had dragged Inza in; but Frank—where was he?

He had disappeared!

CHAPTER XII—FRANK IS TROUBLED

Shuddering with horror as he held the dripping girl in his arms, Barney Mulloy looked over the side of the boat, expecting to see the water dyed with a crimson stain.

Browning gave a shout:

“Here he is!”

Frank’s head appeared on the other side of the boat.

He had dived just in time to avoid the shark when it turned.

The moment he came up on the other side of the boat Browning and Gallup dropped the oars and grasped him.

They had him in the boat a second later.

The shark had lost its prey.

Frank sank down in the bottom of the boat, utterly helpless and without strength.

Barney placed Inza on the rear seat.

“Begorra!” he gasped, wiping great drops of perspiration from his face; “thot wur a close shave, but we did it, me b’ys!”

Ephraim Gallup, despite the exertion of rowing, was pale as a ghost, and Browning was seen to shiver.

“Darn my pertaturs!” muttered the Vermonter. “It’s a wonder we did do it, b’gosh!”

“A wonder!” came from Browning! “It is a miracle!”

“Be me soul, we did it, though! Cheer, b’ys—cheer!”

Then, standing upright in the boat, they waved their caps and gave a wild cheer of joy.

Away on the beach the cheer was answered by another and another and yet another.

Merriwell opened his eyes, and something like a faint smile came to his drawn face.

"It's all right, boys!" he said. "You did a good job!"

"An' it's yersilf that did another, Frankie," declared Barney. "But fer yez th' young lady would be at th' botthom of the say now."

They rowed back, carrying the rescued youth and maiden.

Inza remained in an exhausted condition, but Frank began to recover soon after being drawn into the boat.

A large crowd had gathered on the beach, for the four girls were not the only bathers, and nearly a hundred people had come to the beach for pleasure that afternoon.

When Frank and Inza came ashore the crowd cheered again, and the boys who belonged to Merriwell's party rushed to embrace him.

Toots was so overjoyed that he fell on his knees and hugged Frank's legs, laughing and crying in a hysterical manner.

"Oh, Marser Frank!" he said; "I done fought yo' was a goner one time fo' suah! I nebber suspected to see yo' no moah, Marser Frank! Bress de good Lawd—bress His name!"

Frank was hugged and his hand was shaken till he began to push them off, laughing and remonstrating.

And the strangers who were looking on turned and said to one another:

"Who is he? See how much they think of him!"

Wallace Random, a handsome young fellow of nineteen, who had been on hand to receive his sister, as he was near the beach when she went into the water, hastened to Frank.

"Mr. Merriwell," he said, earnestly, as he grasped Frank's hand, "I am proud to know you. Your friend has saved my sister's life in the same noble manner. You are both heroes."

The girls had come to the beach in carriages, and Inza was soon placed in one, bundled about with a wrap and whirled away.

Frank looked for Inza as soon as he could escape from the ones who were offering their praise and congratulations, but he was told she had gone with Miss Random.

"I shall see her to-night," he said. "There is a dance at the hotel, and she has promised to give me the first waltz."

He made haste to escape to his room at the hotel, whither he was followed by the boys, where Toots rubbed him down and they all talked over the adventure and rescue.

Frank confessed that he was on the verge of giving out when the boat reached them, and he had just strength enough to dive and escape the shark, that had seemed to snap at Inza's feet as she was pulled out of the water.

"I don't think I could have held out a minute more," he said; "and I should

have gone down again immediately if Bruce and Ephraim had not grabbed me when I came up after diving under the boat. I used my last bit of strength to get to the surface that time."

"When you dived," said Hodge, "Effie arose close to me. I saw in an instant that she was ready to give out, and I helped her to get ashore. I could not have done that, but she was able to swim a little after a few minutes. She was almost frantic, and kept saying over and over that she had been forced to break Inza's hold to save herself. She laughed and cried and then swooned for a moment when the boat reached you and you were pulled in."

Later in the afternoon Frank called on Inza, having been sent for by Mr. Burrage.

Inza's father, who was weak and ill, wrung the lad's hand.

"My dear boy!" he cried; "how noble you are! I wished to see you, for I have heard all about your brave deed."

After a few further words, Frank left his card for Inza, who was confined to her room, and returned to the hotel.

The boys found time to talk over their combination, when they had grown tired of discussing the rescue of the two girls. All were elated by the prospect of great sport on their trip back East.

While they were sitting on the veranda of the hotel chatting about athletic sports, Wallace Random appeared. Once more he shook Frank's hand, expressing his appreciation of Merriwell's brave act, and then he was introduced all around to the boys.

"Mr. Random," said Frank, "we have organized an athletic club, and I shall be pleased to accept your invitation to take part in the contests day after to-morrow."

"I am glad to know that," smiled Random. "We hope to make the affair a big success. Entrances for the various contests may be made now or to-morrow, if that serves you better."

"Perhaps it would be better to wait till to-morrow, as we can have time to decide who will take part and what sports they will choose. As yet we have not arranged matters fully, as the first meeting of our club was interrupted when we hastened to save your sister and Miss Burrage. That meeting broke up without adjournment."

"Suit yourselves," laughed Wallace, "but you must remember that we have some hot lads down here, and we do not propose to let anybody from the East carry off honors if we can prevent it."

"I rather fancy you will find some hot stuff among the members of our club," said Frank, quietly. "We will represent Yale College, and it is seldom 'Old Eli' gets left at anything."

"I understand you are something of a runner and hurdle-racer," Random said.

"There are others," was the answer. "I am not the only one."

"But I have heard that you are pretty good."

"He is a dim jandy—I mean a jim dandy," spluttered Harry, getting somewhat excited. "I don't believe you have any one out here who can keep in sight of him."

Random elevated his eyebrows.

"Now you do interest me!" he exclaimed. "I am something of a runner myself, and I shall take part in the hurdle race and the hundred yards dash. Perhaps Mr. Merriwell may like to enter those contests. Out here they say I am bound to win in a canter. Mr. Merriwell might make it interesting, at least."

"Inderesting!" cried Hans. "I pets you your life he peats der packin' oudt uf you! I haf seen dot poy sbrint!"

"Begorra! he's a birrud!" nodded Barney. "He was th' shwiftest runner in Farrdale whin we wur there."

"Mr. Merriwell," said Random, pleasantly, "I trust you will take part in the races. I do not think you will be able to win over me, but I am sure it will be a pleasant and fair rivalry between us, and there will be no hard feelings in any case."

"Well," said Frank, "I do not pretend to be a champion, but I will come in and do the best I can."

"Good!" nodded Wallace. "I hope to see you at the hop to-night. Good-evening, gentlemen."

Then he departed.

CHAPTER XIII—A GAME FOR TWO

Frank and Bart were the only ones of the party who attended the dance, that evening, which was an informal affair.

Fine music was furnished, and the young ladies and girls of Santa Barbara looked their best as they mingled with the guests at the hotel.

As Frank stood looking on he decided that the girls of the Golden State were charming indeed, and there was no reason why California should not be proud of them.

They were refined and cultured, too, as they showed by their manners and conversation. In this respect Frank felt that they might well be compared with the finest bred girls of the East.

"It is a great country," he thought; "and the East is altogether conceited when it fancies it has all the brains and culture. There are other places besides Boston and New York, and I can understand why some of the other places seem superior to many people."

He was watching for Inza. She had promised him the first waltz, and he hoped to find time to chat a moment with her before the dance. He wished to compliment her on her brave attempt to rescue Effie Random.

While he was looking for her Miss Random entered the room, accompanied by her brother.

Lord Stanford, the Englishman, was present, and he started for Effie the moment she appeared.

But the girl saw Frank, and, leaving Wallace, she hastened toward him before the nobleman could reach her.

"Oh, Mr. Merriwell!" she exclaimed, with an ardor that surprised him, as she had seemed so cool and reserved, "I must thank you again and again for your heroic rescue of Inza."

"Don't," entreated Merry. "I have been thanked enough already. Permit me to congratulate you on your fine appearance this evening. It is wonderful! I feared you would be prostrated, and here you are at this dance, looking as fair and fresh as a flower. I do not understand it."

Her eyes fell.

"I—I came to see—you," she almost whispered the words, and an added color tinged her fair cheeks.

Frank began to feel awkward. He could see Lord Stanford glowering at him from a short distance, and he wondered if this was the same girl he had fancied was so eager to capture the nobleman. It seemed that Effie had quite forgotten Stanford.

"To see me?" said Frank, slowly. "I am sure that is a compliment—a great compliment."

"Yes, to see you," she again declared, placing her hand upon his arm, and lifting her blue eyes to his. "I knew you would be here."

At this moment Frank discovered that Inza had entered and was looking toward them. He longed to hurry to her side, but he could not leave Effie Random without positive rudeness.

“What is the matter, Mr. Merriwell?” said Effie, rather sharply. “You do not seem to be listening? I am talking to you!”

“I beg your pardon!” hastily replied Frank, blushing, when he realized how rude his manners must have seemed. “It’s one of my spells—that’s all.”

“Do you have them often?” she asked, with a light laugh.

“Oh, no; only occasionally. I am afraid they make me appear very rude. Physicians whom I have consulted say I may outgrow them by the time I am eighty or ninety, and that I shall not be troubled by them all the rest of my life after that.”

Lord Stanford came up.

“Pawdon,” he said; “but I think this is our dawnce, Miss Random.”

She looked at him, and then, as Frank was on the point of excusing himself, she said:

“Not this one, Lord Stanford. I said I would give you a waltz, but I am engaged to Mr. Merriwell for this one.”

Frank glanced at her in surprise. He had not asked her for that dance. What could she mean? Effie noted the glance and cast her eyes downward.

Like a flash the truth came over Frank. During their brief stay in Santa Barbara he had met Effie quite often with Inza. He had simply regarded her as a rather pretty and winning girl, and had paid her no more attention than was demanded by courtesy. Now it seemed—

He was compelled to smile. Was it possible the foolish girl imagined he was in love with her?

She must know of his sincere admiration for Inza.

Still, such is the weakness of human kind, he did not feel greatly offended at the discovery. Effie was attractive and—

Then it happened that, almost before Frank realized it, they were on the floor, gliding gracefully along to the swing and throb of the music.

Effie was a delightful waltzer, light as a feather and graceful as a swan. Ordinarily it would have cost Frank no effort at all with such a partner.

But this was not an ordinary occasion, and Merriwell felt no satisfaction in dancing, even though Effie was a perfect waltzer. He realized that he was doing wrong and he was decidedly wretched.

On the second round Frank and Effie came close to Inza. She was dancing with Bart Hodge. For a single moment Inza’s dark eyes looked at Merry, but they turned away, and she laughed at something Hodge was whispering in her ear.

Merriwell felt a flush of heat pass over his body, and his cheeks burned. He saw Hodge’s arm about Inza’s waist, and an intense feeling of jealousy seized upon him. He forgot that he was to blame and he railed at his friend.

Then he began to chat and laugh with Effie, seeming to forget Inza entirely.

He entered into the dance with a sudden change of spirit, so that many eyes were turned toward himself and Miss Random, who were generally pronounced the finest waltzers on the floor.

Effie noted the sudden change in Frank, but she did not know what had brought it about. She was charmed by his witty sayings, his complimentary speeches, and his beautiful dancing.

"He is just splendid!" she told herself. "I don't wonder Inza Burrage says he is the finest fellow in the whole world."

She saw Lord Stanford, surrounded by a group of girls, all of whom seemed regarding the red-faced nobleman with great admiration.

"Yesterday I was like those silly fools!" thought Effie. "To-day I have found a real man. What a difference there is!"

She felt a positive disgust for the Englishman.

"Miss Burrage said I'd be sickened of him when I came to know him well. He is looking for an American heiress, and he tried to force her to marry him till he found out she is not rich. Then his ardor cooled swiftly. What a contemptible man he is."

When the dance was over Frank and Effie strolled out on the balcony, where the soft breath of a perfect summer night brought them the sweet perfume of flowers.

The moon had arisen above the Santa Yenz Mountains, and its brilliant light was shimmering with silver the sea that lay away to the westward. The sound of the surf came like subdued and distant organ peals. The scene was entrancing, but it did not appeal to Frank.

He was ill at ease. He felt his guilt, and a great wave of shame and self-contempt swept over him.

With characteristic impulsiveness he suddenly resolved to put an end to it. To seek out Inza and apologize.

As he made the resolution a low, musical laugh came from the other side of a bank of flowers.

Then a deep voice followed. It was Inza and Bart.

"Miss Random," he said, hurriedly, "will you kindly pardon me if I escort you back to the room? I—I—have an engagement and—"

Effie started and glanced at him with mingled surprise and pique. She, too, had heard the laugh. Her eyes flashed, and her lips compressed ominously.

"Certainly, if you wish it, Mr. Merriwell," she replied, coldly. "But may I ask if your extremely sudden engagement is connected with Inza?"

The impertinence of the question passed unheeded by Frank. His mind was engrossed by his new resolution.

"I confess it is," he replied, frankly. "Pray excuse me."

With that he was gone. Effie watched him disappear with eyes filled with tears of rage and humiliation. Gripping the railing of the balcony until her hands ached, she muttered:

“You will regret this, Frank Merriwell. You will regret this insult to me. I will find means to make you suffer for it.”

Bart Hodge strolled past the bank of flowers, and started on seeing her.

“You here,” he stammered, impulsively. “I thought you were dancing with Frank?”

Effie greeted him so cordially that the youth flushed with pleasure. He gladly stepped to her side in obedience to her invitation.

“Yes, I was dancing with Mr. Merriwell,” she replied, “but he had a pressing engagement and was compelled to leave. Where is Inza?”

“She returned inside,” said Bart, indifferently.

“And you permitted her to go alone?”

“Yes. I wanted to look for you,” was the blunt reply, given with a glance of admiration.

“A weapon ready for use,” murmured Effie, softly. “I will strike Frank Merriwell through him.”

In the meantime Frank had eagerly searched for Inza. To his extreme disappointment, he found that she had left for home. Five minutes later he, too, was missed.

CHAPTER XIV—A GOOD START

The day of the tournament at Santa Barbara arrived and brought with it large crowds of visitors from various parts of the State. There was a great swarm of strangers in the beautiful little town that lies between the blue Santa Yenz Mountains and the dreaming sea.

The field for the sports and contests lay outside the town, and there the crowd gathered at an early hour.

It had been arranged that such contests as putting the shot, throwing the hammer, jumping, vaulting, wrestling, and so forth, should come before the races.

Browning had been induced to enter the hammer-throwing and shot-putting contests, while Barney was anxious to show what he could do at the high

jump and the long jump. Diamond had decided to take part in the pole vaulting.

The boys' bicycles had arrived by express the day before, having been forwarded from San Francisco, and Rattleton entered for the two-mile bicycle race, after vainly trying to induce Frank to go into it.

"I'll have quite all I want to do in the hundred yards' dash and the two-hundred-and-twenty yards' hurdle," smiled Frank. "I am not going to break myself all up at the very beginning of our new tour."

"That's right," said Hodge, significantly; "and you will find Wallace Random a sharp rival in both of those contests. It won't surprise me, Frank, if you are unable to defeat him."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Merry, lifting his eyebrows and regarding Bart coolly. "There was a time when you thought no person could defeat me."

Bart flushed and moved uneasily.

"You're a dandy, old fellow," he said; "but Random has a record. He is the amateur champion of this State."

"And still you are going to be in the hurdle race! That is remarkable. What do you expect to win?"

"Well, I can't do worse than get last position," returned Bart, somewhat sulkily. "I do not expect to beat Wallace Random."

Frank turned away.

Inza Burrage was present to witness the contests, but Frank could not get a chance to speak to her. Effie Random held several conversations with her brother.

Ephraim Gallup, who happened to pass near them as they were talking, heard a few words from each.

"Beat him if you can," said Effie, "beat him in both races."

"I will," confidently declared Random. "You may be sure of that."

"You don't know him, or you would not speak thus confidently. He always wins at everything he tries. I wish to see him defeated."

"Don't worry: your wish shall be granted."

Then Ephraim heard no more.

"Wal, darn my punkins!" he muttered. "I'd like ter know who they be talkin' abaout. You don't s'pose it's Frank!"

He was startled by the possibility, but quickly decided that such a thing could not be.

Early on the morning of the previous day, after the Yale Combine had been organized, Frank had hastened to order some suits for the club, which they were to wear while taking part in certain contests. These suits were short, light trousers, scarcely coming to the knees of the wearers, and close fitting dark-blue shirts, each having a large white Y on the breast.

By paying well for it, Merry was able to get several suits rushed through, so

the boys who were to take part in the sports requiring great exertion each could have a suit.

The first contest was putting the shot.

There were six contestants, and Browning came fourth on the list.

The big fellow looked fine, and said he felt well, although he growled a bit, as usual, because he had to do something besides be a spectator.

The Santa Barbara athletic club also had a big lad who was an expert shot-putter and hammer thrower. His name was Benson.

Benson was the sixth man on the list, that position having come to him by lot.

A slender chap by the name of Cummings, from Salinas, started the ball rolling by making a distance of thirty-three feet and four inches.

This was not beaten till Browning came up.

"Do your best, old man," urged Frank. "You can do a good job if you try. You know big Hickok has a record of forty-two and nine."

Bruce grunted.

"I don't suppose you expect me to beat Hickok, do you?" he growled.

"Not exactly," smiled Frank; "but you can come near him."

Browning limbered up, and then took his position. He was regarded with great curiosity, as it had become known that he was from Yale, and something good was expected of him.

His first put, however, was a disappointment to everybody, as he fell under Cummings by five inches.

"Oh, he's too lazy for anything!" muttered Diamond. "He can do better than that."

"He will do better," declared Frank.

But, to the astonishment of all, Browning made scarcely thirty-one feet on his second trial.

There were cries of amusement and derision from the crowd, and a voice shouted:

"Is that one of the wonderful men from Yale? He does not seem to be such hot stuff. Wait till you see Benson toss the shot."

Browning stiffened up, and his face became set. He glanced at Frank, expecting Merriwell would be angry, but was met with a smile and a nod of encouragement.

"I'll do something this time if it's in me!" Bruce mentally vowed.

He did.

On the third trial he sent the shot whizzing through the air to fall far beyond the mark made by Cummings.

When the tape was run it was found he had made thirty-eight feet and

eleven inches.

Then Browning was given a round of applause, and Frank congratulated him when he stepped back into the crowd.

The man who followed Browning made thirty-two feet, and then Benson came up. Wallace Random said a few words to Santa Barbara's champion shot putter, and Benson nodded, although there was a worried look on his face.

The crowd of spectators were silent and expectant.

What would Benson do? Could he beat the man from the East?

At Benson's first trial he made thirty-seven feet and nine inches.

This brought some applause, and a man cried:

"Wait a minute! He will show you something better than that."

But to the dismay of Benson's admirers, he fell back to thirty-six on the second trial.

He prepared for the third and last effort, and it was seen by the expression of his face that he meant to beat the record if it was in him. With the shot in his hand, he poised himself for the throw, falling back on his right foot. The muscles of his right arm and shoulder stood out in hard bunches, while his left arm was extended, his hand being clinched.

A moment he remained thus, and then, with a mighty heave, he sent the shot flying through the air.

With a thud, it dropped to the sandy ground and lay still.

"He has won! He has won!"

The cry went up from Benson's friends.

"Wait a moment till the measurement is made," said Frank Merriwell, quietly, as the tape was laid.

There was a great hush of expectancy, and then the voice of the judge was heard to declare:

"Thirty-eight feet and nine inches. Bruce Browning, of Yale College, has won over all by a margin of two inches."

A moment of silence, and then the familiar Yale yell of victory pealed like a war cry from the lips of the college lads.

The Yale Combine had started out with flying colors.

CHAPTER XV—A HOT DASH

Wallace Random came around and congratulated Browning.

"You did a good job," he said, "and we'll have to take revenge off some of your friends. Don't think for a moment that we mean to let you Yale fellows carry off all the honors."

Benson came up and asked to be introduced. He proved to be a very pleasant fellow, and took his defeat gracefully.

"I did my best," he declared. "I couldn't beat it if I were to try a week. You won fairly."

This frank and generous spirit greatly impressed Merriwell and his friends.

Browning exerted himself again in the hammer-throwing contest, and won by a good margin.

"Keep it up, fellows," laughed Frank. "It strikes me that the Combine is bound to make a path of glory on its way East."

But they were not to win at everything, as they soon discovered.

Barney Mulloy was a great jumper, but there was a youth from Mariposa who could jump. His name was Lundy, and he beat the Irish boy with such ease that Barney was quite crestfallen.

"Begorra! it's wings he has somewhere about him!" declared Barney.

Then came the pole vaulting, and Preston, of Santa Barbara won, although Jack Diamond was a close second.

"I told you!" laughed Wallace Random, speaking to Frank. "You chaps are doing great work, but we have some good men right here."

"That's right," agreed Merriwell, cheerfully. "You are right in it, and that's a fact."

Then came the bicycle race.

Rattleton did his best, but again a Santa Barbara man won.

Then there was wrestling and other contests in which the Yale Combine was not concerned.

At last the hundred yards' dash was called.

The competitors appeared from the dressing tent and were greeted with cheers. Wallace Random was given a hearty reception.

There were five starters. They were Merriwell, of Yale; Random, of Santa Barbara; Black, of San Francisco; Cheston, of Yuma, and Harper, of San Bernardino.

The word came, and the starter's pistol cracked.

Away leaped the runners like greyhounds.

A cheer went up from the spectators.

Wallace Random was a great starter, and he leaped to the front at the first bound.

Merriwell and Black were paired, while Creston got off next, and Harper

was last.

Frank knew how much there was in the start of a short dash, and he felt that Random had obtained an advantage; but that made no difference with him, for he was there to do his best.

For a third of the distance no one obtained much of a lead. Then Random began to pull away.

But he could not get away from Merriwell, who clung to him like a leech, not more than two yards separating them.

It was soon seen that the race lay between Random and Merriwell, with Random apparently having the best of it.

Two-thirds the distance was covered, and still Random held his advantage.

Then a genuine Yale yell came from Frank's friends, who had gathered in a group near the finishing point.

That cheer seemed to act like an electric spur on Merriwell. Half the distance between him and Random was closed quickly, and then with a leap he was at the side of the Santa Barbara man.

A single moment they hung thus, and then, as the tape was approached, Frank shot to the front, and was a winner by about two feet.

"Rah! 'rah! 'rah! Yale!"

Wallace Random was greatly chagrined, for he had felt certain of that race when it was almost finished. Then, in an astonishing manner, Frank Merriwell had reached his side, passed him, and won the dash.

Effie Random said nothing, but she thrust her parasol into the ground with a wrench that broke it.

Frank was cheered and congratulated.

As soon as he could recover from his surprise and disappointment, Random shook Frank's hand.

"You did the trick," he said; "but I'll beat you at the hurdle race. I see you are strong on the finish, and I'll be looking out for you."

"All right," smiled Frank. "If you win that race, we'll break even, but I shall do my best."

Frank noticed that Hodge was not with those who crowded about to congratulate him. He looked for Bart, whom he discovered talking with Effie, and he saw Effie was speaking in an excited manner, a flush on her face.

Frank smiled.

"It looks as if she really wished to see me defeated. I wonder what she is saying to Hodge."

He could see Bart shaking his head, while Effie seemed to be urging him to do something. The more Bart shook his head the more determined the girl became.

Frank was able to watch them but a moment, as his friends demanded his attention.

"Hang me if I didn't know ye'd do it all ther time!" said Ephraim Gallup, proudly. "You're ther same old hustler yeou useter be when yeou was at Fardale."

"Thot's roight, me b'y!" said Barney Mulloy. "It's a pache ye alwus wur, Frankie."

"Yaw," agreed Hans; "you vos a chim dandy, Vrankie!"

The hurdle race was the concluding event of the tournament.

There were other contests and amusements to occupy the time between the dash and the hurdle race.

At last the hurdle race was called.

Then Frank was surprised to find Bart Hodge had entered for the race and was ready to run.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Isn't this a new idea of yours?"

"No," answered Bart. "I entered for this race yesterday."

"You did? That's queer! I knew nothing of it."

"I intended it for a surprise," said Hodge, with a forced laugh.

Frank was not at all pleased. As he was the president of the Combine, he felt that Hodge had not done right in entering for the contest without his knowledge.

At first he thought of refusing to let Bart race, but he quickly banished such an inclination, knowing it might seem that he feared he would be beaten by one of his own club.

"But we'll have a little understanding about this later on," he mentally vowed.

Besides Bart, Frank and Wallace Random, there were three others who had entered for the hurdle race. They were Perkins, of the Southern Union Athletic Club, of Los Angeles; Keeler, of Ventaur, and a Mexican, Pablo Salero, from some unknown place.

The Mexican was a little fellow, while the others were supple and well-built lads.

"Ready, gentlemen!"

It was the voice of the starter.

The six contestants leaned forward, ready to dash away in a moment.

"One!"

Breathless silence.

"Two!"

In a moment they would be off.

"Three!"

Crack! sounded the pistol, and away they darted.

Again Random showed his qualities as a quick starter, but he did not get

away from Merriwell, who was equally as quick.

Straight at the first hurdle the six lads dashed. Side by side Merriwell and Random sailed over it, with Hodge scarcely any in the rear.

The spectators cheered and waved hats, handkerchiefs and parasols.

As the third hurdle was cleared Hodge was neck-and-neck with Random and Merriwell. At that moment it seemed as if the three were evenly matched.

Perkins was close behind them, and the Mexican had already fallen to the rear.

Hodge was straining every nerve, and Merriwell was astonished to see him make such a spurt.

"Can he keep it up?" thought Frank. "If so, he is the man I'll have to work hard to beat."

Over the fourth hurdle they sailed, and then it was that Merriwell and Hodge, still keeping side by side, took the lead, Random being passed, although he was doing his level best.

But the strain was telling on Bart already. His face was drawn into an expression of agony, and he knew he could not keep up that speed to the finish.

As they cleared the fifth hurdle something happened. Hodge seemed to strike the ground awkwardly, and he plunged against Merriwell.

Down both went.

When they scrambled up, Random was in the lead, and he had secured a decided advantage—an advantage that it was not going to be easy to overcome.

Frank was angry and excited. Like a deer he dashed after Wallace.

Still Hodge kept at his side, doing his utmost.

Six, seven, eight hurdles they cleared, and they were close at Random's heels. Frank felt confident he would be able to win for all of his unfortunate downfall.

"I can do it!" he told himself. "There is a wide space between the ninth and tenth hurdles, and there is where I'll get ahead of Random."

Never in all his life had he felt more confident of winning any kind of a contest.

When the ninth hurdle was reached Bart had fallen a trifle to the rear, but he leaped nearly at the same moment with Merriwell.

Then a cry came from Bart as his foot struck and he was thrown forward heavily upon his head.

He struck the ground with a sickening thud, and lay still.

In a moment Frank Merriwell stopped, all thought of winning the race being banished from his mind. He was quickly kneeling beside the fallen lad trying to discover how badly Bart was injured.

Hodge was unconscious, so Frank lifted him and bore him from the track,

while Wallace Random raced on and won over Perkins by a wide margin.

Bart was carried into the shade of a large tree, where a physician began to work over him. The physician could not discover that any bones were broken, and he believed Hodge had been stunned by the fall.

This proved true, for Bart was restored to consciousness after a short time, and the first person he saw was Frank close at his side, watching him with the greatest anxiety.

Bart reached out and grasped Merry's hand, saying feebly:

"It was an accident, old fellow—I swear it was! Don't think I tried to make you lose the race! No one could induce me to do that, no matter how much they begged me to, Frank! You do not think I did it purposely, do you?"

"No," said Frank, "I do not think so, Bart."

"I am glad!" whispered Hodge, thankfully.

Soon the tournament was over, and Santa Barbara was well satisfied, having carried off her share of the honors.

That night there was another hop at the most fashionable hotel of the town.

Frank appeared rather late, and from a place where he could not be seen himself, he watched the dancers.

He was surprised to discover that Inza was not dancing, although she was present. As he watched he saw her refuse several who asked her to dance.

Lord Stanford was given the cold shoulder in a very decisive manner, but there were numberless other girls who were more than glad to dance with him.

He entered the room intending to grasp an opportunity to speak with her.

The moment he appeared Inza retreated toward the other end of the room. He followed hastily, and, catching up with her, said:

"Inza, please do not act in this manner. I have an apology to make."

He passed his hand through her arm, and they went out on the veranda. The moon was over the mountains again, and its silver light glinted the waves of the sea.

Frank and Inza paused in the shadow of the vines. For some moments he did not speak, and then, his voice quivering, he talked long and earnestly. What he said is neither here nor there. He had an apology to make, and he made it in a manly way. He acknowledged his mistake and freely expressed his contrition.

Inza heard him in silence to the end, then she burst into tears. In a moment both of Frank's arms were about her, and she was sobbing with her head against his breast.

The following morning Bart Hodge, who had appeared greatly troubled since the race, sought out Frank.

"I want to ask you a question," he said, earnestly. "Do you think I tried to keep you from winning that race, Frank?"

“Not much, Bart,” replied Merry, cordially. “I know you better than that. But—”

“Yes?”

“Perhaps you were asked to.”

Hodge flushed.

“We won’t say any more,” continued Frank, grasping his companion’s hand. “Let it be buried in the past. I have been a fool, and I deserve all I got. Here comes the rest of the fellows. We’ll talk over our next move with the Combination.”

CHAPTER XVI—THE ARRIVAL AT EMBUDO

“Embudo! Embudo!”

A brakeman shouted the name at the open door of a passenger car northward bound on the Denver and Rio Grande. The train was stopping at a small station in Northern New Mexico, some fifty miles north of Santa Fe.

“Embudo! Embudo!”

Another brakeman shouted the name at the open door at the other end of the car.

“Embudo! Hurrah!”

Several healthy young voices uttered the cry, and there was a general bustling within that car.

“Here’s where we leave the railroad and civilization behind, Inza,” laughed Frank, who had been chatting with Inza Burrage, who occupied a seat with a stern, hard-faced woman.

“Hurrah!” cried the girl, enthusiastically. “We’re off to the land of the Aborigines! What a jolly adventure it’s bound to be!”

“Goodness!” said the hard-faced woman, reprovingly. “Any one would think you a boy to hear you cheer like that, Inza. Don’t do it again! It isn’t proper.”

“Oh, what’s the use to be so awfully proper all the time, Aunt Abby!” laughed the girl, with a little pout. “How can a person help being enthusiastic with the prospect of such adventures ahead! You’ll see things you never saw

before, aunt.”

“And goodness knows we shall all be scalped! I suppose I’m foolish to accompany you on such a foolish expedition.”

“Oh, Frank says there is not the least danger of anything like scalping, and St. Geronimo Day is the great holiday with the Pueblo Indians. I wouldn’t miss it for anything.”

“I assure you, Miss Gale, there is no danger of being scalped or troubled at all by the Indians,” said Frank, who with his friends were bound for the Pueblo of Taos, where they were going to witness the Indian celebration which takes place there each year on St. Geronimo Day.

Inza had communicated with her maiden aunt, who lived in Sacramento, after arriving in Santa Barbara, and Miss Gale had been so wrought up by the girl’s letter, which told how her father had tried to force her into a marriage with a “horrid English reprobate,” that she had packed a trunk and hastened to Santa Barbara.

She found Inza had already “shaken” the Englishman, but Bernard Burrage was such a physical wreck that the good-hearted spinster determined to accompany Inza on the trip East and look out for her.

Mr. Burrage had stopped at Santa Fe, hoping the climate might agree with him.

Frank had heard much about the affair at the Pueblo of Taos on St. Geronimo Day, and he took a vote of the Yale Combine about attending.

The club was unanimously in favor of it, and thus we find them leaving the train at Embudo, the nearest railway station to the Pueblo.

Frank had worked hard to make a favorable impression on Miss Abigail Gale, and had succeeded very well, so he had induced her to take Inza to witness the Indian celebration.

No one but Frank could have succeeded in this, for the spinster detested and feared redskins, but Merry seemed to have some hypnotic influence over her.

Hodge assisted Inza from the train, while Frank aided Miss Abigail to alight, doing so with as much gallantry and grace as if she were a girl of sixteen.

Indeed, her hard face seldom relaxed at all save when she looked at Frank, and then, at times, an expression of positive gentleness would soften her features somewhat.

Frank had not won her good will by aid of a flattering tongue. He believed actions spoke louder than words, and he had taken pains to study her peculiarities that he might know what to do to please her. In this manner he had been remarkably successful with her, although it was Miss Abigail’s firm belief that the entire male sex “didn’t amount to nothing nohow.”

“Look at Frankie, b’ys!” chuckled Barney, giving Ephraim and Hans each a nudge. “It’s a shlick lad he is. If it wasn’t fer him, Inza’d nivver git anywhere at all, at all; but he makes th’ ould hen think she’s a p’ach, an’ she’ll be afther doin’ onnything he loikes fer her to do.”

“By gum! he’s slick,” grinned the boy from Vermont. “I ain’t never seen no female gal ur woman that he wasn’t able to chop ice with when he sot out.”

“Yaw,” nodded Hans, gravely; “he peen able to chop ices mit der girls ven I lets ’em alone. Uf course he don’d stood no show mit me against.”

“Nivver a bit!” agreed Barney. “It’s yersilf thot’s a great masher. Ye’re a perfect Apollo.”

“You pet my poots!” said the Dutch boy proudly. “I don’d bother Vrankie mit because he vos a coot feller, und his feelings I don’d vant to hurt.”

“Go on!” snorted Ephraim, in disgust. “Ye make me sick! Whut sort of a fool noshun hev yeou got inter your fat head? Do you think yeou could cut Frank Merriwell aout with any girl?”

“Say, you peen careful how you talks to me!” said Hans, menacingly. “Uf you don’d, I may be sorry for it! I know vot I can do mit der girls.”

“Thot’s roight, Ephraim,” put in Barney, with a sly wink at the Yankee boy; “he knows phwat he can do. Av he says he can cut Frankie out it’s himsilf thot can do th’ same.”

“Yaw; sometimes I done id shust to shown you.”

Ephraim took his cue, having tumbled when Barney winked.

“Wal, darn my punkins!” he growled. “Yeou make me sick! Mebbe yeou really do think yeou could cut Frank aout?”

“Uf I vant to tried him.”

“Wall, I’ll bet a ’hole barril of yaller-eye beans that yeou can’t do northin’ of the kind, b’gosh! Yeou take me up, if you darst!”

“Betther be careful, Ephraim,” said Barney, in a manner of mock warning. “Ye won’t have inny b’anes to ate nixt winther. Ye see Frankie is payin’ all his attintion to Miss Abigail noo, an’ it’s ounly himself as could do innnything wid th’ loikes av her—onliss it is Hans.”

“I’ll stan’ to my bet,” said Gallup. “Hans never could do a dinged thing with Miss Abigail.”

“Vos dot vot I thought, eh?” excitedly exclaimed the Dutch lad. “Veil, I proff him to you! I shown you britty queek alretty vot I done dot directions in. I vos a hustler ven I started out, und don’d you forget him!”

“All right,” grinned Ephraim. “If yeou can cut Frank aout with Miss Abigail darned if I don’t deliver them beans!”

Then the Vermonter and the Irish lad chuckled and nudged each other, anticipating no end of sport, for they knew Hans was in earnest and would make

an attempt to win the attention of the spinster.

Embudo is down on the railroad time tables, and that is about as near as it comes to being on earth.

When the party reached the station platform they looked around for the town. To their astonishment all they could see was the little red station house and a lonely water tank. On both sides were towering cliffs of lava, that looked as if they had been scorched and melted by the fiercest of heats, and the boys found it difficult to believe that the sickly creek in sight was the Rio Grande River. The little stream made a great fuss as it dashed over a bed that was paved with blocks of black basalt, as if seeking to call attention to itself and its importance.

"Well!" exclaimed Harry, astonished; "jay I be miggered—I mean may I be jiggered!"

"Golly sakes to goodness!" gasped Toots. "Where am we, chilluns?"

Bruce Browning groaned.

"Sold again!" he muttered, in despair. "Why, this is the next stop to the infernal regions!"

"Where's the town?" asked Diamond.

A man who wore a silk hat on the back of his head and carried his hands in the pockets of his striped trousers, which—marvel of marvels!—bore traces of a crease, came forward and said:

"The town, gents, is right across the river there. It is not quite as large as Santa Fe, but it serves as a stopping place all right, if you are on your way to Taos, which I reckon you are."

He eyed them closely, as if sizing them up. His eyes were piercing, and his mustache was coal-black. There was that in his appearance that pronounced him a gambler.

The boys thanked him and looked for the town.

They discovered a long, low adobe building, and that constituted the entire town. It was the post office, hotel and general store, and was kept by a Mexican, who was on hand at the station to get the mail.

A number of passengers beside Frank and his friends left the train.

Frank went ahead toward the baggage car to look out for the luggage.

The station agent was a beardless youth, to whom the arrival of a train was a most welcome break of the lonely monotony of the place. He was hurrying about and showing his importance.

About the station were several loungers, Mexicans and Indians.

Barely had Frank gone forward when he was startled to hear a loud scream, which he recognized as the voice of Inza.

That scream told him something of a startling nature had happened, and like a flash he whirled about.

He was astonished to see Inza struggling in the the arms of a blanketed Indian, who seemed attempting to lift her and carry her off bodily.

With a pantherlike bound, Merry sprang to the rescue.

Quick as he was, another person was on hand ahead of him.

A tall, swarthy young man, dressed in plain clothes, which seemed to fit his magnificent form very well, leaped at the Indian and the girl, tore them apart, and knocked the redskin down with a single straight-from-the-shoulder blow.

It was all over in a second, and the rescuer was saying something to reassure the frightened girl.

All over?

Not quite!

As the Indian who had been knocked down started up in a dazed way, lifting himself with one hand, the man who wore the silk hat whipped out a long-barreled revolver, coolly observing:

“Here is where I assist Uncle Sam in settling the Indian question.”

In another moment he would have shot the Indian, but Frank was in time to grasp his wrist and turn the revolver skyward.

The weapon spoke, and the bullet flattened against the face of the lava cliff above.

The man turned his dark eyes on Frank, and the boy saw a blazing devil in their depths. His face turned crimson, but his voice was still quite cool, as he addressed Merriwell:

“My dear young man, do you know it is very dangerous to chip into a game like that?”

“I saved you from committing murder, sir,” said Frank, equally as cool.

The man’s teeth seemed to gleam through that black mustache.

“Murder!” he said, scornfully. “You kept me from shooting a dog, that’s all. If you will take your hand off my wrist, I’ll do the job now.”

“No, you must not!”

Never had Frank seen a more dangerous look on the face of a living man. He felt that wrist tremble beneath his fingers.

“You are a tenderfoot,” said the owner of the silk hat. “If you were anything else—Well, this would mean your funeral! I am ashamed to shoot you, but I may forget myself if you do not withdraw from the game.”

“If you will promise to put up that gun and let this drunken Indian go, I will withdraw.”

“Did you ever hear of Dan Carver?”

“Yes.”

“I am Carver.”

CHAPTER XVII—OFF FOR PUEBLO

Frank was astonished, but his face showed not the least sign of surprise. Carver was a Western sport and “bad man.” It was said that, when aroused, he was more dangerous than a hundred rattlesnakes.

“Well, Mr. Carver,” said Frank, “I have heard that it is your custom to do your shooting first and your palavering afterward; but I trust you will break the rule in this case. I have heard that you claim to be a gentleman, and, as a gentleman, I ask you not to do any shooting here in the presence of these ladies, who are already badly frightened, and would be horrified at the sight of blood.”

“Oh, if you put it that way,” said the man, slowly, “I presume I shall have to throw up my hand, although I feel it a duty to shoot some holes in that drunken redskin.”

“As a favor to the ladies you will not shoot him?”

“As a favor to the ladies, I will not shoot him—here.”

Merry instantly let go of Dan Carver’s wrist, saying:

“I thank you, sir.”

The Indian who had been knocked down had regained his feet by this time. He paused, swaying a bit unsteadily, and glared in a drunken way at Inza and her rescuer, then he turned and staggered away, disappearing around the station.

“The horrid beast!” exclaimed Miss Abigail, who had lifted her parasol, as if to strike him, while she stiffly stood her ground. “Indians are not good for anything anyway. You never can make anything decent out of them, no matter how hard you try.”

“I believe that is what all white folks think,” said the young man who had knocked the drunken savage down. “They may be right.”

There was a trace of bitterness in the words and the tone in which they were spoken.

Frank stared hard at the rescuer, and then, stepping forward, cried:

“I believe I know you! I am sure I do! Why, you are John Swiftwing, and I

have played football against you!”

The youth with the swarthy face looked at Frank, and then bowed gravely.

“I am John Swiftwing,” he acknowledged; “and I remember you. You are a Yale man, and your name is Merriwell.”

Frank held out his hand.

“Shake, Swiftwing!” he cried. “I am delighted to see you, although you nearly killed me once on a tackle. Without question, you are the fiercest tackler and the best football player Carlisle has on her team. If she had ten more men like you, she’d wipe up the earth with every Eastern college.”

A gleam shot from the eyes of the other, and he accepted Frank’s hand.

“You speak as if you mean it,” he said, “and I thank you.”

“I do mean it,” declared Frank. “Why, all the Eastern papers said so! You showed yourself a wonder. You play football as if your life depended on it.”

“Yes. It is the only white man’s game worth playing.”

“I can’t agree with you there. I consider baseball superior.”

Swiftwing shook his head.

“No,” he said; “it is too tame. Football is like a battle, and it makes one’s blood tingle.”

“Well, I wish to thank you for your ready intervention in behalf of this young lady, who is a friend of mine. Permit me to introduce you. Miss Burrage, this is Mr. Swiftwing, a Carlisle student.”

The young man bowed with a grace that was natural and pleasing, lifting his hat as he did so.

Impulsively Inza held out her gloved hand.

“Mr. Swiftwing,” she said, “I am awfully glad to know you, and, oh! I want to thank you so much for what you just did! That—that drunken—man nearly scared me to death.”

“Why didn’t you say that drunken Indian, as you started to, Miss Burrage?” asked Swiftwing, with something like a bitter smile. “White men never get drunk, I believe!”

“Goodness, yes they do!” exclaimed Miss Abigail; “but not all of them get drunk. All Indians get drunk.”

“Not all of them, madam—I beg your pardon. I have never tasted a drop of liquor in my life.”

“You—you? Why—why—you are—are not—”

“Miss Gale,” said Frank, “allow me to introduce Mr. Swiftwing, who is a full-blooded Indian and a student at the school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.”

The spinster looked astonished, nearly dropping her parasol.

“Gracious me!” she fluttered. “Him an Indian? Why, he’s dressed decent, and I’d never suspected it if you hadn’t said so. My, my! what a surprise!”

She did not offer to shake hands, but Swiftwing bowed to her quite as courteously as he had to Inza.

The other boys crowded around, and Frank introduced them all to the Carlisle student, to whom he explained that they were on their way to the Pueblo of Taos.

“But how do you happen to be away out here, Swiftwing?” asked Frank. “Is your home near here?”

“My home is at the Pueblo of Taos, and I am on my way thither.”

“That is remarkable! You are not done at Carlisle?”

“No, I have another year there. I became hungry for a sight of home, and that is how I happen to be here.”

“How do you travel from here?”

“By horse. I suppose you will go by stage. Ramon Griego will carry you.”

“Yes, we go that way; but we’ll see you again at the Pueblo. I wish to have a talk with you.”

“And so do I,” declared Inza, sincerely, regarding the Indian with admiration. “I want to thank you again for what you did. It was splendid of you.”

She held out her hand once more. John took it, bowed low, and, to her surprise, lifted it to his lips. It was an act that astonished Frank more than any one else, for, despite what he knew of Swiftwing, he had felt that the Indian was incapable of such a thing.

With a wave of his hand to Frank and the others, Swiftwing turned and walked away.

“He is a splendid fellow!” said Inza, a flush on her cheeks. “I did not suppose there could be such a difference between two Indians.”

“Look out, Frankie, me b’y!” chuckled Barney. “It’s a rid roival ye’ll have th’ firrust thing ye know.”

Miss Abigail gave a contemptuous sniff.

“He appeared all right,” she said “but even he is an Indian, and no Indian can ever be like a white man.”

It seemed that John Swiftwing’s ears were remarkably keen, for he seemed to hear those words, and he paused suddenly, turning about with a proud gesture. He was at the corner of the station, and not one of that group ever forgot how he looked as he stood there, looking back at them with all the haughtiness of his nature aroused. With something like a gesture of anger and disdain, he turned again and vanished around the corner.

A moment later he was seen galloping away on the back of a tough little pony, going like the wind and riding like a Centaur.

“How could you have said that so he could hear you, aunt!” pouted Inza, her eyes following the retreating figure of Swiftwing. “It was too bad, after all he

did for—for me!”

Barney nudged Frank in the ribs, whispering:

“Didn’t Oi tell yez! It’s shtuck she is alriddy.”

Frank laughed carelessly.

“I didn’t think he could hear me,” said the spinster; “but it was true, anyhow. He’s got on a white man’s clothes, but that don’t make him like a white man.”

“Yaw!” put in Hans Dunnerwust, getting nearer Miss Abigail; “dot peen so, you pet.”

The old maid gave him a scornful look.

“What do you know about it!” she exclaimed.

“Oxcuse me,” said the Dutch boy. “You took mein vord for dot.”

“I wouldn’t take your word for anything,” sniffed Miss Abigail, as she turned away.

Barney and Ephraim chuckled, and Hans looked rather crestfallen, shaking his head and muttering:

“Vale, she vos a pird!”

The train pulled out of the station, and the party crossed the footbridge to the adobe building.

In front of the building stood two light platform wagons, to each of which were attached two of those diminutive broncho ponies whose endurance has so many surprises.

These were the stages of Ramon Griego & Co.

Curiously enough, the firm with this imposing name was composed of two Mexican boys, who were brothers, and who carried a long star route into the mountains, gathering and delivering mail pouches at a number of little settlements on the way.

Ramon proved to be a bright, well-dressed young man, and could speak English fluently, a fact worthy of note in a land where the inhabitants of the isolated hamlets are three hundred years behind the times.

He had been expecting a large number of passengers, and was prepared for them.

Frank’s party took up one entire wagon, and it was a big load for the little bronchos. If Frank had not known what sort of stuff there was in the little animals, he might have hesitated about starting out with a wagon load of twelve persons, to say nothing of several mail pouches.

The driver, a Mexican lad, occupied a seat with Toots. He cracked his long whip and uttered a yell. The little bronchos started slowly, broke into a run, and away they went, with the boys waving their hats and cheering, while Inza fluttered her handkerchief to the Mexican postmaster, who was standing in the open doorway.

The first turn of the road around a jutting rock hid the railroad from view, and it seemed that the party immediately plunged one hundred years into antiquity.

Each seat was wide enough for three ordinary persons, but Hans had been determined to secure a position beside Miss Abigail, and had succeeded, much to the old maid's discomfort. The Dutch boy looked supremely satisfied with himself, and it was plain he thought he was making progress.

The boys sang, Frank starting it. There were some musical voices in the party, and they formed a decidedly jolly "glee club." The songs of Yale were popular with them, and they awoke the echoes with "Here to Good Old Yale," "Bingo," "Solomon Levi," and so forth.

At two or three points the canyon widened enough to permit a few acres of river bottom, and there several Mexican families lived, managing to keep soul and body together in some mysterious manner that defies a Northern understanding.

About the driver's waist was a cartridge belt that bore two Colt revolvers of .44 caliber, and the boy had a significant way of fingering those guns occasionally that made Miss Abigail very nervous.

"If he tries to murder the whole of us—Well, let him try it!" she said, with a significant hardening of the jaws. "He'll get all he's bargained for."

"Dot vos right," nodded Hans. "He don'd done dot murderin' mitout troubles."

Miss Abigail was silent. Encouraged by this, the Dutch boy added:

"Shust you trust myself to you und you vos all right. I vill peen your bro-tector all der times."

"You!" sniffed Miss Abigail. "Why, if you saw your own shadow you'd think an elephant was after you and run away."

Ephraim snickered, and Hans looked disgusted.

The scenery proved very monotonous, and the party subsided into silence after a time.

The only event to arouse them from the lethargy into which they had fallen was a sudden movement on the part of Miss Abigail that unceremoniously dumped Hans off the seat to the ground, where he was fortunate enough to bounce like a rubber ball out of the way of the rear wheel.

"There!" the spinster was heard to mutter; "perhaps he'll stop squeezing up to me now. He's the most uncomfortable person I ever sat beside."

"Shimminy Gristmas!" Hans gurgled, as he sat up beside the trail and stared at the stage, which had stopped almost immediately. "Vot dot vomans got mit her elpov in, ain'd id? Id vas a regular pattering rams!"

Ephraim Gallup laughed in his hearty manner.

"Darn my punkins! but yeou do look funny, Hans!" he cried. "Whut hap-

pened to ye, anyhaow?”

“You toldt me.”

“Begobs! it’s yersilf thot’s a moighty foine ground tumbler,” said Barney, with a chuckle.

“I dond’t toldt you so!” returned the Dutch boy, with attempted sarcasm. “Don’t you pelief mineself!”

“Come, Hans,” laughed Frank, who with Inza, had been watching the Dutch lad’s efforts to make an impression on Miss Abigail. “Pick yourself up and get aboard. We can’t wait all day for you.”

Hans got up with an effort and started to return to his seat; but he stopped, regarding the spinster doubtngly. She gave him a look, and he dodged, as if she had thrown something at him.

“Oxcuse me!” he exclaimed. “Uf id don’t make some difference to nobody, I vill valk der rest uf der vays.”

This was said in such a doleful manner that every one of the boys laughed.

“Here,” said Frank, “I think there is more room on this seat, and I will take your seat. Hurry up, now.”

Frank took the seat beside Miss Abigail, while, with a sigh of relief, the Dutch boy climbed up beside Inza. He looked very doleful and crestfallen during the rest of the journey to the Pueblo, where they arrived at nine o’clock that evening.

CHAPTER OPINION

XVIII—CARVER’S

Pom! pom! pom!

“Pwhat’s that?” grunted Barney Mulloy, sleepily rubbing his eyes.

Pom! pom! pom!

“Come in, und stop dot knockin’ der door on!” gurgled Hans Dunnerwust from beneath an Indian blanket.

“That ain’t nobody knockin’,” declared Ephraim Gallup, with a yawn. “It saounds like—”

Pom-per-pom! pom-per-pom! pom-per-pom!

"Thunder!" snorted the Vermonter, sitting up and giving his blanket a fling. "Where be we, anyhaow?"

"I don'd told you!" exclaimed Hans, in sudden alarm. "You explain dot to mineself!"

"Here!" came from beneath another blanket that was spread on the floor; "what are you chaps raking such a mow about—I mean making such a row about?"

Then Harry lifted his head and peered around in the semi-darkness.

In all directions heads were lifted, and the voice of Bruce Browning growled:

"Talk about your hard beds! I have stopped in all sorts of hotels, but I never struck a bed like this before! What sort of a ranch is this, anyhow?"

Pom-pom! pom-pom! pom-pom!

"Heavens!" gurgled Diamond, popping bolt upright and holding his hands over his ears. "What infernal noise is that?"

Then all the boys sat up, staring at each other questioningly.

"Where is Frank?"

"He's not here!"

Merriwell was gone, but his blanket was rolled in the corner where he had been sleeping.

By this time the boys began to realize where they were.

"We are at the Pueblo," said Hodge. "We arrived here last night, and it must be morning. That sound is the beating of a drum, which means the exercises of the day have begun."

Then there was a hustling, and every one, with the exception of Browning, moved in a hurry. Browning would not have hurried if the adobe hut had been falling down about his ears.

The blanket which served as a door was flung back, and it was seen that the sun was just peeping over the eastern mountains, shooting lances of golden light toward the zenith.

Already the world at the Pueblo of Taos was astir and mass was being said in the little whitewashed chapel, at the door of which stood an idiot boy, who, now and then, pounded spasmodically on a drum. This drumming was answered in a similar manner by another drummer, who stood on the highest terrace of the higher of the two community buildings.

These buildings were made of sundried mud, from a distance looking like two great pyramids. On a nearer approach, it could be seen they were built in terraces, like steps for a mountain-tall giant, each terrace being a story. One was six stories in height, and the other was four.

There were no doors, and the entrances were through the tops of the ter-

paces, which were reached by ladders.

In those two buildings three hundred Pueblo Indians lived.

On the plain near the buildings spectators were already gathering, and the boys were surprised to see they were nearly all white men.

"Merry has stolen a march on us!" cried Hodge. "There he is with Inza now! He got up without awakening us, the rascal!"

"I'm glad he did," yawned Browning. "I could sleep ten hours longer."

"Well, you'd better do it!" came from Diamond. "Pretty soon you'll want to sleep all the time."

Indeed, Frank had arisen at the first hint of coming day and gone forth from the hut.

A little later, as day was breaking, Inza arose and saw him, whereupon she lost little time in preparing to come out and join him.

Frank and Inza had walked out toward a distant encampment, the picturesque tepees being of great interest to them. On their way they met a man who was strolling about with his hands in his pockets, seemingly enjoying the morning air. A silk hat was set upon the back of his head.

It was Dan Carver.

"Good-morning," said Carver, lifting his hat. "We meet again."

Inza was impulsive.

"Oh, Mr. Carver!" she exclaimed; "I want to thank you."

The man looked surprised.

"What for?" he asked.

"Frank—er—Mr. Merriwell says you would have protected me from that horrid Indian at the station yesterday, and he says you were determined to shoot the Indian afterward, but refrained because you did not care to shock ladies."

"Mr. Merriwell is very kind to put it that way," said Dan Carver.

"I was so agitated that I could not tell what was taking place. I am sure you were very kind."

"In not shooting the Injun? Yes, I reckon I was. Ordinarily I'd filled him full of lead. That's the only way to let the devilment out of them dogs."

"Oh, but it is awful!" exclaimed the girl. "I suppose there are some real bad Indians."

"Some! Well, I should warble! Excuse me, miss. They are all bad—every one of them!"

Inza shook her head.

"No! no!" she cried. "I know you are mistaken! There are some good Indians."

"They're all dead ones."

"I can't think so, sir."

“That’s because you don’t know ’em, miss. If you had seen the things I have— Well, you wouldn’t think there could be such a thing as a good Injun alive.”

Still the girl could not be convinced.

“Why,” she exclaimed, “you saw the one who saved me from the drunken fellow. He was an Indian.”

“Yes.”

“Surely he is a good Indian.”

“You may think so.”

“I know it!” she cried, her cheeks beginning to glow, as she warmed to the defense of her red champion. “He showed it in his face. Mr. Merriwell knows him. He has been East to the Indian school at Carlisle, and he is educated. He had the manners of a gentleman, and I believe he has a true and good heart.”

“That shows how little you Eastern people know of Indians. All the education they may have will not make them anything but what they are—and that is bad all the way through.”

“I will not believe that, sir!”

Carver smiled.

“I do not expect you to believe it. Eastern people seldom do.”

“John Swiftwing has the making of a splendid man in him. He plays on the Carlisle football team, and Frank says he is one of their best players. He is like a tiger in a game.”

“I don’t doubt it. Football is a savage’s game at best, and it allows him to work off some of his savage traits. He goes into the struggle as he would go into a battle, and he rejoices in beating down and trampling on all who oppose him. His heart at such a time is a perfect inferno of fury, and, give him a deadly weapon, he would not hesitate to murder. With his bare hands he has little chance to kill. Oh, yes, football is a splendid game for savages!”

It was Merriwell’s turn to smile.

“Mr. Carver,” he said, quite calmly, “you are showing how very ignorant you are about football. It’s a man’s game, and only men of nerve, as well as skill and strength, can play it.”

Carver’s brow darkened for a moment and then cleared.

“It is natural you should think so,” he nodded. “You are a college football player. Never mind that; we’ll not discuss it. But it is certain that all the education John Swiftwing may receive will not change him from a savage. It may seem to make a change in his exterior, but inwardly he will remain the same. All efforts to educate and change him are wasted, as such efforts are wasted on all Indians.”

By this time Inza was so aroused that she was growing angry, and she could not hold herself in check.

“You couldn’t make me believe that if you were to talk forever!” she cried. “I am sure there is as much difference between Indians as there is between white men. John Swiftwing is a noble fellow, and I know it—so there!”

Carver bowed, again lifting his silk hat.

“A woman convinced against her will is of the same opinion still,” he said.

“But I’m not convinced.”

“Then I shall not try to convince you, miss; but I do wish to warn you to keep away from that gang out there.”

He motioned toward the distant tepees, where figures could be seen moving about and blue smoke was rising.

“Those are Apaches,” he said; “the worst Indians on the face of God’s footstool. They are utterly without conscience or anything else that is not vile, and it might not be safe for you to approach too near them, even though they are supposed to be quite peaceable just now.”

“How do they happen to be here?” asked Frank.

“They have come to trade baskets, buckskin shirts, moccasins, almost anything, for liquor. It is probable there will be two thousand visitors there to-day, and the Apaches will get all the rum they want. To-morrow they may start out murdering and torturing.”

Inza shuddered.

“It seems to me that the white men are to blame for letting them have liquor,” she said.

“Perhaps so, but you know there are fools and rascals among the white men. Remember my warning; keep away from the Apache camp. Good-morning.”

Again lifting his hat, he walked onward.

CHAPTER XIX—ON DANGEROUS GROUND

Behind a clump of mesquite stood John Swiftwing, and he had heard the entire conversation. He was there when Frank and Inza met Carver, and he did not stir. He had not sought to listen, and he did not think it his duty to reveal himself.

Swiftwing’s eyes flashed fire and his brow grew dark as he listened to the

words of the gambler, but a softer light came to his face when he heard Inza defending him so bravely.

He folded his arms upon his breast and stood there in a proud pose, his nostrils dilated.

At that moment he would have made a perfect model for an artist or sculptor.

Swiftwing's face was far from expressionless, for various emotions were depicted upon it as he heard the words of the three beyond the mesquite. He betrayed rage, pride and gratitude, and his broad chest arose and fell tumultuously.

When Carver strolled on, Frank and Inza turned about and retraced their steps toward the Pueblo. As they departed, the unseen Indian heard Inza say:

"I will not believe John Swiftwing is a bad Indian! He has a noble face, and you told me, Frank, that you thought him a fine fellow."

"I did," said Merry, "but I know very little of him. Physically, he is a marvel, which is rather strange, as he is a Pueblo Indian, and they are not remarkable for their physical development. But I must confess that Carver's opinion of all Indians seems to be the general belief of those who associate with them, and know them best."

"I don't want to believe it, and I am not going to believe it!"

Swiftwing could hear no more. He had heard quite enough.

"She is a fair white dove!" came from his lips in a murmur that was like liquid music. "She believes there may be some good in an Indian."

Then he bowed his head, and for a long time he stood there motionless as an image of stone. The beating of the drums at the Pueblo aroused him.

His face was heavy with something that seemed a sullen look of despair.

"The white men say all Indians are bad. Carver says all the education I may receive will not change my nature—I shall be an Indian still. I believe he is right! It is useless for the red man to try to be like the white man. God made them in different molds. He spoke truly when he said the heart remained the same for all of any outward change. Once more I am back here with my people, and I feel that I am like them. What is all my education? What does it amount to? The white man looks on me with scorn. But for the White Dove there would be no more courage left in my heart. I would give it all up, and go back to live with my people. After all, when I have finished at school, that is what I will do."

He turned his face toward the Pueblo, on the topmost terrace of which the lone drummer could be seen.

"I have seen the great stone cities of the white men," he said. "The home of my people is but a shadow beside the monster buildings that tower into the air. The white men do many wonderful things. They have the railroad, the telegraph, the telephone, and soon all the secrets of electricity will be theirs. What can my

people do? Nothing! It is fate! God willed it so, and we cannot change it.”

His heart was heavy as he moved toward the Pueblo.

In the meantime Frank had left Inza at the tent of the rancher, while he had gone to see what arrangement could be made about getting a chance to take part in the Indian sports and games that day. He hoped he and his friends would be permitted to compete in some of the contests.

Frank was gone more than half an hour.

When he returned he found Inza standing near the tent, chatting to Swiftwing, who was listening with quiet dignity.

Merry scowled a bit.

“I must caution her,” he said. “She should be careful.”

He came up and offered his hand to the young Indian.

“Good-morning, Swiftwing,” he said, heartily in his pleasant manner. “I am glad to see you.”

The Carlisle student took the proffered hand and shook it warmly.

“Thank you, Mr. Merriwell,” he said, simply.

“Oh, Frank!” cried Inza; “what do you think?”

“I think a number of things,” laughed Merry. “What do you mean?”

“Why, that Indian who grasped me in his arms at the station is here—I saw him!”

“What!”

“It is true! I saw him watching me, but he put off quickly enough when Mr. Swiftwing came up.”

“It is Whirling Bear, the great wrestler of our people,” said Swiftwing. “He was drunk when he molested you yesterday, else he would not have done it. He was drunk on rum, which he obtained from some conscienceless white man.”

“White men should be ashamed to sell such stuff to the poor Indians!” cried Inza.

“They make money by selling it,” Swiftwing observed, with a touch of scorn in his voice.

“And some white men will do anything for money,” said Inza.

“That is true,” confessed Frank. “There are plenty of scoundrels among the white men, and not a few of them are Indian agents. But I have something of which I wish to speak to you, Swiftwing.”

“I am listening, Mr. Merriwell.”

“If possible, I wish to find an opportunity for my friends and myself to take part in some of the sports and games to-day. Can it be arranged?”

The Indian looked doubtful.

“I do not know, but I will see. It is certain you will not be permitted to take part in the religious ceremonies.”

"We do not care for that, but I have heard you have a kind of queer ball game."

"Yes."

"We'd like to try you at your own game."

A faint smile came to the Indian's face.

"You have never seen one of our ball games?"

"No."

"Then you know very little about it?"

"Only what I have heard of it."

"How many in your party?"

"Nine."

"It can be played with nine on a side, but it is better with fifty on a side."

"Whew! Fifty? Why, that's a small army!"

"The game does not resemble a game of ball in the least."

"I have heard so."

"You will be defeated."

"Never mind. We shall have some sport, and we are here for that."

"Is there anything else you wish to do?"

"You said something about wrestling."

"Yes."

"Some of the fellows are good wrestlers."

"It will take a good wrestler to match Whirling Bear."

"I will find a match for him."

"Very well. There is to be another race beside the religious race. Will you care to take part in that?"

"Yes. I wouldn't mind trying to see what I can do at that myself."

"I am not sure you will be allowed to take part in these things, but I will find out about it."

Then, lifting his hat to Inza and nodding to Frank, he strode away. The girl watched his retreating figure, and Frank watched her face.

"I don't care, I won't believe it of him!" she exclaimed. "No matter what Dan Carver says, I feel sure Swiftwing is a noble fellow."

"I am afraid, Inza, you are getting altogether too interested in him," said Frank, reproof in his voice.

She turned on him swiftly, indignation and surprise showing on her face and in her eyes.

"What do you mean to insinuate?" she flashed.

"Now, don't flare up like that, Inza!" urged Merry. "It is for your good that I wish to caution you."

"Oh, indeed!"

“Yes, indeed. I fear your admiration for John Swiftwing may lead you to treat him with such friendliness that he may mistake your motives.”

“Frank Merriwell!” she cried; “I did not think this of you!”

“Don’t misunderstand me,” he hastened to say. “You cannot treat John Swiftwing as you might an ordinary savage. He has been educated in the East, and he is accustomed to Eastern ways. Already I am sure he admires you greatly, and—”

“And you don’t like it!”

“It is not that, Inza, but—”

“It is that!” she flung back, in her impulsive manner. “I am astonished at you, Mr. Merriwell!”

“Inza, listen—”

“I don’t care to listen, sir!”

“You must listen!”

“Must! You cannot force me to listen!”

“No, I will not try; but you must listen for your own sake. I am saying this for your good.”

“Oh, thank you!”

How cutting her words and manner were! He felt the sting, and his face went from red to white, but he continued, firmly:

“If you were to continue to be so friendly with John Swiftwing he might think you in love with him.”

“What of it!”

“It would be an easy thing for you to arouse a responsive passion in his heart.”

Inza clapped her hands.

“How jolly that would be! Think of having an Indian lover! Why, it is just awfully romantic!”

“It may seem very romantic, and all that, but it would be dangerous.”

“Dangerous! Pooh!”

“Yes, dangerous. For all of his education, Swiftwing is an Indian, and he would not fancy being fooled and toyed with. If he fancied you had deceived him, there is no telling what he might take it into his head to do.”

“Now you are trying to make out, like Dan Carver, that he is a common bad Indian. I thought better of you than that, Mr. Merriwell!”

Frank made a gesture of despair.

“You are very unreasonable this morning.”

“And you are jealous—jealous of an Indian!” taunted the girl. “I did not think that of you!”

Frank straightened up proudly.

"You are at liberty to think what you like," he said. "I am not jealous, for I think you have more sense than to fall in love with John Swiftwing or any other redskin."

"Oh, I don't know!" Inza tossed back, tauntingly. "You can't always tell."

Frank turned away.

"Excuse me," he said. "I must find him and learn what he has been able to do about making arrangements for us."

He lifted his cap and walked away.

The look on Inza's face as she watched him depart told that she was not entirely pleased with herself.

"To think he should be jealous of John Swiftwing!" she murmured, "that's enough to stir any one up! And he is jealous! He needn't deny it! I'll make him still more so before I quit. I'll make him think I am really in love with John."

Little did she know how dangerous was the ground upon which she was so fearlessly treading.

CHAPTER XX—THE SUN DANCE

By this time the boys had arisen, hastily made their toilets, eaten a "snatched" breakfast, and were coming forth to witness the ceremonies.

It was interesting to watch the crowd gathering from all directions. Some who had come to witness the ceremonies had traveled many hundred miles. There were many Mexicans, not a few cowboys, Indians from various tribes, ranchers and sports, travelers and women.

While mass was going on in the little white chapel, the Pueblos, for whose benefit it was said, were busy elsewhere with preparations for the religious ceremony, in which they have the fullest belief.

The men were in the subterranean *estufas*, dressing their bodies and performing those secret rites which no white man is ever permitted to witness.

The women were in the labyrinths of the great pyramids, decking themselves out in their finest apparel for the celebration, for the Pueblos had Sunday clothes, and not a few of the garments were rich and handsome.

Mass was over at last, and then came the procession of the saints.

In the chapel were several images. These were taken up in mysterious awe by the women present and carried to the door.

Outside the chapel a piece of sheeting was raised aloft on poles by four Indians to form a canopy to protect the images from the heat of the sun. The procession moved off toward a little bower of green limbs near the bigger pyramid.

At the head of the company marched the idiot drummer, beating away with might and main on his snareless drum.

Close behind him followed two Pueblos, who fired guns as rapidly as they could load them, presumably to frighten away evil spirits.

Then came the women with the images.

The figures were placed in the little bower, so they might overlook the field where the races and sports were to take place.

Not far away on a pole at least forty feet high were suspended a sheep, pieces of bread known as tortillas, and little sacks that were filled with various kinds of grain.

These were the fruits of the field, and were thus hung as a thank offering to the Sun Father, by whose grace it was possible to raise enough to supply the community.

At length the male Pueblos were seen emerging from holes in the ground, entrances to their subterranean council chambers.

Women and children, bedecked in their handsomest garments, appeared on the terraces. They wore bright robes and sheepskin leggins, the latter being white as paper.

Ordinarily these Indians wore clothes in which they could have passed muster in any civilized community, but now all who were to take part in the ceremonies appeared stripped to the breechclout, some of which were fancifully decorated and adorned.

Some of the men had worked red ribbons and skeins of yellow yarn into their long black hair, and all were painted, although, unlike Northern Indians, the Pueblos try to please in their appearance, instead of making themselves as horrible as possible.

Some were half white and some half blue, while others were marked with geometrical figures. Some were of one solid color from crown to toe.

Not a few of them were adorned with handsome white eagle feathers, and some had their heads almost entirely covered with downy feathers.

Among the Pueblos the feather is a symbol of prayer. They say the eagle soars toward the sun at will, and his soft white feathers float upward on the breeze, like thoughts.

When the eagles are breeding the Pueblos go into the mountains and capture the young, which are kept in captivity for Saint Geronimo Day.

And so it is that when the Indian decorates himself on this great occasion with fluttering feathers each feather is equivalent to a prayer that is constantly ascending to the Sun Father.

To say the least, the idea is poetical.

By the time the sun dance was ready to begin more than fifteen hundred witnesses had assembled, and more were coming.

Inza and Miss Abigail intrusted themselves to the care of the boys, who found for them a fine position to witness the celebration.

"Where is Merriwell?" asked the spinster, looking around. "I heard him talking to you in front of the tent, Inza, but I have not seen him this morning."

"I believe he is trying to make some arrangements so that the boys may take part in the sports of the day," answered the girl, quietly.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Miss Abigail. "What a crazy notion! I don't understand how he can want to have anything at all to do with them horrid Indians! If the Indians were beaten at any of their games, they might get angry and kill us all."

"Nefer you been afraid mit dot," said Hans, who had been egged on by Barney and Ephraim to make one more attempt to win the good will of Miss Abigail. "Uf they tried dot mit you they vos sure to get left alretty queek. I vos here, und I don'd let yourself be scalped. Yaw!"

The spinster gave him a look that nearly froze him on the spot.

"You!" she exclaimed. "You would fall all over yourself trying to get out of the way if you thought there was any danger."

"You don'd pelief me!" cried Hans. "I vos a corker to fight. Somedime ven dere vos some dangers meppy I peen aple to shown you der sort uf a heroes vot you don'd know I peen."

This was very amusing to Barney and Ephraim, who were chuckling with satisfaction.

Frank appeared.

"It's all right, fellows!" he exclaimed, his face glowing with satisfaction. "I have arranged it."

"Good stuff!" exclaimed Harry. "But what are we going to do?"

"Take part in everything but the religious performances."

"What else occurs?"

"A ball game, races, wrestling match, and so forth!"

"Hurro!" cried Barney Mulloy, in delight. "It's shport we'll be afther havin' wid th' spalpanes!"

"By gum!" grinned Ephraim Gallup. "It's goin' to be a sight better'n a

circus!”

“I shouldn’t have been able to fix it if it hadn’t been for John Swiftwing,” confessed Frank. “He did all the business for me.”

“Is he going to take part in any of the sports?” asked Diamond.

“Yes.”

“Well, he is a dandy. He can run like a deer, and he has the strength of a grizzly bear.”

“Don’t I know it?” laughed Frank. “Didn’t I find it out when Yale played Carlisle. He was a perfect wonder among the Indians, and their entire eleven were bulldog fighters. They were not at all scientific in their play, but they gave Yale the hottest kind of a fight, and came near battering a road to victory several times.”

Inza did not seem to hear Merriwell’s words, and she was giving him no attention. She had called Hodge to her side, and was speaking to Bart.

As Frank turned toward the girl he heard her say:

“It’s a disgrace to civilization that the American Indian is treated in such a shameful manner! The Indians have been robbed, and deceived, and butchered, and lied to, till they have no confidence in white men; and now, because once in a while an Indian imitates a white man and gets drunk, it is said all Indians are bad! It makes my blood boil to think of it. John Swiftwing is a specimen of the educated Indian, and he shows what the government might do with these unfortunates if it tried. I think the United States ought to be ashamed of itself! I am ashamed of it, so there!”

Hodge laughed.

“You have grown very enthusiastic over this subject of late,” he said. “It seems to me that all your enthusiasm has been aroused since you first saw John Swiftwing.”

Inza echoed his laugh, but added color came to her cheeks.

“Perhaps you are right,” she admitted. “I confess I did not know there were any Indians like Mr. Swiftwing. He was a revelation to me.”

“There are a few like him, but he is not just what he seems, you may be sure of that, Inza.”

“Now stop right there, Bart Hodge! Don’t tell me that he is still a savage at heart. I know better! You can’t make me believe that after seeing all the fine things there are in the East and learning how much superior the method of living among white men is to the way the Indians live that a highly intelligent fellow like John Swiftwing could desire to come back here and live as his people live.”

“I shall not try to make you believe it, Inza,” smiled Bart, “for I have learned that it is not an easy thing to change your mind once you have it set on anything.”

“That’s so! When I am sure of a thing I’ll stick to it.”

Frank bit his lip.

“That’s right,” he thought. “She is the most obstinate girl in the world. She is jealous, quick-tempered, obstinate and intractable, but still there is an irresistible charm about her. I should dislike any other girl of her temperament and disposition, but it is most marvelous that the more hateful she is the greater is her attraction for me. Who can explain that? I am sure I can’t.”

He spoke to Inza, but she did not deign to give him much attention, continuing her conversation with Hodge, whose eyes twinkled as he saw there was some sort of a misunderstanding between her and Frank.

“They seem to be quarreling or making up all the time,” Bart mentally observed.

Boomp-boomp! boomp-er-boomp! boomp-er-boomp!

The sun dance had begun, and the drummer was beating out the time with a curious and ponderous drumstick.

The drum was a big rawhide affair, as large as a barrel, and was carried by two men.

The men of the two large community buildings had formed in separate groups, shoulder to shoulder, and, on an open space before the bower occupied by the images, they began the dance.

This dance was a curious lifting of the feet with a sharp, jerky motion, and they sang a Pueblo anthem, which sounded like this:

“Hi yo to hoo he yo yah hay yo,
He yah hi yo ye har ye he ho.”

This was a song of praise and thanksgiving to the Sun Father, and a supplication for the continuance of his favor. It was not the hoarse and discordant yelping of the Northern Indian, but arose and fell in rhythmical cadences and with an exactness of time that was surprising.

The spectators watched the dance with a curious feeling of interest and fascination.

CHAPTER RELIGIOUS RACE

XXI—THE

Soon the sun dance was over and then came the religious race.

The track was a smooth strip of ground, stretching about four hundred yards from the bower in which the images had been placed.

The track was kept clear by old men, who were stationed at short distances up and down, armed with green branches to keep intruders out of the way.

At each end the contestants stood in a row, watching the track.

Each of the big community buildings was represented by sixteen runners, who were to take turns in the race.

The governor of the Pueblo made a short speech, and then, with startling suddenness two lithe figures darted out from the end nearer the bower, there was a wild shout of "hay-wah-oh," and the race had begun.

The two runners stopped when they reached the other end of the course, but already two other runners had taken their places, darting off like foxes the moment the original two crossed a certain line that was marked by a bush that lay across the track.

This change was made at each end of the course, so all the sixteen contestants took turns.

But it was permissible to put the same runner in as many times as necessary, and it so happened that, whenever one side would get a lead over the other, the best runners were called on to go in repeatedly.

Behind each of the runners chosen to take up the race next stood two old men, who were each holding a long eagle feather. With these feathers they repeatedly touched the calves of the runners' legs, at the same time muttering a prayer to the Sun Father, imploring him to give the runners the speed of the eagle.

The spectators showed much excitement as the race continued.

"Um-o-pah! um-o-pah!" they shouted, wildly waving their hands to the winners.

They were urging them to "hurry up."

In vain the boys looked for John Swiftwing.

"It's strange he has not been chosen to take part in this race," said Frank. "I have been told by one of the old chiefs that he was swifter than all their other runners before he went away to school."

"Are there no other races?" asked Hodge.

"Yes; but this being the religious race, is of the most consequence, and usually the best runners are put into this."

"Perhaps Swiftwing is saving himself for some other race."

"Perhaps so."

Inza watched the runners with great interest, but Miss Abigail soon tired of the affair.

"I can't say that I see anything entertaining or intellectual in all this," she sniffed.

"Yaw," nodded Hans, who still kept near her; "I peen feexed dot vay yourself. Der race vas on der pum. You agree mit yourself about dot exactly."

"Don't bother to agree with me about anything!" came stiffly from the spinster. "I don't care to have you agree with me."

"Oh, you don'd! Vell, you reminds me uf a feller vot I knowed vonce on a time. He vas always disagreeing mit eferydings. He wouldn't eat anyding vot he thought might agree mit him, und so he died der dispepsia of. You vant to look out for dot."

With this shot Hans edged away, not liking the glare Miss Abigail gave him.

"You pet me my life she don'd got der pest uf me all der times!" he chuckled.

While the religious race was taking place, Swiftwing suddenly appeared at Frank's side.

"If you wish to play ball," he said, "you may have a chance. Bring your friends. Come."

Frank spoke to the boys, all of whom, with the exception of Browning, were eager for the sport.

Bruce grumbled a little, but followed Frank.

Swiftwing led them away, but he had found time to speak a word in Inza Burrage's ear, and Frank had noted this.

Merry saw Inza start a little and then shake her head, while her face grew pale and she pressed nearer to her aunt.

"I wonder what the fellow said to her," thought Frank, who was far from pleased. "She would not tell me if I asked her, so I'll have to continue to wonder."

The young Indian led the boys to a place not far from the bower, but beyond the crowd of spectators.

"The ball game will be for sport," he said, "and, as you do not know just how Indians play ball, I have decided that you shall be divided. Four of you will play on one side, and five on the other. The rest of the players will be Indians, and there will be twenty on a side. They are preparing now. Get ready, for the game will begin right after the race."

So, with much joking among themselves, the boys pulled off their sweaters and prepared for the race.

Swiftwing gave their superfluous clothes into the care of an old man, who was told to watch carefully that no Mexicans or Apaches stole anything from him.

Then Swiftwing showed the boys the balls and the bats, which were like old-fashioned "shinny" sticks, and explained to them how the game was to be

played.

This done, the Indian youth left Frank to divide his party, and hurried away.

Within three minutes a great shouting announced that the religious race was over, and one of the buildings had won over the other.

Barely had this shouting ceased when, with yells like wild animals, thirty-one young bucks, stripped to the breechcloth, came from somewhere and rushed upon the white boys.

Hans gave a gurgle of fear and rolled over in a sudden attempt to take flight.

"Here vas where you lose mein scalp!" he gurgled.

Toots was scared, and his teeth chattered.

"Oh, Lordy!" he gasped. "Mah wool am gone dis time fo' suah! I done knowed I'd nebbber keep dis wool on mah haid till I got back home!"

Barney Mulloy squared off, his hands clinched and his eyes flashing.

"Come on, ye spalpanes!" he grated. "It's a roight tough bit av a shcrap we'll be affther havin', me laddy-bucks!"

"Gug-gug-good gosh!" stammered Ephraim Gallup, his face turning pale and his knees knocking together. "We're ketched in a trap, by gum! I wish I was to hum on the farm!"

"What's the meaning of this, Merriwell?" cried Jack Diamond, clutching Frank's arm with a strong grip. "Are we in for scalping—or what?"

"It's all right," assured Merriwell. "That's their way of attracting the attention of the crowd and informing them that the ball game is about to begin."

"Is that all?" gurgled Ephraim, in great relief, seeing the young Indians gather about but observing they did not offer hostilities. "Wal, darned if I ain't afraid I'll never be able to comb my hair ag'in! It feels as if it was stickin' up stiffer than quills on the back of a hedgehoag."

The shout from the young bucks had attracted the attention of the spectators and they were rushing toward the spot.

A hand touched Frank's arm.

"Come," said the voice of John Swiftwing. "A place for us to play will be prepared."

John was one of the young bucks. He had cast aside the clothes of civilization, and, like the others, he was stripped to the breechcloth.

His physique was magnificent, and Frank regarded him with admiration. Such broad shoulders, such a deep chest, such hard and muscular limbs were not common among the Pueblos.

In Swiftwing's hair eagle feathers had been fastened, and it seemed that, with his clothes, he had cast aside all the refining changes of civilization.

He was a savage again!

His eyes were flashing, and his head was poised proudly on his strong neck.

The players looked to him as a leader, and they followed him to the cleared space where the ball game was to take place.

Frank had divided his party. Rattleton, Diamond, Mulloy and Gallup were on one side, while Merriwell, Browning, Hodge, Dunnerwust and Toots were on the other.

It took but a few moments for all arrangements to be completed.

The sides of twenty men each were drawn up facing each other, with an open space between them. The forty players were scattered over considerable territory. Each man stood in an expectant attitude, one of the rude bats in his hands, ready for the ball to be put into play.

The ball was small and hard, and the players could not touch it with their hands after play began, but they must keep it constantly in the air. The moment it touched the ground the game was won and the side upon whose territory it had fallen were defeated.

This was the usual rule, but, on this occasion it was modified somewhat, as there were white players in the game, and it was not expected they could do as well as the Indians who were familiar with the sport. It was decided that the ball must be driven to the ground twice on one side or the other in order to insure a defeat. It was to be the "best two out of three."

Suddenly there was a shrill yell, a sharp crack, and the ball had been batted into play.

CHAPTER XXII—THE BALL GAME

Up, up into the air sailed the little ball.

With a shout the players rushed to get beneath it.

Frank found himself on the side opposite Swiftwing.

John was the first to strike the ball after it had been batted into play.

Down came the little black sphere, and, poising himself on one foot, the Carlisle "buck" swung his bat and sent the ball straight toward Frank.

The trick was done with marvelous skill, and it seemed to be a challenge.

Frank squared himself in a fraction of a second, and then——

Crack!

Back sped the ball.

A whoop of delight went up from Frank's side.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" cried Hans. "Don'd dot peen a pird! Gif id to him, Vrankie!"

Crack!

Swiftwing hit the ball, and, with equal skill, he shot it back at Merriwell.

Frank was expecting this, and he returned it with all the skill of a professional tennis player.

The spectators roared their applause.

For some moments this "volleying" was kept up, and then the ball glanced from Swiftwing's bat and went high in the air.

Frank had come out best in this first struggle, much to his surprise, as, not being familiar with the game, he had not anticipated such success.

The white men in the crowd gave a yell of delight.

Frank caught a glimpse of Inza's face, and he fancied there was an expression of disappointment on it.

"I believe she would have been pleased if he had vanquished me!" thought Frank, a trifle bitterly. "I do not understand her at all of late."

He could discern the look of admiration on the girl's face as she regarded the magnificent Indian who commanded the players on the side that opposed Merriwell.

Frank was somewhat dismayed when he discovered that Whirling Bear was the commander of his side.

The young Indian who had been drunk at Embudo the day before was straight enough now, and he seemed to be somewhat of a favorite among the Pueblo athletes.

Not a few of the Indians showed a strong dislike for John Swiftwing, and Frank understood this was because he had been away to the white man's school. They wished to see him beaten at everything that he might know how weak he had become while he was learning the white man's knowledge.

When the ball glanced from Swiftwing's bat it was not allowed to fall to the ground. A lithe savage ran under it and sent it spinning into the air.

Far over Whirling Bear's side sped the little black sphere.

Whirling Bear shouted a command.

Like a flash three of the rearmost bucks darted after the ball, and one of them, who had the speed of the wind, ran under it as it was falling to the ground. Without stopping or pausing, he swung his bat and hit the ball.

Oh, what a shout of delight pealed from white men and Indians alike! Surely the ball had been kept from the ground in a most amazing manner, for

the batter was not able to stop and turn till he had passed at least forty feet beyond the point where he hit the ball.

There was a rush on Swiftwing's side, and the ball was returned.

The one who struck it sent it straight at Hodge.

Bart met it with a good crack and sent it back.

Barney Mulloy poised his bat.

"Begobs! Oi'll knock the paling off it wid me shtick!" he cried.

With all his might he struck.

And missed it!

But one of the young Indians was on hand, and he seemed prepared for such an emergency, as he struck the ball before it could reach the ground, lifting it into the air again, and saving the first defeat for Swiftwing's side.

Hans Dunnerwust saw the ball coming in his direction, and he resolved to get some glory out of the game.

He ran to meet it, tripped himself, fell down, rolled over, sat up, and swung his bat. In some manner he succeeded in hitting the ball as he sat on the ground, and he sent it into the air again.

"You don'd done dot mit me!" he cried, and the spectators roared and cheered, the white men laughing loudly, and not a few of the Indians betraying mirth.

"Gol darn my punkins!" exclaimed Ephraim Gallup, joyously. "This is more fun than a darg-fight! Never see nothing like it before! Let me git a rap at that ball!"

But when he made a run for it, his long legs got tangled with his bat, and he was tripped with such suddenness that he flipped into the air as if sent with a spring, turned over and dropped on the back of his neck.

An Indian struck the ball, however, and it did not touch the ground.

"Say!" snorted the Vermonter, as he sat up and glared around, "p'int me aout the critter what done that!"

No one paid any attention to him, so he got up, secured his bat, and waited for a chance to get at the ball without running after it.

Crack! crack! crack!—the bats were rapping the little ball in quick succession, and the players and spectators were feverish with excitement.

The Indians were betting madly on the outcome of the game, and the white witnesses were taking "chances" on it.

Dan Carver, cool and serene, was covering everything that came his way, backing Swiftwing's side.

Frank was watching an opportunity to get in a good "drive." He observed that the most of the Indian players knocked the ball into the air, and he fancied that a drive that would place it might be successful.

His opportunity came at last.

He gave the ball a fierce crack, sending it shooting over the heads of the other side, just out of the reach of their bats.

It dropped in a clear space, before a player could reach it, and a great shout of victory went up.

Whirling Bear, although the commander of the side that Frank was on, had said nothing to Merriwell, and he seemed to show signs of disgust, as if he were not pleased that it should have been a white lad who had knocked the ball.

Dan Carver did not seem at all disturbed by what had happened, but continued to take bets, offering to place any sum on Swiftwing at one or two.

In a moment the game was resumed, and it went forward with more intensity than before. The players seemed warmed up to the work, and their skill in keeping the ball in the air was astonishing, to say the least.

Several of the white players won some glory.

Both Diamond and Rattleton got in good strokes, and Bruce Browning struck once with all the power in his muscular arms, sending the ball so high into the air that it was a mere speck and almost went out of sight.

"Begorra! it's not such fun as this Oi've had since Oi attinded me larst Oirish fair!" cried Barney, who was in his element. "This b'ates a wake!"

"It's a darn sight more fun than shuckin' corn at a huskin'-bee!" grinned Ephraim Gallup. "Take that, gol darn ye!"

He managed to hit the ball at last, after missing it three times, and nearly turning himself wrong side out with the violence of his efforts.

"Whee!" he squealed, as the little sphere carromed off his bat and whizzed into the air. "I bet a squash that started the bark on her!"

Toots got a crack on the shins that upset him and made him howl with pain.

"Land ob wartermillions!" he wailed. "Nebber see no such mess as dis am! Dutchmans an' Irish all mixed up in a stew! An' ebry one ob um seems tryin' teh git a crack at de nigger's shins wif dem sticks! I's gwan teh retellyate on some pussen bimer-by—yes, sar!"

Once Harry Rattleton was able to save Swiftwing's side from a second and final defeat. An Indian struck and missed the ball, but Harry caught it with his bat, having struck almost at the same instant.

"Gear she hoes—I mean here she goes!" he yelled. "Can't do it again over there! We're going to do you up, after all!"

Finally three players on Whirling Bear's side ran for a ball. Dunnerwust and Toots were two of them, and they both fell down, while an Indian fell on top of them.

Over the three sailed Bart Hodge, his bat poised and his teeth set. He reached the ball and kept it from striking the ground, but it glanced from his

bat and went off sideways.

It went in a bad direction.

Whirling Bear tried to reach it, but failed, and it fell to the ground.

And now the sides were tied with the chances even for the final struggle.

CHAPTER XXIII—THE WRESTLING MATCH

Less than half a minute elapsed before the game was resumed.

The players went at it with unabated energy and enthusiasm, and the excitement was more intense than ever.

This round would settle it.

Whirling Bear was in a bad humor. Although one of the white lads had won the first set with a drive, it seemed to Whirling Bear that the second one had been lost because Hodge had not hit the ball as skillfully as he might.

In fact, Hodge had done well to reach it at all.

Frank and Whirling Bear both rushed at the ball and came face to face. As Frank struck, he saw the Indian swing his bat.

Whirling Bear did not strike at the ball, although he pretended to do so.

He struck straight at Frank Merriwell's head.

Merry saw this and dodged.

He succeeded in hitting the ball, and he escaped Whirling Bear's bat at the same time. The bat whizzed through the air.

In another moment Frank was ready to meet the Indian's assault, but, seeing he had failed in the first attempt, the Pueblo darted away.

"That fellow is treacherous," Merriwell decided. "He has a grudge against me for some reason, and I'll have to keep my eye on him. If he had hit me, my skull would have been cracked."

Inza witnessed Merriwell's peril, and she caught her breath, uttering a little cry of terror. When Frank dodged, she breathed again, and she panted:

"Go for him, Frank—don't let him get away!"

Whirling Bear, however, got away like a leaping cat, and continued giving orders to his men as if nothing unusual had happened.

Faster and more furious waxed the game. Spurred on by the shouts and yells of the spectators, each side was exerting itself to the very utmost.

It was really very exciting, and the skill of the players aroused the admiration of all. The Indians handled themselves in a remarkable manner, and, with one or two exceptions, the white boys were doing almost as well.

On Whirling Bear's side Merriwell and Hodge were the most conspicuous among the white players, while Mulloy and Diamond showed great skill and judgment on the other side.

"Hurro!" the Irish lad was heard to shout. "It's hot shtuff we are, an' don't yez fergit thot! Erin go braugh! Th' United States an' Ould Oireland feriver!"

For some moments there was a furious volleying, so fierce at moments that the eye followed the movements of the players and the flying ball with no little difficulty.

Inza Burrage was greatly excited. She clapped her hands and waved her handkerchief.

"Oh, aunt!" she cried; "it's almost as good as a football game! Isn't it just perfectly splendid!"

"It is confusing—very confusing," said Miss Abigail, severely. "It seems to be a genuine savage game."

At last Hodge saw his opportunity, and he drove the ball toward an opening in the ranks of the opposing players. It was skillfully done, and, almost before any one could realize it the game was over, Whirling Bear's side having conquered.

Then the Indians danced and sang songs of victory.

Swiftwing seemed to take his defeat gracefully, and he insisted that the white boys, Merriwell and Hodge, and not members of his own race had brought it about.

Frank told Swiftwing that he was astonished to find the Indians played the game with so much skill.

"It is great sport," he said. "I feel well satisfied for my trouble in visiting Taos."

"You feel satisfied now," said Swiftwing, in a peculiar manner. "You may not be so well satisfied when you depart."

Frank was puzzled by this remark.

"I wonder what he means by that," he muttered, as the Indian walked away.

"Begobs! Oi think he m'anes we'll be beaten at iverything ilse we thry," nodded Barney.

But Frank fancied that was not just what the Indian had meant.

The boys found the Indian who had charge of their clothes, and soon they were in sweaters.

Whirling Bear sought the party, and, standing with his hands on his hips,

eying them insolently, he said:

“What white boy think he want to wrestle?”

“Gol darn his eyes!” muttered Ephraim, who did not like the appearance of the Indian. “I’d like ter thump him betwixt ther eyes!”

“What white boy dare to wrestle with Whirling Bear?” asked the Indian.

With a spring the impulsive Irish lad landed before the insolent redskin.

“It’s mesilf that’ll thry yez a whirrul!” he cried.

“You?” said Whirling Bear, contemptuously. “You no wrestle! Go ’way!”

That, as he afterward confessed, made the Irish boy “hot.” He told Whirling Bear he could stand him on his head in a minute.

“All right,” said the Indian, with a wicked gleam in his black eyes. “You strip off and try. Come.”

Immediately Barney began to “peel.”

“Look out for him,” warned Frank, assisting the Irish lad to get out of his sweater. “He is treacherous, and he dislikes all whites. I can see that. He may try to injure you seriously.”

“Oi’ll kape me oie on th’ spalpane, Frankie. Av he gits th’ bist av me it’s a smart chap he is.”

In a short time the Irish lad was ready.

The challenge had been heard, and there was a rush of the spectators to witness the wrestling match.

A ring was formed, and the crowd was kept back by some of the spectators who appointed themselves for that purpose.

Soon all were ready, and, at opposite sides of the ring, the white boy and the Indian crouched, their hands on their knees, watching each other like hawks.

Suddenly, as if moved by the same impulse, they rushed at each other and grappled.

Both obtained good holds, and a terrific struggle began.

Barney knew considerable about the science of wrestling, and he immediately discovered that the Indian was not a novice.

As soon as holds were secured Whirling Bear leaned heavily to the left and pinned Barney’s right arm close to the elbow, at once causing the Irish lad trouble.

Barney tried to straighten the Indian, but saw that Whirling Bear fancied he had an advantage and was determined to hold it.

Now the Irish lad knew that, for all that the redskin was bothering him by this trick, Whirling Bear could not be firm in such a position, and it would not be difficult to throw him if the trick came right.

Barney knew that a wrestler who leans to the left always lays himself open to the cross-buttock, and he immediately began to work to use that trip on his opponent.

In order to work the cross-buttock successfully it is necessary to have a hold that is loose at first and yet firm and then to move with the utmost rapidity. The least hitch or false move may prove fatal to the aggressor.

As the Indian and the Irish lad strained and squirmed and sought to trip each other, Barney worked his hold looser and looser, all the while watching for the opportunity he sought, although pretending to be working for something else.

The crowd watched the movements of the contestants with the greatest interest.

Dan Carver was on hand, and, after a moment, he offered to bet even money that the Irish boy would take the first fall. He was able to get up a small amount, and then, hands in pockets, he calmly regarded the contest.

Barney was tempted once or twice to try the trip, but was not quite satisfied with his opportunity. If he tried and failed, the Indian might throw him heavily by sharply jerking him backward.

Twice Whirling Bear jerked Barney forward to get him off his guard and then tried the inside click, but failed to throw the sturdy Irish youth.

This seemed to anger the redskin, for it was plain he had looked on the white boys with no small contempt, and had anticipated securing an easy victory.

Furiously he went at Barney, and this gave the white boy the very opportunity he sought.

Quick as thought Barney turned his left side toward his opponent, got his hip partly beneath him, and then, with a rapid movement, crossed both his legs and lifted him from the ground.

Down went Whirling Bear, with Barney uppermost!

It was a pretty fall, and it awoke the admiration of the spectators so that they cheered the Irish lad heartily.

Barney sprang up, but the Indian arose almost as swiftly, and, before any one realized it, the struggle was on again.

This time Whirling Bear was fiercer than before. The muscles stood out on his bare limbs and back, while the cords of his neck were drawn taut and there were knots in his forehead. The look on his face was not pleasant to see. He looked as if he longed to murder the Irish lad.

Frank was watching every movement closely. He was well pleased with Barney's success, but it seemed that the Indian had been taken by surprise, and it was doubtful if the Irish boy could repeat the trick.

Barney tried the backheel trip, and his failure to throw Whirling Bear nearly resulted in his own downfall.

Next Barney attempted the hip stroke, but that was another failure, and Whirling Bear now seemed like a cat on his feet.

All the while Barney was forced to look out for various trips and heaves which the Indian attempted in rapid succession.

Some one offered to bet Carver even that the Indian took the second fall, and the sport shook his head.

"I knew the Irishman was going to surprise him at the start," he said. "Now he is out for blood. I'll go something he takes this fall."

All at once, in some astonishing manner, the Indian got under Barney and raised him into the air directly across his back.

Then Whirling Bear lifted Barney above his head to hurl him to the ground!

CHAPTER XXIV—THE FOOT RACE

Frank saw a gleaming spirit of evil in the eyes of the savage.

Whirling Bear meant to injure, perhaps to kill, Barney.

He intended to cast the Irish youth down upon his head, and the prospect was that Barney's neck would be broken instantly.

Immediately Frank leaped forward.

As the Indian dashed Barney to the ground, Frank caught him and kept him from falling on his head.

The Irish lad went down heavily, but he was not severely injured.

Whirling Bear gave a cry of anger when he saw what Merriwell had done, and then rushed at Frank.

Frank dodged and tripped the Indian with the greatest skill, so that the redskin was pitched forward on his face and stunned for the moment.

"If you will try the copper-skin a whirl, I'll back you for any amount," said Dan Carver, quietly.

Whirling Bear sat up, savagely glaring at the white boys.

"No can wrestle with two!" he growled. "One at time is 'nough. Why other white boy do something?"

"I simply kept you from murdering my friend," said Frank. "You were trying to break his neck, and I saw it."

Whirling Bear got up, looking disgusted.

"Sometime may get 'nother chance," he said, and then walked away, paying no heed to the spectators who were calling for him to remain and settle the match by seeing who could get the third fall.

"Begorra! it's a roight nate thrick he did whin he lifted me inther th' air," confessed Barney. "Sorry a bit do Oi know how he did it at all, at all!"

"I do not think I ever saw a throw made in that manner," confessed Frank. "He went under you like an eel, and brought you up across his back and over his shoulder."

"He is the champion wrestler of the Pueblos," declared a spectator. "I did not fancy you would be able to throw him at all."

"You should be proud to say you broke even with him," declared another.

Frank felt a hand on his arm, and a voice said in his ear:

"The sun priests are resting. While they rest there will be a footrace, the same as white men run. Will you enter. Swiftwing says you are a great runner."

The speaker was a young Indian of evident intelligence.

Frank was willing and ready to take part in the footrace, and he immediately accepted the invitation.

"I know I shall be pitted against Swiftwing," he thought, "and it is liable to be the race of my life, for he can run like the wind. I will beat him—or die!"

A straight course of nearly a quarter of a mile was prepared, and the spectators ranged up on either side near the finish.

There were five starters, four of whom were Indians. Merriwell was the only white persons who had been invited to take part.

The Indians were stripped for the race, as they had been in taking part in other sports.

Frank brought out a pair of running shoes, and these he put on. He removed his sweater and stripped down to a light, sleeveless undershirt.

As they stood side by side, Swiftwing spoke to Frank.

"Much depends on this race," he said—"much more than you can know. Beat me, Merriwell, if you can. You will be sorry if you fail."

All this was very mysterious, but Frank returned:

"You may be sure I shall do my best to beat you."

A moment later a great shout went up from the spectators.

The runners had started, darting off from the scratch like so many deer.

Swiftwing started in a most astonishing manner, seeming to leap off at full speed in a second.

Frank was not slow in starting, but he found the Indian had gained a slight advantage at the outset.

It was a beautiful sight to see the five runners come speeding along the track, heads up, breasts thrown forward, nostrils dilated and eyes flashing.

Of them all, two persons seemed to fly over the ground with very little exertion.

They were John Swiftwing and Frank Merriwell.

At Frank's side ran a tall Indian who was making great speed, but did not seem as graceful as the white boy or the Indian in advance.

Although Swiftwing had gained an advantage at the start, he was not able to widen the distance between himself and the white boy. Close behind him he could hear the feet of Frank Merriwell.

And Frank? He was preparing for one mighty spurt at the last of the race, feeling that he would surprise Swiftwind then.

The spectators cheered wildly, and some enthusiastic cowboys fired shots into the air, yelling for the white boy to run faster and not let a "copper-skin" beat him.

Far ahead at the end of the course Frank saw Inza Burrage watching their approach. Near her stood an Indian who had just dismounted from the back of a magnificent horse, which he was holding.

Inza waved her handkerchief.

Was it a signal to Frank? or was it meant for John Swiftwing?

"In either case," thought the white boy, "it is enough. I will win!"

He set his teeth and gave a great spurt that must have carried him into the lead; but, at that moment something happened.

The tall Indian who had been racing at Frank's side thrust out a foot and neatly tripped Merriwell up. This happened at the very moment when the white boy started to spurt, and Frank was flung into the air and hurled forward upon his head. His hands were thrust out to break his fall, and he saved himself in a measure, but he was stunned and lay motionless for some seconds.

With a gasp he sat up.

"Beaten!" he hoarsely grated—"beaten by a foul trick! I did not think John Swiftwing would have anything to do with a plot of this sort!"

Then he saw something that caused his heart to give one mad leap and stand still.

Swiftwing reached the end of the course. As he rushed over the line, without pausing, he caught Inza Burrage about the waist, swung her into the air, tossed her over his shoulder, and—

How was it done? An instant later the Indian was astride the horse which the other Indian had been holding ready for him. He still held fast to Inza. Frank heard her scream with sudden terror, and the cry was drowned by a hoarse sound from Swiftwing. Like an arrow leaving the bow, the horse, bearing its double burden, shot away.

CHAPTER XXV—JOHN SWIFTWING'S FAREWELL

"White Dove, we are alone in the mountains, where neither friend nor foe can reach us. Here we will stay. Soon the sun will seek his bed to rest, and the night will smile down upon us from its starry eyes, while it breathes a soft breath to smooth the ruffled feathers of the White Dove. You must have no fear of day or night, for I am with you, and I will guard you as the she-bear guards its cubs."

Inza Burrage, her face tear-wet, her hair tumbled and tangled, her clothing torn in two or three places, turned her gaze reproachingly upon John Swiftwing.

"It is not the day or the night that I fear," she said, slowly, with a dignity that was womanly. "I do not fear the dangers of the mountains. Wild beasts have no terrors for me now. And still my heart is frozen within me, and all my body is like ice."

They were standing on a small plateau, where they could look away across a plain that lay below them. The sun was in the western sky. Behind them the sweat-stained horse that had brought them thither was feeding.

"Why should your heart be frozen and your body like ice?" asked the Indian, gently, his voice soft and musical, and a light of tenderness gleaming in his eyes.

"Because, John Swiftwing—because I fear you!"

"The White Dove should not fear me, for I will guard and protect her with my life. I will face any peril in defense of her."

He took a step toward her, but she drew back, flinging out her hand.

"Stop!" she gasped. "Please—please don't touch me! I want to talk to you—I wish to beg you to be merciful and take me back to those from whom you carried me away!"

He folded his arms and looked at her in silence. It was an unconscious pose, and never had he looked handsomer than at that moment. After a little silence he spoke:

"Why should I take you back?" he asked. "I love you, and I want you for

my mate. You shall be my mate. You shall be my wife, White Dove. We will live together in some beautiful valley, far away from all the world—live in a little nest that I will find for you. The sunny days will glide by like a soft-floating stream, and every starry night shall be a dream of happiness.”

“No! no! no!” she cried, with her hands outflung. “That could not be!”

“Why not?”

“Because—oh, because!”

“White Dove, don’t you love me?”

“No! no! no!”

“Then your eyes have deceived me, for I fancied I saw love deep down in them. It must have been the reflection of the love that was in my heart. But still I know there was encouragement in them. They spoke like words.”

“And this is my punishment!” sobbed the poor girl. “Oh, Mr. Swiftwing, it was not love—it was admiration! I thought you so brave and so noble! I did not dream you could do such a wicked thing as you have done! No one could have made me believe it was in your heart. I would have defended you against the tongues of all accusers. But now—how my idol is shattered!”

He shrank beneath her words, as if they were blows from a whip. For a moment he cowered, and then he lifted his head with an angry, defiant toss.

“They told you,” he said—“they told you the red streak was in me! They were right! I heard them say it! They told you that my heart was the heart of an Indian, even though I wore white man’s clothes and read white man’s books. They were right! They told you all the education I might receive would not change my nature. They were right! God made the white man, and He made the Indian. He did not make them alike, and what God has made man cannot change. The white man took me to give me an education. Bah! What is an education to me? What would it mean if I had the finest education that the white man could give me? I would still remain an Indian, and, with all my education, I would turn back to my people, live as they live and die as they die—no better. I have thought it all out. I have thought it is no use to try to be anything but an Indian. The fight is ended! I am an Indian again!”

Inza’s heart was full of despair.

“I will not believe you are as bad as you think!” she cried. “I saw something noble in your face, and I think it came from your heart. See, Swiftwing—on my knees I beg you to take me back to my friends! I know you will not refuse me! Take me back to them, and always will I remember you with gratitude. Always will I think of you as noble and true when the great test came!”

Thus she entreated him, and the pleading of her face and eyes was more than her words. He stirred uneasily.

“You do not love me?”

"No! no!"

"You love Frank Merriwell?"

"Yes! I think more of him than any one else."

"I would be a fool to give you up to him now. I would be a fool to take you back to him when I have you safe. If I did that, I would not be an Indian. I love you."

She continued to entreat him to take her back, and her words were wonderfully eloquent. He stood like an image of stone, his brow dark, his arms folded, looking down at her. She grew weak with fear, for she could see nothing of relenting in his face. Tears rained down her cheeks and she wrung her hands. He turned away.

"Give me time to think," he said.

For a long time he stood there, looking down upon the plain, moveless as a thing inanimate. She prayed that his heart might be softened.

At last he turned and held out one hand.

"White Dove," he said, and his voice was as sweet and gentle as the murmur of a brook, "come to me."

Somehow she did not fear him then. She arose and went, to him, permitting him to take her hand.

"Look," he said, pointing toward a black speck upon the plain, "there is Frank Merriwell! He is coming for you! He is on my trail, but I could take you where he could never find us. Instead of that, White Dove, I am going to take you down there to meet him!"

She gave a scream of joy.

"Oh, you dear, good fellow!" she cried, once more like a girl. "I could hug you for that!"

"Don't do it!" warned John Swiftwing, hoarsely. "I might change my mind!"

She waved her handkerchief, and the black speck on the plain fluttered something white. The black speck was moving, and dust arose in a tiny cloud behind it.

"He has seen us," said the Indian. "Come on; we will go down."

He led her to the horse and lifted her upon the animal's back. Then he led the horse down the mountain to meet the trailer.

The sun was low when they met. Frank Merriwell had a rifle in his hands, and it was aimed straight at the Indian's heart.

"Up with your hands, Swiftwing!" he ordered, sternly. "Don't try anything crooked, for a hundred armed men are coming behind me, and they have sworn to hunt you down like a dog."

The redskin smiled scornfully.

"If they were a thousand it would make no difference," he said. "They could

not find me. I will not put up my hands, Merriwell, so shoot if you wish!"

"Don't shoot, Frank!" screamed Inza. "He saw you coming, and he brought me to meet you!"

"Brought you to meet me?" repeated Frank, doubtingly. "Why should he do that?"

"He is going to give me up—going to let me go back with you."

"Is that right, Swiftwing?"

The Indian bowed.

"The White Dove speaks straight," he said, quietly.

"But—but I do not understand! They said the only way to save her was to kill you—that you were like all Indians, and—"

Swiftwing seemed to cringe a bit, and the black look on his face deepened.

"They were wrong," he said. "To-day I am not an Indian—I am a fool! Tell them I was a fool, and I brought the White Dove to meet you! Do you know what I have done, Merriwell? I will tell you. By giving the White Dove up after taking her away as I did, I shall win the contempt of my people. They will look on me as a coward! They will spit on me with scorn! They will say I have the heart of a chicken! With them I shall be an outcast and a thing of contempt. Is it nothing? I have done this for you—and for the White Dove. I thought she loved me; she says she does not. Take her—take her away. Never shall I look on her again! Farewell, Merriwell!"

"Your hand, John Swiftwing!" cried Frank. "Your heart is all right, after all! Old fellow, I'll see you this fall, when we play Carlisle again!"

With a sad smile, the Indian youth shook his head.

"I shall not be there," he said.

"No? Why, how is that? I do not understand!"

"I shall not go back to the white man's school."

"You won't? What is the meaning of that? Why won't you go back?"

"Because it is useless. They are right when they say the Indian can never become like the white man. I shall try no more."

"But—but you are different! Think what you have done this day! By Jove! you have shown yourself all right! Think what a hero you would be at school if they knew the story! You are the lion of the football team anyhow. They can't get along without you."

"They must, for they will have me no more. You say I am different from the Indians. Perhaps I am to-day; but to-morrow and ever after that I shall be an Indian in everything! I shall forget that I was at the white man's school. I shall forget that I can read and write and make the white man's figures. I shall go back to be the same as I was before I learned such things, and my people will despise me, for they will say I am neither a white man nor an Indian."

Frank used all his eloquence to influence the Indian to change his mind, but it was useless. Then Inza tried, but with no better success.

"Farewell," said John again. "Take the horse to the Pueblo. It is owned there. Farewell forever!"

Inza's eyes were full of tears.

"It's too bad!" she sobbed. "I am so sorry!"

John Swiftwing said not another word, but, turning his face toward the mountains, walked swiftly away. Not once did he turn about and look back.

Frank and Inza rode to meet the white men, who were seen in the distance, coming madly along the trail. When they had traveled for a time they turned to look for John Swiftwing.

He was near the foot of the mountains, and, as they looked, he was swallowed from view by the deep shadows at the base of the Taos Range.

"Oh, Frank, it was noble of him, after all," said Inza, half tearfully. "But—but I hope we don't meet again."

"It is not likely," returned Frank.

"And, Frank——"

"Well?"

"Can you forgive me?"

"Willingly," he cried, and gave her a gentle hug that meant a great deal.

When they reached the other horsemen Frank sprang a surprise on them.

"It was only a bit of fun," he said. "But Swiftwing thought best not to come back for fear there would be trouble."

But in secret he told his companions the truth, and it was decided to leave the Pueblo of Taos early the next morning.

"Sure, an' it was great sport, that contist," said Barney.

"We'll never see anything galf as hood—no, half as good," came from Harry.

"Don't be too sure of that," put in Diamond. "We are not home yet by a jugful. Lots may happen before we get there."

CHAPTER XXVI—MORNING AT RODNEY'S RANCH

Boo-oo-oo-ng!

“Horn ob Gabrul! what am dat?”

Toots gasped the words, as he sat up and stared about him in the semi-darkness.

Boo-oo-oo-ng! boo-oo-oo-ng!

“Wek up, chilluns!” gurgled the colored boy. “De crack ob doom hab come, an’ ole Gabrul am tootin’ ob his horn fo’ suah!”

“Shimminy Gristmas!” grunted Hans, as he sat up. “Vos dot a Dexas cy-clones vot you hear?”

“Gol darned if it don’t saound like a kaow bellein’!” said Ephraim Gallup; “only a heap laouder.”

“Is it a stameboat we’re on, Oi dunno!” murmured Barney, sleepily. “It’s th’ foghorn Oi hear.”

Rap! rap! rap! Rapp-er-ty-bang!

Some one was hammering on the door, and a voice called:

“Turn out—turn out for breakfast!”

“That was the breakfast horn, boys!” laughed Frank. “We must get a hustle on, for this is the day of the great tournament on Rodney’s Ranch, and we are here for sport. Ye have been promised dead loads of fun. Up, fellows—up!”

The boys scrambled to their feet. None of them had fully undressed, and they had been sleeping in blankets spread on the floor of a large room in the ranch house.

Through the open window, which was on the eastern side of the house, a pink glow could be seen in the sky. In a moment, as it seemed, the rim of the sun came into view, and morning had dawned with startling suddenness.

“Oh, thunder!” grumbled Bruce. “The night was not half long enough. I’d like to sleep about five hours longer.”

“That’s natural with you,” chuckled Harry, as he drew on his shoes. “You are always tired.”

“Can’t help it,” admitted the big fellow. “I was born that way. This sporting tour is killing me. How’d we happen to know anything about this cowboy racket, anyway?”

“Oh, I’m onto all that’s going,” smiled Frank.

“That’s right enough,” agreed Bruce; “but you didn’t know a thing about it at noon yesterday, and we were on our way eastward over the Texas and Pacific. None of us expected to stop short of Fort Worth, but, of a sudden, you yank us off the train at Stanton and run us out here to this ranch, without a word of explanation. When we arrive here we are received with open arms and made to feel as if we had been expected. I’ll acknowledge that I don’t understand it.”

“Your eyes were not sharp, old fellow,” said Frank. “Had they been, you

would have seen that we were invited here.”

“By whom?”

“The daughter of the man who owns this ranch.”

“Not the girl Miss Burrage met on the train?”

“Yes.”

“How did Miss Burrage happen to know her?”

“The rancher’s daughter went abroad last winter, and they became acquainted in Italy.”

“And so she invited Inza here when they met by accident on the train. Is that the way of it?”

“Sure. Inza told her she and Miss Gale were traveling with us, and Miss Rodney made the invitation include the whole of us. I was glad enough to accept it when I learned there was to be a regular cowboy tournament here to-day, to end to-night with a dance.”

“That’s all right,” said Bruce, “if you’ll let us be spectators. I don’t see any sense in getting out and trying to beat the punchers at their own tricks.”

“Don’t let that worry you. I am not chump enough to try to do any trick we’ll not have an even show at. We’ll see a bit of cowboy sport here, and our tour eastward would not have been complete without it.”

“That’s so! That’s so!”

The others of the party were very enthusiastic over the prospect of a day of sport on a Texas cattle ranch.

“All right,” grunted Bruce. “You fellows may hoe in and have all the sport you like. I’ll keep still and look on.”

It did not take the boys long to dress and prepare for breakfast.

Bill Rodney, the rancher, greeted the boys heartily, his free and easy manner making them feel that they were quite welcome.

“Sorry I had to stow you chaps the way I did, but every room in the old ranch was filled,” he said. “If I’d known in advance that you were comin’, I’d had better accommerdations for yer.”

“We couldn’t have asked for anything better,” declared Frank, pleasantly. “I didn’t know but you might think it an imposition for us to come the way we did, as—”

“My little gal asked ye, didn’t she? Well, that settled it. What Sadie does goes on this ranch, you bet! If she invited the whole of Texas here, I’d do my best to entertain ’em. There’ll be a few people here before night, and I want you chaps to sail right in and have the best time you can. Come on to breakfast.”

They entered the big, low dining-room, trooping in after their host.

There were seats at the long table for twelve persons, and Toots had asked the privilege of showing them how a real “cullud ge’man” could wait on the party.

This privilege had been granted, and he had disappeared to the kitchen.

Inza and Miss Abigail Gale were on hand to greet the boys, and then, one by one, the lads were introduced to a very pretty girl in a morning gown.

This was Sadie Rodney, the rancher's daughter, with whom Inza had become acquainted in Italy.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Miss Abigail; "what a crowd of men! It really makes me feel timid!"

She did not look at all timid, for she had a face that was almost masculine in its sternness, and she never seemed flustered.

The rancher sat at the head of the table, with Miss Rodney at the foot, having Miss Abigail and Inza on either hand.

Frank had a seat near Inza, while Hans was placed beside the spinster.

Then Toots appeared in a white apron, and breakfast began, with the morning sunshine streaming into the windows and lighting a pleasant scene.

"Now I want you to make yourselves right at home," said the rancher, sincerely. "We ain't able to put on so much style here as my gal has been accustomed to away at boarding school and travelin' abroad, but we have fodder that's fit to eat. Now, don't blush and shake your head at me, Sadie. It's all right. The boys don't expect me to put on frills, and I'd make a mess of it if I did."

He laughed heartily, and the girl blushed all the more.

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed, reprovingly.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Rodney, in his rough, hearty manner. "I know it's rude of me, but it's hard to learn an old dog new tricks."

Then he leaned over to Diamond, who sat near him, and whispered loud enough for every one present to hear him:

"Don't you think I've a mighty fine gal? She's cost me a heap of money, but I don't care. I'd spend all I've got on her. Look at her! Have you got any handsomer gals than that in the East?"

"If so I have not had the pleasure of seeing them," said Jack, gallantly.

Quite naturally, this confused the girl still more, and Frank hastened to crack a joke and tell a bit of a story to turn attention from her.

Merry saw that she was really ladylike and refined, for all of her honest father's good-natured coarseness, and her position had distressed her not a little.

Hans tried to be very attentive to Miss Abigail, but she repulsed him, so that he was very crestfallen after that, not a little to the amusement of the others.

The breakfast progressed merrily.

While it was going on a horseman came dashing up to the house, walked up to the dining-room window, leaned on the sill, and looked in.

"Howdy, Rodney," he said, in a familiar manner.

Then he lifted the broad-brimmed hat from his dark curls and bowed to

Sadie. After that he held the hat under his arm while he stood by the window.

He was a handsome fellow in his way, having a drooping black mustache and an imperial, while his dark eyes were keen and piercing. There was about his face a devil-may-care look, as if he feared nothing that walked on the face of the earth.

He was puffing carelessly at a Spanish cigarette, held by his full red lips, which showed beneath the mustache.

"Morning Charlie," said the rancher. "Glad to see you on hand so early. Are the boys from the Lone Star comin' up?"

"The whole of Concho Valley will be here to-day," returned the man at the window. "It is bound to be a big time, Rodney."

"That's whatever. Bill Rodney don't do anything by halves. When did ye start?"

"Midnight."

"Wal, it's a right smart ride. Give yer horse to Kemble and come in to breakfast. You can have my chance here."

"Thank you; but I'll wait till you are through."

Then he strolled away, his handsome horse following him like a well-trained dog.

"Who is he?" asked Frank.

"That's Indian Charlie, foreman of the Lone Star Ranch," answered Rodney. "He's the best shot and roper in Texas, and the most reckless rider I ever saw. He was born in the East, and went to college, but skipped after shootin' another chap in a duel over a girl. Lucky for Charlie, t'other chap didn't die; but Charlie never went back, and now he has the most remarkable aversion for all tenderfeet of any man I ever saw. You all want to be right careful not to git him r'iled, for he is worse than a wild steer on the rampage when he's mad. He has a way of shootin' first and talkin' it over afterward."

"Such a fellow as that needs to be taught a lesson," said Frank. "Some one should take the trouble to teach him, too."

"No one who knows him dares take the trouble to try."

"That's strange. I had an idea cowboys were not afraid of anything."

"It is plain you do not understand what a dangerous man Indian Charlie is, Mr. Merriwell," said the rancher's daughter. "You must be sure to keep away from him, as you cannot be sure he will not take offense at some trivial thing and force you to apologize."

"Indeed!" smiled Merriwell, lifting his eyebrows. "This man grows more and more interesting to me."

"Yaw, he peen very inderestin mit me," broke in Hans. "I vos goin' to kept meinself a goot vays near off from him."

“Miss Rodney,” said Harry, “you have said just enough to arouse Frank Merriwell’s curiosity, and now he will not be able to keep away from this Indian Charlie. He is certain to do something to stir Charlie up at the first opportunity.”

The girl turned pale.

“Don’t do it, Mr. Merriwell, I beg of you!” she cried. “You will simply humiliate yourself, for you will be forced to apologize to save yourself from being shot.”

Frank laughed.

“Don’t let that worry you, Miss Rodney,” he said. “I assure you there is no cause of alarm. I am not going to chase him with a chip on my shoulder.”

But those who knew Frank best were certain he would not seek to avoid trouble with the foreman of the Lone Star, and they felt a foreboding of coming trouble.

CHAPTER XXVII—COWBOY PECULIARITIES

After breakfast the little party went out upon the broad veranda.

The sun was still red, but it was growing smaller and hotter as it mounted into the sky.

Its slanting rays lighted up a rolling prairie, illimitable in expanse and stretching away till its irregular, wavy outline was marked against the sky.

Now and then, miles away, small clumps of stunted jack-oaks or mesquite made dark green polka dot spots on the lighter color of the grass, while far away lay a genuine chaparral thicket.

Between the ranch and the chaparral a herd of several hundred cattle were feeding.

Near the ranch house were outbuildings and corrals.

In the vicinity of these a number of cowboys could be seen moving about.

Still urging the boys to make themselves at home, Rodney left them. Before he departed, he sighted a body of horsemen riding down rapidly from the northeast.

“Here come the boys from Tilford’s ranch,” he said. “I knew they’d be the

first ones to show up.”

The boys watched the approaching riders with interest. Before long they could be plainly seen, and, as they came near the ranch, they broke into a mad gallop and came tearing across the prairie.

Anything wilder in appearance than those leather-clad “punchers” the imagination could not conceive. They yelled and cracked their quirts, spreading out into a long line, mounted on tough little ponies, which tore over the ground with a twinkling movement of the legs which was bewildering to one accustomed to the movements of an ordinary galloping horse.

Upon the heads of the riders were broad-brimmed hats, some of them being of stiff rawhide and some being the well-known Stetson sombrero, which cost anywhere from eighteen to eighty dollars.

Every man had a handkerchief knotted about his neck, and a cartridge belt, bearing heavy revolvers in open holsters, about his waist.

Their hair was long and unkempt, and their faces were weather-tanned.

Some had on long-legged, high-heeled boots, and some wore leather leg-gins, while at the heels of every man were heavy, murderous-looking spurs.

With their jangling spurs, flapping ropes and buckskin strings, broad-brimmed hats, bright-colored handkerchiefs, they certainly were a most impressive cavalcade of prairie scamperers.

As they swept toward the corrals near the ranch, Rodney’s men ran out and greeted them with a yell.

In return the Tilford men suddenly jerked out their “guns,” and sent twenty shots into the air. Then they flung the little ponies on their haunches, stopping in an instant with such suddenness that almost any fairly expert rider must have been sent flying headlong over the animal’s ears to the ground.

“There, fellows,” smiled Frank, with a wave of his hand toward the arrivals, “there is a band of genuine wild and woolly cow-punchers. Take a good look at them, for the real cowboy is disappearing, and, in a very few years you will not be able to see a sight like that anywhere on this continent.”

“I suppose they are all right,” said Diamond, “but it is plain enough that they are great bluffers.”

“In what way?” asked Frank, quickly.

“In their get up. There is no reason why they should look so extremely tough beyond their own personal desire to appear like bad men.”

“I think you are wrong, old fellow. Name something about them that they might discard.”

“Their long hair, to begin with. That is pure affectation.”

“Not at all. Long hair is a necessity with them.”

“Get out! How?”

“Well, you know they are exposed to all kinds of weather. Their business is out of doors, rain or shine, and in many changes of climate. They have found by experience that long hair protects their eyes and ears. If they were to keep their hair cut short, many of them would be troubled with sore eyes, pains in the head and loud ringing in the ears.”

“That may be true,” acknowledged Jack; “but just look at those outrageous hats.”

“That is the only sort of hat suitable for cowboys to wear, as it protects from from the sun and from the rain. The very fact that it has been used for generation after generation without changing fashion is enough to indicate that necessity, not vanity, dictated its origin.”

“But see those wretched rawhide affairs.”

“I see them. Those are the cheap hats, and they are made by the cowboys themselves. Years ago every cowboy made his own hat, as manufacturers had not discovered that there was money in making hats for the punchers. An old cattleman once told me how they made their hats.”

“How it peen done, Vrankie? You toldt us dot,” urged Hans.

“When a cowboy wanted to make a hat for himself, he went out and dug in the ground a hole as near the size and shape of his head as he could make it. Then a large, circular piece of rawhide, soft, wet and pliable, was spread over the hole. Next, with a bunch of grass or buckskin, the center of the rawhide was pressed down into the hole till it assumed its size and shape. The surrounding circle of hide, which was to be the brim, was kept flat on the ground by constant patting and pressing with the hands. When the hat was molded, it was left till it was well dried by the sun. Then it was taken to a place where smoke and heat scorched it till it was perfectly waterproof. When it was trimmed with strings and straps, it was ready for use.”

“How about those bright handkerchiefs the men use about their necks? Surely those are worn to attract attention. They might be carried in the pocket quite as well.”

“Wrong again, Jack. Very often when riding at full speed the eyes of the cowboy are filled with mud or sand, and then the handkerchief is ready for use. The man can catch up a corner and wipe out his eyes without pulling in his horse. In sand storms the handkerchief is sometimes called into use as a veil. Having it tied about his neck, the owner of the handkerchief knows it is secure. If he had to take it out and restore it to his pocket every time he used it, he would lose it frequently. Sometimes he uses the handkerchief when his horse is racing along, and the animal stumbles. The handkerchief must be dropped instantly. He could not fail to lose it if it were not tied about his neck.”

“Well, look at those outrageous leather leggins. What are they for?”

“To protect their clothes from the wear and tear of the saddles, from being torn by thorns, mesquite or cactus, and sometimes to protect them from rattlesnakes.”

“Hush! Well, how about the high heels on their boots? I have you there! That is a pure case of vanity, and you must acknowledge it.”

Frank smiled.

“Not at all, my boy. Those boots cost from eighteen to forty dollars a pair, and are made to order. The heels are long and sloping toward the sole of the foot not to make the foot look small, but to keep it from slipping out of the stirrup in a time of danger, when the cowboy’s horse may be tearing along at breakneck speed. Those boots are made to ride in, not to walk in.”

“But the spurs—the spurs!” cried Diamond, triumphantly. “They are outrageous and cruel. Surely those huge implements of torture are made thus to look savage and attract attention.”

“Not a bit of it. Singular as it may seem, the smaller spurs used in the East are much more cruel. They cut the horse; these big spurs do not. They are made big and strong that they may not wear out. Sometimes the only way a cowboy can save his horse from being run down by a mad steer is by using the spur sharply. At such a time it is far better for a horse to be prodded with a steel spur than to have a foot or more of horns run into him, which might result in the throwing of the rider to be trampled to death, and the loss of several hundred cattle. See?”

Diamond looked discomfited.

“At least, on one point I have you,” he cried. “You can’t get around it.”

“Name the point.”

“The fringe—the fringe on their suits. There is pure vanity, you will admit.”

“Quite the contrary. The fringe comes along the outside seam of their trousers and sleeves. There is no sewing there, but the buckskin is slashed in narrow strip and knotted together. That is the purpose the fringe plays. The ends are left to hide the knots and any holes that might be seen gaping between them.”

“Begobs!” cried Barney, in admiration, “it’s yersilf, Frankie, thot knows all about it, but pwere yez got yer infermation is pwhat Oi dunno.”

“This is not the first time I have been among the cowboys, and I always keep eyes and ears open wherever I am. I have managed to pick up such knowledge as I possess concerning them by watching and listening. They have ever been very interesting to me.”

“Mr. Merriwell, I congratulate you!” cried Sadie Rodney. “I am surprised to find a ‘tenderfoot’ knows so much about cow-punchers.”

“I’d never faound aout half that if I’d lived right with them a year,” declared Ephraim Gallup. “They’re darned pecooler critters, an’ I guess this one comin’

this way is one of the most pecooler 'mongst 'em.”

Indian Charlie had left the others, and was sauntering toward the little party on the veranda.

Sadie Rodney looked serious, and shrank close to Inza, in whose ear she murmured:

“I am afraid of that man. He has asked me to marry him. I have refused him a dozen times, but he persists, and he says he will have me in spite of myself. I do not dare anger him, for there is no telling what he might do.”

Frank heard her words.

“The fellow deserves a good thumping!” he mentally exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXVIII—INDIAN CHARLIE IS SURPRISED

Indian Charlie came swaggering up. He regarded the boys with a glance of supreme contempt.

“Permit me to compliment you on your thoughtfulness, Miss Rodney,” he said, in a most insinuating manner.

The rancher’s daughter looked puzzled and perturbed.

“I do not think I understand you,” she said, slowly.

“Surely you have done your best to make sport for us to-day. You have brought us some rare curiosities.”

Now Bart Hodge had a temper of his own, and he did not fancy being insulted, even though the person who offered the insult was a fire-eating cow-puncher. So Bart murmured:

“Oh, I don’t know! There are others!”

The foreman of the Lone Star looked astonished, and then scowled blackly.

“Were you referring to me, sir?”

Although the words came from his lips like the cut of a whip through the air, Hodge began to whistle in the most unconcerned manner possible, without even looking toward Indian Charlie.

Frank, who was keeping watch of everything, saw the red tide of anger surge into the face of the cowboy, and he knew Charlie was in a most dangerous

mood.

Sadie Rodney, rancher's daughter though she was, showed signs of alarm. She shrank close to Inza, murmuring:

"How did he dare say anything like that? Charlie has been known to shoot a man for less provocation."

To her astonishment, Inza did not seem at all alarmed, but confidently returned:

"It will be a good thing for him if he tries to shoot any one in this crowd. Those boys can take care of themselves."

Miss Abigail nodded.

"I am sure that Mr. Merriwell can take care of himself," she said.

"Und I peen retty to brotect you mit your life!" declared Hans, who was clinging close to the spinster.

With two bounds Indian Charlie was upon the veranda.

"Did you refer to me, sir?" he said, facing Hodge.

Bart surveyed him from head to feet.

"Excuse me," he said, cuttingly. "I do not think I have the honor of your acquaintance."

Then he started to turn away.

A snarl came from Indian Charlie's lips, and his hand fell on the butt of a revolver resting in the open holster at his hip.

He did not draw the weapon.

Frank Merriwell's fingers closed on the man's wrist, and Frank's cool voice sounded in his ear:

"Slow and easy, sir! Don't do anything rash, for you might regret it. That is, you might if you thought quick enough during the brief time you would be given to regret anything after that."

The foreman of the Lone Star turned his head and his eyes met those of Frank Merriwell. For some moments their glances fought a silent duel.

"Take your hand from my wrist!"

Charlie hissed the words.

"First take your hand from the butt of that revolver," said Frank, with perfect calmness.

The cowboy seemed to doubt the evidence of his senses. Was it possible this tenderfoot dared face him—dared touch him? With a sudden wrench he attempted to break from Frank, but, to his surprise, the young Yale athlete gave his wrist a twist, snapping the revolver from his fingers, and, almost at the same instant, snatched the other weapon from its holster.

"These are not suitable for a careless man to handle," said Merry, as he flung them far out upon the grass.

For a single instant Indian Charlie was dazed. How the trick had been accomplished by this smooth-faced youth he could not conceive, and it filled him with wonder.

That passed in a moment, and he was like a furious tiger, his white teeth gleaming beneath his black mustache.

“That settles you!” he snarled.

He attempted to clutch Frank by the throat, but his hands were brushed aside, and again Merry warned him to go slow and easy.

“There are ladies present,” Frank said. “Have some regard for them, sir. If you wish to settle—”

But the man had quite lost his self-possession, and he struck at Frank in a wicked manner.

The blow was parried with ease.

An instant later Indian Charlie was stretched upon the veranda.

“I beg your pardon for doing such a thing in your presence, ladies,” came quietly from Merriwell’s lips; “but I was forced into it. As he may make further trouble I beg you to retire.”

“No!” palpitated Inza. “I shall stay here.”

“Me, too,” said Miss Abigail. “Goodness sakes! what dreadful things men are!”

“Shall I sit on him and hold him down, Frank?” yawned Browning, who did not seem in the least disturbed.

“No, let him alone. He—”

With a leap like a wild creature the man came to his feet. There was a demon in his eyes.

“Look out!” screamed Diamond, suddenly.

A knife flashed in Indian Charlie’s hand, and he darted at Frank.

Browning reached out to grasp the furious fellow, but was too slow.

The knife was driven at Frank by the man, who at that moment was crazed with rage.

Merriwell dodged, caught the fellow’s wrist, gave it another wrench, and the blade fell clanging to the floor.

Both Inza and Sadie had screamed, but the danger was over before they could draw a second breath.

Then Frank laughed. It was the same old dangerous laugh that those who knew him best understood.

Smack!—with all the force he could command he struck the man.

Indian Charlie went down again, but came up like a ball on the rebound.

Frank followed him up, and was on hand to meet him when he arose.

A second blow landed, and the foreman of the Lone Star was sent spinning

over the end rail of the veranda to the ground.

He struck on his head and shoulders and lay still.

Some cowboys who had seen the encounter came running up and bent over the fallen man.

One of them, a little bow-legged fellow, after taking a good look at Indian Charlie, arose, and, placing his hands on his hips, stared in profound amazement at Frank Merriwell.

"Wa-al, may I be durned!" he said. "Ef I ever saw anything like that yar, my name ain't Pecos Pete! He's knocked Charlie clean out, an' he ain't nothin' but a tenderfoot kid!"

"That's whatever," agreed one of the others. "An' I will allow it wur ther slickest job Hank Kildare ever seen done. Say, young feller, I wants ter shake yer paw!"

Then Kildare, who had a face that was like tanned leather, came up on the veranda and grasped Frank by the hand, wringing the boy's arm up and down as if it were the handle of a pump.

"Thar ain't many tenderfeet like you," he said; "an' you kin boast o' bin' ther fust critter to lay out Injun Charlie."

"But I wants ter warn yer, youngster," said Pecos Pete, as he also came up and shook Frank by the hand. "Injun Charlie is bad medicine, an' he ain't goin' ter fergit ye none whatever. When he gits round from this he'll lay fer yer, an', ef you know what's healthy, yer won't linger round these yar parts."

"That's so," agreed Kildare. "You'll mosey right lively, an' take yer friends with yer, fer he may start in ter clean out ther hull bunch, an' nothin' but chain lightnin' will stop him next time. You hear me!"

"Thank you, gentlemen," smiled Frank, calmly. "I came here with my friends, being invited to attend the tournament here to-day, and we do not propose to be frightened away. If I have further trouble with that man I shall not be so gentle with him."

"Gentle!" snorted Kildare. "Wa-al, did yer hear that? Gentle! Is that w'at yer calls ther way yer knocked him out, tenderfoot?"

"Gentle!" echoed Pecos Pete. "Why, that last blow o' your'n would hev knocked down a steer!"

"So yer think you'll stay?" asked Kildare.

"Sure."

"Do you carry guns?"

"No."

"Be yer armed anyway?"

"No."

"Hyar, take one o' my shooters."

“What for?”

“You’ll need it.”

“Oh, I scarcely think so.”

“That’s right,” nodded Pecos Pete—“that’s right, Hank. He won’t need it ef Charlie draws on him. What show’d he have? Charlie is old lightnin’, an’ he’d fill the boy full o’ bullets afore the kid could think o’ reachin’ fer a gun.”

One of the men bending over the foreman of the Lone Star spoke:

“It may be as how Charlie won’t be in condition to do any shootin’ fer some time. He’s stiff as a spike.”

“I hope I did not hurt him seriously,” said Frank, at once. “He forced me to do what I did in self-defense.”

“Don’t let it worry yer, youngster. You’re all right.”

Then they lifted the unconscious man and carried him away toward one of the outbuildings.

CHAPTER XXIX—HANS AND THE BRONCHO

Sadie Rodney drew a deep breath.

“I am sorry, Mr. Merriwell,” she said, “that this unfortunate affair occurred, and I must express my admiration for the manner in which you disposed of that fellow. I can scarcely believe it now. But I fear it will mean more and serious trouble. I shall speak to father about it, and Indian Charlie shall be watched.”

“Don’t let it trouble you,” smiled Frank. “I do not fear that man, and he will not harm me, unless he does so in a treacherous manner.”

Within ten minutes every cowboy about the ranch knew what had happened, and it was not long before they were trooping around to the front of the house to get a look at the tenderfoot who had dared face Indian Charlie and had knocked him out. They stared at the youth doubtfully, and then went away shaking their heads.

“Look at them!” laughed Rattleton. “They won’t believe you could do it, Frank. I’ll bet that some of them think Charlie was struck by lightning.”

“It’s quite likely he will think so himself, when he is able to think at all,”

said Hodge. "I thank you for chipping in, Frank; but I should have tried him a whirl if you hadn't touched him."

"I saw him reach for his gun, and——"

"You reached for him. You found him, too. Here come more cowboys!"

Another party of horsemen were seen tearing down toward the ranch, and the wild and reckless manner in which they rode made it a thrilling spectacle.

"Ah!" cried Jack; "those fellows are horsemen! It is not often you see men who can ride like that."

"Vale, I don'd know!" put in Hans. "You don'd seen me ride a proncho alretty yet, eh? I vos a vonder. Pimeby britty soon I vos goin' to shown you der sort uf a vild parepack rider I peen. You pet I vill surprise meinself!"

"That's right, b'gosh!" grinned Ephraim. "It will be better'n a circus to see ye."

"Mebbe you don'd think I can't ride a proncho?" cried Hans, resentfully. "You gif me a chance un I vill shown you."

"Begorra!" cried Barney; "it's a chance ye can be afther havin' now. Come on, ye Dutch chaze."

"Oh, gone away mit yourself!" said Hans, quickly. "I nefer ride a pig breakfasts on."

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed the Vermonter. "I knowed he'd back aout. Why, you couldn't ride a saw-hoss!"

"Vot?" screamed Hans, angrily. "Don'd you pelief me! I pet myself zwei tollar I can ride der pestest horse vot you never saw! Yaw! I done him any oldt times!"

"Then come on, an' don't ye darst back aout."

Hans was wildly excited. His fat face was flushed and his eyes were bulging. He presented such a ludicrous spectacle that the boys broke into shouts of laughter.

"You hadn't better try to ride a broncho, Hans," warned Frank, who feared the fat lad might be injured. "Keep away from the deceptive broncho. Only the most expert horsemen can ride them."

"Vale, I peen der most exbert horseman vot you nefer saw. Yaw! I profe him to yourself. Come on!"

Hans ran down the steps, tripped over his own feet, and rolled on the grass, producing still more amusement.

"Come on!" he wildly cried, as he struggled up. "You don'd know der kindt uv sduff I vasn't made uf. Shust you pring me to a hoss vot I don'd peen aple not to ride! You can't done dot!"

"He'll nivver dare throy it, b'ys," grinned Barney. "He'll back out th' minute he sees th' baste. Come on. It's poiles av shport we'll be afther havin' wid him."

“Come on, fellows!” shouted Rattleton. “Here’s where we have a circus! Hurrah for fun!”

A moment later they were following the fat Dutch boy around to the nearest corral, in the vicinity of which a number of cowboys were gathered.

“Pring der proncho oudt righd away alretty!” shouted Hans, as he waddled around toward the corral, with the others following him. “I peen goin’ to shown you how to ride him, you pet!”

The cowboys stared at him in astonishment.

“Hey?” cried Hank Kildare, putting his hands on his hips and glaring at the Dutch lad. “Whatever is thet thar ye say?”

“Vere dot proncho vos, ain’d id? I peen goin’ to took a whirl oudt of?”

“Git out! Ye’re crazy! Why, you couldn’t ride a dead cow!”

Hans grew still more excited. His face was red, and he wildly flourished his short arms, fairly choking in his excitement.

“Py ginger! I shown you dot about pritty queek right away!” he cried. “Uf I don’t ride der vorst proncho I nefer seen you vos a liar!”

The cowboys shouted with laughter.

“Why, dern my eyes!” came from Pecos Pete, who was a veteran “broncho buster,” or horse trainer. “I reckon mebbe I’ll have to git you to show me a few p’int about ther business.”

“I shown you somedings vot I don’t know,” flung back the excited Dutch boy. “Pring oudt der proncho!”

“Hyar,” said one of the cowboys, dismounting from the tough little beast upon which he had ridden up to the ranch; “hyar’s yer chance. Git right on hyar.”

“Vot am I gifin’ you!” shouted Hans. “Dot peen a drained horses. Vot I vos lookin’ for been a horse dot don’d peen drained alretty yet.”

“I’ll allow as how you’ll find ther critter ain’t trained any too much. You can’t ride him.”

“Vot vill I pet you apout dot?” excitedly demanded the fat boy. “You don’t think I can’t ride him, ain’d id?”

“Wa-al, I judge he’ll make it right lively for ye.”

“Dot saddles id! How I peen aple his pack to ged on?”

Frank interfered, seeing Hans was in earnest about attempting to ride.

“You hadn’t better try it,” he said. “The broncho might kill you.”

“Vot? Don’d you pelief me! Der proncho vot could done dot don’d peen porn alretty yet. Get oud der vay of.”

Hans was determined, and Frank found it useless to argue with him.

“Is the animal vicious?” he asked in an aside of its owner.

“Wa-al, he ain’t bad,” was the slow reply. “He kin buck a leetle, but he’s

trained to it, an' he won't try it unless I set him at it."

"Then don't set him at it, for Hans might be thrown off and killed. Let him ride, and he will be satisfied. It'll be more sport to hear him boast than it would be to see him flung off and injured."

The cowboy looked doubtful, but Frank finally succeeded in getting him to agree not to set the broncho to bucking.

Then Ephraim and Barney each got hold of one of Hans' legs to assist him to mount.

"Are yez riddy?" asked the Irish lad, a twinkle in his eyes, with one of which he winked a signal at the Vermonter, who grinned back knowingly.

"Vait a leedle!" squawked Hans, as he reached up with his short arms and got a hold on the saddle—"vait till I ged me der saddles hold uf!"

"Wal, be ye reddy naow?" asked Ephraim.

"Yaw. Led her went!"

Barney and Ephraim gave a whoop and lifted Hans off his feet. Then, as the broncho shied sideways, they dropped him with a dull thud to the ground, where he struck in a sitting posture, the breath going out of his body with a grunted puff.

The cowboys laughed heartily, and the girls, who were watching from a distance, were much amused, Miss Gale alone looking severe and unruffled.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gasped the Dutch boy, as soon as he could catch his breath. "Why you done dot, ain'd id? Why you scared der proncho your holler mit? Don'd you know somedings?"

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Ephraim, slapping his thigh. "Darn my per-taturs! but that's ther funniest thing I ever saw!"

"Hey?" squawked Hans, shaking his fist at the Vermonter. "Vot you don'd peen laughin' at? I don'd seen nottings funny apoud id!"

He got up slowly and advanced toward the broncho, which was standing quiet enough.

"Begoro! it wur a mistake, me b'y," declared Barney. "It wur simply an oxidint."

"Oh, id vos an oxident?" said Hans, his suspicions allayed by Barney's honest manner. "Vale, don'd you led id fail to happen again. Und if dot Yankee poy from Fermonts done dot any more I peen goin' ter kick uf him der stuffin's oudt!"

With this threat he prepared to attempt to mount once more.

Barney and Ephraim came forward to lift him. The Irish lad made a significant upward gesture behind Hans' back, and Ephraim nodded and chuckled.

"Are yez riddy?" Barney asked once more.

"Yaw. Led her gone!"

Then, with all their strength, the mischievous assistants fairly flung the fat boy over the broncho's back.

Hans came down on the other side, striking the ground with a dull thud, having fallen flat on his back. He lay there a moment, and then slowly reached out toward the sky with his hands, as if trying to catch something.

"Py shimminy!" he exclaimed; "I nefer seen such peautiful fireworks pefore!"

This seemed to amuse the gathering cowboys more than anything that had happened, and their shouts of laughter aroused the fallen lad, who sat up and looked around.

Frank and his friends were amused.

"Vill somepody peen kindt enough to exblain vot habbened," urged Hans, in a bewildered way.

Barney and Ephraim rushed around and lifted him to his feet, although he regarded them with some suspicion.

"May th' ould Nick floy away wid a broncho thet won't shtand still!" cried Barney. "Av th' baste hadn't moved thin it's mounted ye'd been alriddy."

"Did der proncho move?"

"Move?" cried Ephraim, with a broad gesture. "Does dynamite move if yeou swat it with a brick!"

Hans faced the animal, shaking his fist angrily at the innocent creature.

"Look ad here, Mister Proncho!" he squealed; "uf you don'd done dot again, I peen goin' to kick uf you der hay oudt! Dot vos peesness! I don'd dislike dot foolin', und I vant you to misunderstood dot!"

"Thar, b'gosh!" said Ephraim; "I kinder guess the gol darn critter understands it naow!"

"You pet! Now, you put me ub right avay queek pefore he haf forgotten id. Hurry up!"

Again the boys caught hold of Hans, but this time they lifted him onto the back of the broncho, where, with no small amount of awkwardness, he succeeded in getting seated in the saddle.

"Hah!" he cried, triumphantly. "Don'd I toldt you so! Ven I vos retty to done peesness, I vos der poy to got there!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the other boys, waving their caps and hands. "What's the matter with Dunnerwust? He's all right! 'Rah! 'rah! 'rah!"

The Dutch boy looked proud as a peacock.

"Look avay oudt now!" he said. "I vas goin' to shown you der vay to ride."

Then he tried to start the broncho, but the animal refused to stir.

"Vot peen der madder mit you?" angrily demanded Hans, striking the creature with his hand. "Why you don'd gone along, ain'd id?"

Still the broncho stood quite still, its head down and its short ears tipped back in an ominous manner.

Hans tried in various ways to start the creature up, but was not successful. "Der proncho peen dead!" he said, in disgust, thumping the animal with his heels.

As if resenting this, the creature suddenly gave a squeal, made a bound into the air, and came down with all four feet close together and its back "humped."

Dunnerwust shot up from the saddle in a most surprising way.

By chance he came straight down and struck in the saddle again. He tried to catch hold and cling on, but the broncho made another leap.

"Hellup! hellup!" roared Hans, as he again shot into the air. "Dat proncho haf injy-rubber mit his pack in!"

CHAPTER XXX—INDIAN CHARLIE'S GAME

Although he realized that Hans might be injured, Frank could not restrain his laughter, for the spectacle was one to make a wooden image laugh.

Barney and Ephraim were convulsed.

"Oh!" shouted the Irish lad, holding his hands to his sides and swaying forward and backward. "See th' broncho play bounce ball wid th' Doochman!"

"Gol darned if this ain't better'n goin' to ther best circus that ever struck aour part of the country!" laughed the Vermonter. "I'd ruther see it than a hull cage of monkeys, b'gosh! Haw! haw! haw!"

"Yah! yah! yah!" sounded the shrill "coon" laugh of Toots. "'Scuse meh, but I's gotter laff or bu'st mah boiluh fo' suah! land ob wartermillions! de nex' bounce am gwan teh—Dar he goes!"

The broncho shot forward a short distance, then stopped suddenly, its forward feet planted solidly.

Over the creature's head sailed Hans, like a huge toad.

In some way the Dutch lad turned in the air and struck on his back.

The others ran forward to see if he was injured.

"Are you hurt?" asked Frank, anxiously, bending over Hans.

The fat lad looked at Merriwell, and slowly the most comical expression conceivable spread over the broad expanse of his face.

"Nit, I don'd peen hurted alretty yet," he replied; "but you pet my life I vos goin' to peen britty queek! I vas goin' to got pehindt dot proncho and teekle his heels a straw mit shust to seen if he could kick uf me a few prains outd."

Hans was assisted to his feet. He took a look at the broncho, which was standing quite still, and then turned and ran, as if afraid of the creature.

All this was very amusing to the cowboys, who shouted with mirth.

"Wal, if I don't believe I kin ride that critter!" cried Ephraim Gallup, wagging his head. "I've rid some purty tough nuts in my day."

"Better not try it," warned Frank.

That was just enough to start the Yankee boy.

"By gum! I will try it!" he shouted, and made a rush for the animal.

The deceptive creature stood quite still while Ephraim jumped up and swung one leg over its back, and then, before the Vermonter could straighten up in the saddle, the broncho started with wild and eccentric leaps to scoot around through the party.

"Whoa!" yelled the lank lad, wildly clinging to the creature—"whoa, gol darn ye! Stan' still a jiffy till I git ont—Wow!"

The broncho performed a twisting evolution that sent Ephraim spinning, and the twinkling heels of the animal narrowly missed the Vermonter's head.

Ephraim got up quickly from the ground, placed his arms akimbo, his hands resting on his hips, and stared at the broncho, which was quite still, its head drooping and its whole attitude one of dejection and meekness.

"Wal, may I be chawed to death by 'skeeters if yeou ain't ther darndest deceivin' critter I ever saw!" he drawled.

Then the cowboys shouted again. They were having fun at the expense of the tenderfeet.

Frank was enjoying all this, and, at the same time, was watching Indian Charlie, who had sauntered out of one of the stables and joined the crowd.

To his surprise the foreman of the Lone Star did not notice him at all, or pretended not to notice him. Charlie did not look in the direction of Frank.

"I'll keep my eyes open to see that he doesn't take me by surprise some time," thought Merriwell.

Charlie sneered at Ephraim.

"What is all this?" he asked. "Tenderfeet can't ride anything."

"To be course not!" nodded one of the punchers near him; "but they seem to think they kin, an' we're havin' fun with um."

That was quite enough for Frank.

"So they think tenderfeet can't ride anything!" he muttered. "Well, I don't

like to have them believe that.”

Then all were surprised to see him walk forward quickly, come up beside the broncho, and spring into the saddle with a single bound.

The boys gave a shout.

“Rah for Frank Merriwell!” cried Hodge. “Rah! ’rah! ’rah!”

“Now ye’ll see some roidin’!” came from Barney.

For a moment the broncho stood quite still, as if astonished that a third person should attempt to ride it, then, with a wild squeal, it began to plunge and leap and rear and buck in the fiercest manner.

To the astonishment of the cowboys Frank kept his seat in the saddle, apparently with as much ease as any one of them could have maintained it.

“Hey! go it!” laughed Merry, finding an opportunity to snatch off his cap and give it a flourish around his head. “This is the sport! Wake up, old crowbait!”

It happened that the owner of the horse did not fancy having the animal called “crowbait.” He was angry in a moment.

“Buck him, Comet!” he shouted, waving his arms to the little horse and making certain gestures—“buck him hard!”

And Comet bucked as hard as he was able, but still the laughing rider maintained his seat in the saddle.

“Why, this is easy!” declared Frank, who had ridden bucking horses before and studied their tricks. “This creature doesn’t seem to have much ginger in him.”

The boys laughed and applauded, while the cattlemen looked astonished and disgusted.

“Whatever do yer think o’ thet?” said one.

“It’s derved queer an onery kid like him kin ride a broncho,” admitted another.

“That’s ther feller what knocked Injun Charlie out,” said Hank Kildare. “I’ll allow he’s a terror.”

Charlie happened to be standing near enough to hear the words. His face reddened, and he said:

“He proved rather handy with his fists,” he admitted; “but he didn’t knock me out. I fell backward over the veranda rail, and was stunned. I reckoned it would be said he did it.”

Now up to this time no one had felt like disputing anything Charlie said, or even hinting that they doubted him. The time had come, however, when Hank Kildare felt like showing independence.

“Mebbe yer went backward over ther rail, Charlie,” he said; “but I don’t reckon ye’ll claim ye wasn’t pushed?”

Charlie scowled, but forced a sneering smile.

“The kid struck at me, and I stepped backward,” he declared. “In doing so I

struck against the rail and fell over upon my head. That is all.”

“Wa-al,” dryly drawled Kildare, “it’s a nice black eye ye’ll have to remember that yar fall.”

In the meantime, while this conversation was taking place, Comet had been doing his best to unseat Merriwell, but had not succeeded. At last he stopped and stood still, seeming played out and completely disgusted by failure.

Frank laughed.

“It’s easier than I thought,” he said.

“That broncho was trained to buck,” said Indian Charlie, speaking loudly enough for Frank to hear. “He isn’t much like a natural buckner. The tenderfoot couldn’t stay on the back of a natural buckner a second.”

Again Frank laughed, and it was far more expressive than words. That laugh distinctly said that the foreman of the Lone Star was making a fool of himself.

Bart Hodge was angry.

“I’ll bet Frank Merriwell can ride any broncho on this ranch!” he cried, addressing no one in particular.

That was exactly what Indian Charlie wanted.

“What will you bet, sir?” he instantly asked.

“A hundred dollars!” cried Hodge, recklessly.

“Done!” exclaimed Charlie. “Put up the money in Rodney’s hands. Here is my william.”

He produced a crisp new hundred-dollar bill and flourished it at Bart.

Hodge turned pale, for he suddenly realized that he did not have a hundred dollars to his name.

“I—I haven’t the money,” he stammered. “I spoke too quick. If I had it I would put it up.”

“Bah!” sneered Indian Charlie. “You are a bluff! You know he can’t ride an unbroken broncho. Back down, but keep your mouth closed after this.”

“Mr. Hodge need not back down,” said the cool voice of Frank, who had dismounted. “I will let him have a hundred dollars, or two hundred, if he wishes it.”

And Frank produced “a roll.”

Charlie’s eyes snapped. The game was coming all right, after all.

“Hodge has made betting talk, and I have my money ready to put up,” he said. “Let him cover it—if he dares!”

Bart seized the money Frank offered, and Bill Rodney was called forward. As soon as he understood the terms of the bet the rancher protested.

“Mr. Merriwell is a rider, as I will allow,” he said; “but he can’t ride one critter there is on the ranch. No one yere can ride him, an’ Pecos Pete, what is a

reg'ler broncho breaker, is goin' to break him as part of the fun ter-day."

"I presume that is the horse Indian Charlie will expect me to ride?" said Frank, his lips hardening a bit and a determined look coming to his handsome face.

"To be course it is."

Charlie was standing near enough to hear this talk, and a sneer curled the red lips beneath his dark mustache.

"There isn't any blood in those tenderfeet," he said, speaking to one of the men, but meaning that Frank and Bart should hear. "I've driven them into their holes."

Hodge looked as if he longed to fly at the sneering man.

"Here is the money!" he cried. "If Merry says so, up she goes!"

Frank nodded a bit, and Bart thrust the money into Rodney's hand. The rancher did not want to take it, but Indian Charlie was not letting any time go to waste.

"Here's mine!" he exclaimed, quickly covering the amount.

"Say," broke in Pecos Pete, stepping forward quickly; "this don't go none whatever. I cotton to this yar tenderfoot, an' I don't want ter see him murdered."

"There can't be any backing out now!" came triumphantly from the foreman of the Lone Star. "The money is up. I reckon nobody here wants to chip into this game."

He glanced around in a way that usually served as a warning to those who knew him, but, to his surprise and anger, he suddenly discovered that to a certain extent his former prestige was gone. The men who had known and feared him did not seem to fear him as in former times.

"Ef this wuz a squar deal fer ther tenderfoot it'd be all right," said Hank Kildare; "but it ain't that none at all. Ther youngster don't know what he is goin' up against."

"Thank you," said Frank, quietly. "If I am caught, I'll stand it, that is all. It will be my funeral, as you say out here."

"Ther boy's got sand," muttered Kildare, as he turned away, "but it's a shame to run him up against such a game as this. He'll be killed ef Charlie says he's ter try ter ride Firebrand."

"And that is what I do say!" cried Indian Charlie. "I said there was a horse on this ranch he couldn't ride, and I meant Firebrand."

"Bring out Firebrand," directed Merriwell, grimly.

CHAPTER XXXI—FRANK MERRIWELL'S RIDE

Frank Merriwell was a natural horseman, and he had often taken pleasure in breaking some obstinate and vicious animal. At the same time he knew well enough that a bucking broncho is about as much like an ordinary unbroken horse as dynamite is like baking powder.

But he had encountered vicious horses in the West. He remembered how, on the ranch of Miles Morgan, in Kansas, he had successfully ridden a man-killing stallion, to the unutterable astonishment of everybody about the place.

From choice Frank would not have attempted to ride a buck, but he was aroused by the sneering words of Indian Charlie and the manner in which the coward had sought to make him the butt of ridicule.

"I'll ride the beast if I live!" Frank mentally vowed.

It was useless to try to dissuade him, as the cowboys soon found out.

When Inza learned what he meant to do, she came out and cautioned him, but she had the utmost confidence in his ability.

Sadie Rodney, however, did not think Frank could ride the broncho.

"Don't try it, Mr. Merriwell!" she entreated. "You will be killed!"

"I hardly think so," smiled Frank, quietly.

Four cowboys came leading Firebrand from the corral. The animal was a vicious-looking creature, with an ugly cast in his eyes, and even as it was brought forth, it made a desperate attempt to beat down one of the men with its forward hoofs, rearing into the air and striking with amazing quickness.

The cowboy dodged and escaped, but the broncho suddenly stopped, and no urging could induce it to stir another step.

Indian Charlie's metallic laugh rang out.

"The tenderfoot will do a fine job with that creature!" he cried. "I never colared a hundred easier in all my life. Why, he won't be able to stay on Firebrand's back a second, if he ever gets there."

It was not possible to strap a saddle to the back of such a creature without

a fight, and it took six cowboys at least twenty minutes to succeed in doing this.

Frank stood and watched this work, seeming not at all disturbed by the struggle that was going on.

"The tenderfoot has confidence in himself," said one of the cowboys.

At last everything was ready for Frank to make the attempt to ride Firebrand. He flung aside his jacket, pulled his cap hard down on his head, and advanced toward the animal.

"You'll have to make a jump fer ther saddle ef you ever expect to—Wa-al, dern me!"

Pecos Pete interrupted himself with the exclamation, for Frank was mounted on the broncho before he could finish speaking.

"Let go!"

Merriwell's voice rang out clear and strong, and the cowboys broke away in all directions, one of them barely escaping being struck by the whistling heels of the animal.

Then, as if every muscle in him was of spring steel and he was run by a furnace, the broncho let himself loose. It was marvelous how he could double himself up, shoot into the air, bounce, bound, rear and kick with such rapidity. It really was impossible to follow all his movements with the eye. He squealed with fury. For thirty feet he shot ahead, and then he stopped as if turned to stone.

It did not seem possible that any living man could remain on the broncho's back, and Frank was snapped about as if some of the movements would break him in two or jerk his head off; but he retained his seat in the saddle as if he had been fastened there and nothing could free him from it.

Firebrand stood on his forward feet and then stood on his hind feet. He jumped into the air and humped his back five or six times in rapid succession. He jumped sideways, forward, backward, in all directions, but Frank refused to be dislodged.

A murmur of admiration came from the cowboys.

"Dern my eyes!" grunted Pecos Pete, his mouth wide open.

"He'll be thrown in a minute," declared Indian Charlie. "He can't stay much longer."

"He will be killed!" cried Sadie Rodney, clinging to Inza's arm.

"He will not be harmed," said Inza, but her face was very pale and her hands were clasped.

Firebrand reared into the air, and, with a scream of fury, threw himself on his back.

In some way Frank succeeded in dropping upon his feet, and he was in the saddle again when the broncho arose.

That brought a shout of applause from the cowboys.

"He done it as well as I could!" cried Pecos Pete.

"That's whatever!" fluttered Hank Kildare. "Derned ef I don't believe he's goin' ter ride ther critter! Kin it be he is a tenderfoot?"

"Ef so, he's seen bronchos before."

"You bet!"

Indian Charlie was astonished as well as disgusted.

"Why that trick should have finished him!" he muttered. "He should have been killed by the fall!"

Barney Mulloy was near enough to catch the words.

"G'wan wid yez!" he cried. "Loightning can't kill thot b'y!"

The broncho was not satisfied by any means. If possible, it continued its wild gyrations with renewed fury. It darted hither and thither, and, finally, made straight for the nearest corral in a blind manner.

"Look out! look out!" shouted several cowboys.

It seemed the furious animal meant to run straight into the corral fence, but it wheeled sideways and tried to rub Frank off. In this attempt it was not successful, and, with a scream that was wilder than any yet uttered, it again threw itself backward.

Then it was that Frank demonstrated that his escape on the previous occasion had been no accident, for he alighted on his feet with quite as much skill as before, and was in the saddle again when Firebrand got up.

Bill Rodney waved his hat with one hand and the stake money with the other, uttering a genuine cowboy yell of delight.

"Why, he's a wonder—a howlin' wonder!" the admiring rancher shouted. "Look out, Pecos Pete, for hyer's a chap what's mighty nigh your equal."

"That's right," nodded the broncho buster, generously; "but how it happens is a sight more than I know!"

Miss Abigail, who had come from the house with the two girls, nodded her head, her hard face softening.

"He is a wonderful young man," she said. "I do hope he will not be injured, and I hope you'll be lucky enough to marry him, Inza. If you don't—well, I'll marry him myself, and he's the first male critter I ever saw that I'd have!"

"I didn't think he could do it," confessed the rancher's daughter, her eyes glowing with admiration as she watched Frank struggling with the broncho. "There are old cowboys who would not dare attempt to ride that beast."

"Frank never fails in anything he attempts," declared Inza, proudly.

Indian Charlie ground his teeth.

"Who'd dreamed the tenderfoot knew anything about riding such a creature?" he hissed, under his breath. "It is a miracle!"

Still he hoped some accident would happen to Frank.

But no accident occurred, and after five minutes of struggling Merry sprang from the back of the broncho, the creature being taken in charge by several cowboys at once.

"I claim the stake money, Mr. Rodney," said Hodge.

"You can't have it!" came in a flash from the lips of the foreman of the Lone Star.

"Can't?" asked Bart, in astonishment, as Charlie pushed forward. "How is that? I do not understand, sir."

"You have not won it."

"Haven't? I think you are mistaken. Didn't you see—"

"I saw the fellow get on Firebrand's back and stay there a short time, but that was all."

"That was enough."

"He did not break the broncho."

"I didn't bet that he would. I bet he would ride any horse on the ranch, and he has done it. The money is mine."

"Pecos Pete would have broken the animal. Merriwell must do that before the money is yours."

"Not much," smiled Frank, who came up in time to overhear the man's words. "I heard the terms of the wager, and Hodge wins. He bet I could ride the horse, and I will leave it to anybody present if I did not do so. I did not agree to break the creature, and I did not try. That's all."

"You didn't ride long enough."

"No time was stipulated. I will leave it to the men here if I did not ride long enough to prove that I could ride the animal."

"Yes! yes! yes!" was the shout that went up.

"And I shall pay the money to Mr. Hodge," said Bill Rodney. "He won it all right, or Mr. Merriwell won it fer him."

He gave the money to Bart, and the cowboys cheered.

With an angry exclamation, Indian Charlie turned and walked away.

CHAPTER XXXII—INSOLENCE OF BILLY CORNMEAL

Frank was the hero of Rodney's ranch. He had caused two great sensations, one by his encounter with Indian Charlie, and the other by his skill in riding the broncho.

Sadie Rodney congratulated him, offering him her hand.

Inza fancied Sadie held to Frank's hand in a manner that was extremely significant, and she did not like it at all.

From a distance Indian Charlie saw this, and again he ground his teeth.

"She is stuck on that fellow!" he thought. "I can see that. She thinks him something wonderful, and I stand no show with her now. Wait! I am not done with him. My opportunity may come before the tournament is over."

Then he withdrew to think up some manner in which he could "do up" Frank.

Frank was dripping with perspiration, and the party of "tenderfeet" withdrew to the shelter of the veranda, where they sat in hammocks and easy-chairs, while they refreshed themselves with cooling drinks.

With the next party that arrived at the ranch was a mother and her two daughters, and one or more females continued to come in with every party that appeared after that.

By eleven o'clock in the forenoon several hundred people had assembled, and the "tenderfeet" were not backward in entertaining the prettiest of the girls who were there.

A big picnic dinner was served, and all the guests received something to eat.

The sports were to begin immediately after dinner, but the cowboys had amused themselves during the forenoon by numerous tricks and games of their own, besides telling stories and discussing the remarkable youngster from the East who had ridden Firebrand.

Indian Charlie held aloof. He was still angry and had not given over his determination to "fix" Frank.

"He will take a hand in the sports this afternoon," thought Charlie. "Then my time will come. He had better look out!"

He did not wish to injure Frank in an underhand way, but he had found the boy from the East could more than take care of himself when given a fair show.

"If I had not seen that Sadie Rodney is stuck on him, I don't know as I should care so much," thought Charlie.

He tried to chat with Sadie, but she shunned him, which simply added to his rage. Then he watched for his chance to find her alone.

He found it.

"I wish to speak with you, Sadie," he said, hurrying to her side.

"Miss Rodney, if you please," she said, rather sharply.

“Oh, all right!” grated Charlie. “You have permitted me to call you by your given name at times in the past.”

“I may have permitted it without being at all pleased by such familiarity.”

Charlie’s face flushed.

“Something has happened to change you,” he grated, “and I know what it is.”

“Indeed!”

“You used to think I was not such a bad fellow.”

“Perhaps I did not know you as well as I know you now.”

“It was not that. You did not know some one else.”

“Ah?”

“Yes, you did not know this tenderfoot with the swelled head.”

“Who is the tenderfoot with the swelled head?”

“Frank Merriwell.”

“Oh, I don’t know! He seems to be all right.”

Charlie twisted one end of his black mustache into his mouth and began to chew it in a savage manner.

“Frank Merriwell is something surprising for a tenderfoot,” he admitted; “but you had better keep away from him.”

“Oh, really!”

“Yes, really. It will be better for him.”

“It strikes me that your words are insulting, sir!”

“Wait!” he exclaimed, putting out one hand and barring her way as she sought to pass him. “Please don’t go so soon, Sadie! Listen! Frank Merriwell has a sweetheart, and she is your friend. It would not be just for you to try to cut her out. You know that, and I do not believe you would think of such a thing.”

“Thank you for your good opinion of me!” laughed the girl in a way that caused him to scowl and shrink a bit.

“I am in earnest,” he went on, quickly. “Am I right in thinking so. I know you can win him from her if you try, but you shall not do it!”

He hissed the words through his teeth, and she started back, an expression of fear flitting across her face. Then she became angry to think that he should speak to her in such a manner.

“Stand aside!” she exclaimed. “You are not my master! It is well for you that Frank Merriwell is not here.”

“It is well for him that he is not here,” declared Charlie, his face pale and his lips cold and blue, while there was a deadly glitter in his eyes. “I see you care for him! That is enough! You shall be mine! I have sworn it a thousand times and I swear it again!”

CHAPTER XXXIII—SHOOTING

Immediately after dinner there was an exhibition of trick and fancy shooting, in which Frank resolved to take part.

Rodney had provided a trap and plenty of glass balls for the occasion, and it was said that Indian Charlie was certain to carry off the honors of the day, as he was a wonderful shot with rifle, revolver or shotgun.

Charlie had a splendid black horse, and he started the shoot off by shooting from horseback, breaking a dozen balls in rapid succession without a miss, while the horse was at full gallop.

The watching cowboys uttered a yell of applause.

“Certainly that fellow is a peach with a shooting iron,” nodded Frank Merriwell. “There are not many who can beat that sort of work.”

Hank Kildare followed Indian Charlie, but he rang the bell only three times out of the six shots.

Pecos Pete, mounted on a wiry little broncho, went scooting across the grassy plain, flung his hat into the air, and shot six holes through it before it could touch the ground.

Then Indian Charlie showed the spectators another trick. As he rode along a revolver in his right hand, he snapped six quarters into the air with the thumb of his left hand and knocked each one out of sight with a bullet as it spun above his head.

This brought another yell of applause from the watching cowboys, and Frank began to understand how it came about that Charlie had been regarded with no small amount of respect by those who knew him best.

“A fellow with a hot temper and the ability to shoot like that is dangerous,” thought Merriwell. “I can see how it is that no one cared to anger him. It was lucky for me that he did not get out a gun when we had that little trouble.”

With a revolver in either hand, and hanging head downward on the right side of his horse, clinging there face outward in some marvelous manner, one of the cowboys tore past the target, at which he sent a dozen bullets, shooting with one revolver and then with the other.

This was most remarkable as an exhibition of horsemanship, for he did not succeed in ringing the bell once, although nearly every bullet hit the target.

“Wait till they come down to straight shooting,” said Frank. “Then I will get into the game.”

One after another, the cowboys gave an exhibition of some sort of trick shooting; but it was noticeable that, although several of them were fully more skillful as horsemen, none could make such a record as Indian Charlie for hitting whatever he fired at.

Frank watched his style of shooting with no small amount of interest, and saw him break ball after ball till he had smashed fifty-one. On the fifty-second ball he missed, but Merry saw he did so from pure carelessness.

“There is no telling when he would stop if he felt he was on his mettle,” thought Frank.

A bow-legged chap from the Star and Bar Ranch made thirty-two straight, and created no small amount of excitement.

The fifth man made twenty-four and then failed.

Frank was next and last.

If he did not beat the Star and Bar man he could not get into the “shoot off.”

“Now, Frankie, me b’y,” said Barney Mulloy, anxiously, “show th’ punchers what ye’re made av.”

Frank nodded quietly and took his position.

CHAPTER XXXIV—FRANK SHOWS HIS SKILL

“He’ll do it!”

“He can’t do it!”

“He’ll miss the next one!”

“Don’d you pelief me! Dot poy nefer vos known to miss!”

Hans was confident, as were all of Frank’s friends. Those who did not know him were the ones who were doubtful.

Twenty balls were broken in a deliberate, confident manner. It seemed that Frank did not think it was possible to miss.

Twenty-five! He was getting close to the Star and Bar man, and the excitement increased.

Indian Charlie laughed loud enough for Frank to hear, scornfully saying: "It's a case of luck—nothing more. He'll slip up in a minute. Why, he's getting nervous now!"

Frank paid not the least attention to this, apparently not hearing it.

Thirty balls were broken! Two more would tie the Star and Bar man.

Every spectator was standing. Inza Burrage was confident, while Sadie Rodney was almost quivering with excitement. Miss Abigail looked calm and confident.

"Ther youngster is a wonder," said Pecos Pete. "I'll allow he kin shoot as well as ride, an' that's a right smart bit."

Thirty-one!

Another to tie!

Thirty-two!

The tie was made!

Charlie carefully cleaned his gun and prepared for the trial.

Frank was congratulated by his friends.

It was agreed that the shoot-off should be to see who could make the most points out of a possible hundred.

In the choice to see who should shoot last Frank felt that he was fortunate, as he had secured that privilege.

Indian Charlie was ready, and he took his stand. Then he proceeded to break fifty balls without a miss.

Then, to the astonishment of all, Charlie missed the next ball.

That angered him, and he uttered a smothered exclamation. His anger did him harm, for he missed again.

The foreman of the Lone Star stopped to swab out his gun and cool off. He realized that it would not do to continue shooting till his nerves were perfectly steady.

When he started in once more he seemed to smash the balls with greater ease than before, and he made seventy-eight out of a possible eighty.

"That is more than enough to win," he laughed.

Then he seemed to grow careless, for he missed again.

He finished by making ninety-six out of one hundred shots.

"There," he said, "that is pretty bad, but it is good enough to beat the tenderfoot and have twenty to spare."

"We shall see," thought Frank.

Merriwell took the position Charlie had vacated, and then, to the amazement and disappointment of every one, missed the second ball.

No one was more surprised than Frank by the miss, but it did not rattle him in the least. He remembered the gun in his hands shot "close," and resolved to take unusual care.

Then he went on shooting, and for the next fifty shots he did not make a single miss.

Frank followed up his success with twenty-five more without a break, and then missed one.

When eighty was reached, Frank was tied, having made seventy-eight.

Now the excitement was greater than it had been at any time during the day, for it was seen that the tenderfoot stood an even chance of winning.

"He shall not win!" cried Indian Charlie, deep in his burning heart. "He must not win!"

Then for a moment he turned toward the nearest corral and lifted his hand to his hat in a peculiar manner.

No one observed this movement, for the attention of all seemed concentrated on the handsome youth who was doing the shooting.

Frank had made ninety-three out of ninety-five. With his next two shots he broke two more balls.

If he broke another he would tie Indian Charlie.

Once more the foreman of the Lone Star faced toward the corral and made a rapid gesture. His face was pale and his hands shook. He felt that he would be eternally disgraced if beaten by this boy.

Bang!

Frank fired again and another ball was broken.

Charlie was tied!

Merriwell's friends got together, prepared to cheer when the next ball was broken.

Frank stood in readiness for the next ball.

"A thousand demons!" huskily whispered the foreman of the Lone Star. "If that half-breed——"

Snap!—a white ball sailed into the air.

Bang!—Frank tossed the gun to his shoulder and fired.

At the same instant he was seen to reel, drop the gun and fall forward on his face, as if death-stricken.

But he had smashed the ninety-seventh ball and won the shoot-off!

CHAPTER XXXV—WHO FIRED THE SHOT

Frank was lifted and carried into the house, and a cowboy by the name of Fisher, who had once practiced medicine, and was something of a surgeon, was rushed in to attend to him.

The cowboys and the others scattered to search for the unknown who had fired the dastardly shot.

Behind one of the corrals they found Billy Cornmeal, apparently dead drunk, an empty whisky bottle clasped to his breast.

They shook and hammered the half-breed, but not even several sharp pricks with the point of a knife served to arouse him.

“Let him alone,” said Pecos Pete. “He’s dead ter ther world, an’ he couldn’t tell anything. We’re losin’ time.”

So Billy was left to sleep off his jag while the search was continued.

It proved anything but satisfactory, as no person save the half-blood was found who could have fired the shot, and it seemed certain that Billy Cornmeal had not done it.

There was something mysterious about the affair.

“If there had been a possible way for him to do the trick, I should suspect Indian Charlie,” said Diamond; “but he was with us, and we know he did not do the trick.”

“He did not do it,” said Hodge, fiercely, “but he may have been at the bottom of it.”

They went back to the house.

As they entered, they were astonished to meet Frank, about whose head a bandage was tied.

Rattleton gave a wild shout of joy and clasped Merry in his arms.

“He’s all right, fellows!” Harry shouted. “Here he is! He is not dead! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!”

“Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!” roared the others, expressing their delight in a

wild outburst of cheering.

It was some time before the rejoicing over Frank's lucky escape abated, but the mystery of the shot remained a mystery still.

Who had tried to kill Merriwell? That question seemed unanswerable.

"I tell you," said Hodge, "I believe that half-breed had something to do with it."

"Billy Cornmeal?" asked Rodney.

"Sure."

"But he was drunk."

"He seemed to be, but I don't think he was drunk at all. I think it was a trick, and he played it well."

"Why should he shoot Merriwell?"

"That is a question he might be forced to answer. Let's go find him and bring him into the house."

This was agreed upon, but when they went to look for the half-breed he was gone. He had seemed too drunk to move, but still he had disappeared.

That was suspicious. They looked for his pony, and that had disappeared also.

"He must have skipped immediately after we left him," said Hodge; "and so he has had time to place himself beyond some of those knots of timber. That is proof enough that he was the skunk who did the shooting, but some other person put him up to it. Mark me, the real enemy of Frank Merriwell is not Billy Cornmeal."

CHAPTER XXXVI—A CAST FOR LIFE—CONCLUSION

Frank begged them not to let what had happened interrupt the sport, and so it was soon in progress again.

The cowboys gave some exhibitions of the manner in which they roped steers and wild horses, and a Mexican "roper" did some fancy work with a lariat.

The Mexican delighted them with his skill, and not a few of his tricks were graceful and difficult, being very pleasing to the eye.

He could set a noose whirling in the air, let it fall over his head, still whirling, pass down to his feet, and then he would step out of it without letting it touch his person or the ground and lift it whirling into the air.

This trick he would reverse, whirling the noose about a foot above the ground, step into it and whirl it up over his head into the air.

He could send it spinning far upward, till the rope looked like a big corkscrew top, with the little end touching his hand, and then, as it fell, he would jump through the noose and snap it into the air again.

"I can't do that," smiled Frank, as he watched the roper, "but I am not exactly a greenhorn with a rope. I can throw it fairly well."

A sudden desire to get on horseback and join in the sports once more seized him. He could not keep still.

"I am all right," he declared. "It will hurt me much more to hump up and keep still. Let me have the best horse you have, Mr. Rodney. If I harm the animal, I will pay for him."

"You shall have Fleetfoot," said the rancher. "In fact, I feel like letting you have anything I own."

A short time later Frank was mounted on a handsome black gelding, a creature full of fire and intelligence.

Frank joined the cowboys in their sport, and, being provided with a rope, sprang another surprise on them by showing that he could cast the noose with more than ordinary skill.

The fun waxed fast and furious, and the cowboys, riding madly hither and thither, drew farther and farther from the house.

Suddenly all were startled to hear a shrill cry and see a girl running toward them.

Several women and girls came rushing out of the house and ran around the corner toward one of the corrals.

The girl running toward the cowboys was Inza Burrage. She waved her hand toward the corral.

At that moment a horse bearing a double burden was seen to shoot out from the corral and go racing across the plain.

"It's Indian Charlie's critter, an' that's Charlie on its back!" cried Hank Kildare.

"Right ye are!" agreed Pecos Pete; "but it's more'n Charlie ridin' ther critter! He's got somethin' in his arms! Dern my eyes! I reckon he's tryin' ter kerry off Rodney's gal!"

"That's it!" burst from Frank Merriwell. "He is kidnaping Miss Rodney! After the fellow, men! We must run him down!"

Frank was right. Charlie, driven desperate and maddened by several drinks

he had taken, had quite lost his head. Again seeking Sadie Rodney, he had found an opportunity to catch her in his arms, carry her to the corral, where his horse was saddled and ready, and bear her away.

Ordinarily the man would not have attempted such a thing. Just now he was ready for any desperate deed.

He believed he had a horse that was the superior of anything on or about Rodney's ranch, and so he had tried to kidnap Sadie, hoping to get a big start before he was discovered.

Inza had seen him, and she ran to tell Frank what had happened.

Away went the cowboys in pursuit of the kidnaper and his victim, and Frank, mounted on Fleetfoot, was leading them.

The boy remembered how Swiftwing had carried off Inza.

Frank coiled up the lariat as he rode.

There was great excitement about the ranch. Men and women ran in all directions, shouting and calling.

The cowboys, headed by Merriwell, swept past to the south.

Indian Charlie looked back and saw his pursuers. He recognized the boyish leader, and ground his teeth.

"That fellow has brought me nothing but bad luck!" he grated. "I don't care now! Let them catch me if they can! I'd like to get a shot at Merriwell myself! I wouldn't make such a bungle of it as that fool half-breed made. I was to give Cornmeal fifty dollars, but he failed to do the job."

Sadie Rodney had not fainted, although it seemed so at first.

"Oh, you wretch!" she exclaimed, faintly, having overheard his words. "So you hired the half-breed to kill Frank Merriwell! You are more of a wretch than I thought!"

She shuddered with horror.

"Oh, shiver away!" brutally laughed the man. "I am a demon, and I know it! I'm proud of it! It was born in me, and I have not been able to get away from it. I vowed I would have you at any cost, and I mean to keep my word."

"You will not succeed."

"Oh, yes, I shall! They can't run me down."

"You do not know the stuff Fleetfoot is made of, and Frank Merriwell is mounted on Fleetfoot. You can't get away from him."

"So much the worse for him! I shall shoot him!"

Away they went, mile after mile being covered.

Charlie looked back again. Mounted on the black horse, Frank was drawing away from the cowboys. He was gaining on Charlie.

"Let him come!" snarled the desperate wretch. "He can't save you!"

Frank continued to gain.

The kidnaper was riding recklessly, without considering the course he was taking. Soon he could hear the beating hoofs of the horse ridden by his persistent pursuer.

Closer and closer Frank crept. His face was set with determination. He was alone, but he would rescue Sadie Rodney.

Suddenly a scream of fear came from the girl.

"The bluffs!" she cried—"the bluffs! We are right upon them!"

Indian Charlie realized it for the first time. He saw before them the bluffs which arose two hundred feet from the bed of a dry gorge.

Then he hastily tried to rein about with his free hand.

Too late!

The horse took the bit in his teeth and charged straight at the gorge which lay in advance.

To go over the bluff meant a plunge to death, and yet he was unable to rein his horse about. Frantically he tried to turn the creature aside.

Frank realized the peril that threatened the man and girl. He freed the lariat he had brought all this distance and prepared to use it. Around and around his head the noose circled, and then, just before the horse in advance reached the brink of the bluff, he made the cast.

The noose sailed through the air and dropped over the head and shoulders of the man and girl. The trained horse Frank bestrode suddenly turned and braced itself.

Snap!—the rope tightened, and two human beings were jerked from the back of the horse, just as, with a wild shriek of fear, the animal plunged over the brink.

When the cowboys came up they found Frank talking reassuringly to Sadie Rodney, who had been stunned somewhat by the fall to the ground, but was not seriously hurt, while the body of Indian Charlie lay sprawled on the ground.

Charlie's neck was broken when he fell, and his plotting and crookedness were over forever.

Great was the reception the party was given at Rodney's ranch. Great were the honors bestowed on the "tenderfoot," who, as Hank Kildare expressed it, "had shown the punchers he wuz jest as good as the best of them—an' a sight better!"

William Rodney could not find words to express his thankfulness and admiration of Frank.

The tournament was over for that day, but the dance followed in the evening, and a jolly time it was.

Sadie Rodney waltzed twice with Frank, but he did not neglect Inza, who received full assurance that the rancher's daughter had not won her place in Frank's heart.

It was a jolly time, and for all of the misfortune which had befallen Frank, the boys felt they were fully repaid for the time spent in visiting Rodney's ranch.

And in spite of all that had occurred there was not a grumbling spirit among "Frank Merriwell's Athletes."

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