

Standish Burt L.

Frank Merriwell's Triumph: or, The Disappearance of Felicia



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CHAPTER I. A COMPACT OF RASCALS

They were dangerous-looking men, thirty of them in all, armed to the teeth. They looked like unscrupulous fellows who would hesitate at no desperate deed. Some of them had bad records, and yet they had served Frank Merriwell faithfully in guarding his mine, the Queen Mystery, against those who tried to wrest it from him by force and fraud.

Frank had called these men together, and he now stood on his doorstep in Mystery Valley, Arizona, looking them over. Bart Hodge, Frank's college chum and companion in many adventures, was behind him in the doorway. Little Abe, a hunchback boy whom Merriwell had rescued from ruffians at a mining camp and befriended for some time, peered from the cabin. Merry smiled pleasantly as he surveyed the men.

"Well, boys," he said, "the time has come when I shall need your services no longer."

Some of them stirred restlessly and looked regretful.

"To tell you the truth," Frank went on, "I am genuinely sorry to part with you. You have served me well. But I need you no more. My enemies have been defeated, and the courts have recognized my rightful claim to this property. You fought for me when it was necessary. You risked your lives for me."

"That's what we is paid for, Mr. Merriwell," said Tombstone Phil, the leader. "We tries to earn our money."

"You have earned it, every one of you. I remember the day we stood off a hundred painted ruffians in the desert; I remember the hunting of Jim Rednight; and I don't forget that when Hodge and I stood beneath a tree near Phoenix, with ropes about our necks, that you charged to the rescue and saved us. Have I paid you in a satisfactory manner?"

"Sure thing!"

"You bet!"

"That's whatever!"

"You don't hear us kick any!"

"We're satisfied!"

These exclamations were uttered by various men in the gathering.

"I am glad to know, boys," declared Frank, "that you are all satisfied. If you must leave me, I like to have you leave feeling that you have been treated on the square."

"Mr. Merriwell," said Mexican Bob, a wizened little man, "I ken chew up the galoot what says you ain't plumb on the level. Thar's nary a critter in the bunch whatever makes a murmur about you."

"You can see, boys," Frank went on, "that I have no further use for you as a guard to my property. If any of you wish to remain, however, I shall try to find employment for you. There's work enough to be done here, although it may not be the sort of work you care to touch. I need more men in the mine. You know the wages paid. It's hard work and may not be satisfactory to any of you."

The men were silent.

“As we are parting,” Merry added, “I wish to show my appreciation of you in a manner that will be satisfactory to you all. For that purpose I have something to distribute among you. Hand them out, Hodge.”

Bart stepped back and reappeared some moments later loaded down with a lot of small canvas pouches.

“Come up one at a time, boys,” invited Merry, as he began taking these from Bart. “Here you are, Phil.”

He dropped the first pouch into Tombstone Phil’s hand, and it gave forth a musical, clinking sound that made the eyes of the men sparkle.

One by one they filed past the doorstep, and into each outstretched hand was dropped a clinking canvas pouch, each one of which was heavy enough to make its recipient smile.

When the last man had received his present, they gathered again in front of the door, and suddenly Tombstone Phil roared:

“Give up a youp, boys, for the whitest man on two legs, Frank Merriwell!”

They swung their hats in the air and uttered a yell that awoke the echoes of the valley.

“Thanks, men,” said Merry quietly. “I appreciate that. As long as you desire to remain in Mystery Valley you are at liberty to do so; when you wish to depart you can do so, also. So-long, boys. Good luck to you.”

He waved his hand, and they answered with another sharp yell. Then they turned and moved away, declaring over and over among themselves that he was the “whitest man.” One of those who repeated this assertion a number of times was a leathery, bowlegged, bewhiskered individual in greasy garments known as Hull Shawmut. If anything, Shawmut seemed more pleased and satisfied than his companions.

The only one who said nothing at all was Kip Henry, known as “the Roper,” on account of his skill in throwing the lariat. Henry was thin, supple, with a small black mustache, and in his appearance was somewhat dandified, taking great satisfaction in bright colors and in fanciful Mexican garments. He wore a peaked Mexican hat, and his trousers were slit at the bottom, Mexican style. Several times Shawmut glanced at Henry, noting his lack of enthusiasm. When the Thirty retired to their camp down the valley and lingered there, Henry sat apart by himself, rolling and smoking a cigarette and frowning at the ground.

“What’s the matter, pard?” asked Shawmut, clapping him on the shoulder. “Didn’t yer git yer little present?”

“Yes, I got it,” nodded the Roper.

“Then what’s eating of yer?”

“Well, Shawmut, I am a whole lot sorry this yere job is ended. That’s what’s the matter. It certain was a snap.”

“That’s right,” agreed Kip, sitting down near the other. “We gits good pay for our time, and we works none to speak of. It certain was a snap. Howsomever, such snaps can’t last always, partner. Do you opine we’ve got any kick coming?”

“The only thing I was a-thinking of,” answered Kip, “is that here we fights to keep this yere mine for him, we takes chances o’ being called outlaws, and – now the job is done – we gits dropped. You knows and I knows that this yere mine is a mighty rich one. Why don’t we have the luck to locate a mine like that? Why should luck always come to other galoots?”

“I ain’t explaining that none,” confessed Shawmut, as he filled his pipe. “Luck is a heap singular. One night I bucks Jimmy Clerg’s bank down in Tucson. I never has much luck hitting the tiger, nohow. This night things run just the same. I peddles and peddles till I gits down to my last yellor boy. If I loses that I am broke. I has a good hoss and outfit, and so I says, ‘Here goes.’ Well, she does go. Jim’s dealer he rakes her in. I sets thar busted wide. When I goes into that place I has eight hundred in my clothes. In less than an hour I has nothing.

“Clerg he comes ambling along a-looking the tables over. I sees him, and I says: ‘Jim, how much you let me have on my hoss and outfit?’ ‘What’s it wurth?’ says he. ‘Three hundred, cold,’ says I. ‘That goes,’ says he. And he lets me have the coin. Then I tackles the bank again, and I keeps right on peddling. Yes, sir, I gits down once more to my last coin. This is where I walks out of the saloon on my uppers. All the same, I bets the last red. I wins. Right there, Kip, my luck turns. Arter that it didn’t seem I could lose nohow. Pretty soon I has all the chips stacked up in front of me. I cashes in once or twice and keeps right on pushing her. I knows luck is with me, and I takes all kinds o’ long chances. Well, pard, when I ambles out of the place at daylight the bank is busted and I has all the ready coin of the joint. That’s the way luck works. You gits it in the neck a long time; but bimeby, when she turns, she just pours in on yer.”

“But it don’t seem any to me that my luck is going to turn,” muttered the Roper.

“Mebbe you takes a little walk with me,” said Shawmut significantly. “Mebbe I tells you something some interesting.”

They arose and walked away from the others, so that their talk might not be heard.

“Did you ever hear of Benson Clark?” asked Shawmut.

“Clark? Clark? Why, I dunno. Seems ter me I hears o’ him.”

“I knows him well once. He was a grubstaker. But his is hard luck and a-plenty of it. All the same, he keeps right on thinking sure that luck changes for him. Something like two years ago I loses track of him. I never sees him any since. But old Bense he hits it rich at last. Somewhere in the Mazatzals he located a claim what opens rich as mud. Some Indians off their reservation finds him there, and he has to run for it. He gits out of the mountains, but they cuts him off and shoots him up. His luck don’t do him no good, for he croaks. But right here is where another lucky gent comes in. This other gent he happens along and finds old Bense, and Bense he tells him about the mine and gives him a map. Now, this other lucky gent he proposes to go and locate that mine. He proposes to do this, though right now he owns two of the best mines in the whole country. Mebbe you guesses who I’m talking about.”

“Why,” exclaimed Henry, “you don’t mean Mr. Merriwell, do yer?”

“Mebbe I does,” answered Shawmut, glancing at his companion slantwise. “Now, what do yer think of that?”

“What do I think of it?” muttered the Roper. “Well, I will tell yer. I think it’s rotten that all the luck is to come to one gent. I think Mr. Merriwell has a-plenty and he can do without another mine.”

“Just what I thinks,” agreed Shawmut. “I figgers it out that way myself. But he has a map, and that shows him where to find old Bense’s claim.”

“See here,” said Kip, stopping short, “how do you happen to know so much about this?”

“Well, mebbe I listens around some; mebbe I harks a little; mebbe I finds it out that way.”

“I see,” said Henry, in surprise; “but I never thinks it o’ you. You seem so satisfied-like I reckons you don’t bother any.”

“Mebbe I plays my cards slick and proper,” chuckled Shawmut. “You sees I don’t care to be suspected now.”

“What do you propose to do?”

“Well, partner, if I tells you, does you opine you’re ready to stick by me?”

“Share even and I am ready for anything,” was the assurance.

“Mr. Merriwell he proposes hiking out soon to locate that thar claim o’ Benson Clark’s. I am none in a hurry about getting away from here, so I lingers. When he hikes I follers. When he locates the claim mebbe he has to leave it; mebbe I jump it; mebbe I gits it recorded first. If he don’t suspect me any, if he don’t know I’m arter it, he don’t hurry any about having it recorded. That gives me time to get ahead of him. If you’re with me in this, we goes even on the claim. It’s a heap resky, for this yere Merriwell is dangerous to deal with. Is it settled?”

“Yere’s my hand,” said Kip Henry.

Shawmut clasped the proffered hand, and the compact was made.

CHAPTER II. DAYS OF RETRIBUTION

When Merry had dismissed the men, he turned back into the cabin and sat down near the table.

“Well, that’s the end of that business, Bart,” he said.

“Yes,” nodded Hodge, sitting opposite. “I congratulate you on the way you handled those men, Merry. No one else could have done it as well. If ever I saw a collection of land pirates, it was that bunch.”

Frank smiled.

“They were a pretty tough set,” he confessed; “but they were just the men I needed to match the ruffians Sukes set against me.”

Milton Sukes was the chief conspirator against Frank in the schemes to deprive him of the Queen Mystery Mine.

“Sukes will hire no more ruffians,” said Hodge.

“I should say not. He has perpetrated his last piece of villainy. He has gone before the judgment bar on high.”

“And the last poor wretch he deluded is an imbecile.”

“Poor Worthington!” said Merry. “I fear he will never be right again. It was his bullet that destroyed Sukes, yet no man can prove it. What he suffered after that during his flight into the desert, where he nearly perished for water, completely turned his brain.”

“You want to look out for him, Frank. I think he is dangerous.”

Merry laughed.

“Ridiculous, Hodge! He is as harmless as a child. When I let him, he follows me about like a dog.”

Even as Frank said this, a crouching figure came creeping to the door and peered in. It was a man with unshaven, haggard face and eyes from which the light of reason had fled.

“There he is!” exclaimed this man. “There is my ghost! Do you want me, ghost?”

“Come in, Worthington!” called Frank.

The man entered hesitatingly and stood near the table, never taking his eyes from Merry’s face for a moment.

“What you command, ghost, I must obey,” he said. “You own me, body and soul. Ha! ha! body and soul! But I have no soul! I bartered it with a wretch who deceived me! I was an honest man before that! Perhaps you don’t believe me, but I swear I was. You must believe me! It’s a terrible thing to be owned by a ghost who has no confidence in you. But why should my ghost have confidence! Didn’t I deceive him? Didn’t I kill him? I see it now. I see the fire! It is burning – it is burning there! He has found me as I am setting it. He springs upon me! He is strong – so strong! Ha! his feet slip! Down he goes! His head strikes! He is unconscious!”

The wretch seemed living over the terrible experiences through which he had passed on a certain night in Denver, when he set fire to Merriwell’s office and tried to burn Frank to death. He thought he had accomplished his purpose, and the appearance of his intended victim alive had turned his brain.

As he listened Hodge shivered a little.

“Never mind, Worthington,” said Frank. “He is all right. He will escape from the fire.”

“No, no, no!” gasped the man, wringing his hands. “See him lying there! See the fire flashing on his face! See the smoke! It is coming thick. I must go! I must leave him. It is a fearful thing to do! But if he escapes he will destroy me. He will send me to prison, and I must leave him to die!”

He covered his eyes with his hands, as if to shut out a terrible spectacle.

“No one sees me!” he whispered. “Here are the stairs! It is all dark – all dark! I must get out quick, before the fire is discovered. I have done it! I am on the street! I mustn’t run! If I run they will suspect me. I will walk fast – walk fast!”

Merry glanced at Hodge and sadly shook his head.

“Now the engines are coming!” exclaimed the deranged man. “Hear them as they clang and roar along the streets! See the people run! See the horses galloping! They are coming to try to put out the fire. What if they do it in time to save him! Then he will tell them of my treachery! Then he will send me to prison! I must see – I must know! I must go back there!”

“He shall not send you to prison, Worthington,” asserted Merry soothingly. “He shall be merciful to you.”

“Why should he? Here is the burning building. Here are the engines, panting and throbbing. See! they pour streams of water on the building. No use! It is too late; you cannot save him. He is dead long before this. Who shall say I was to blame? What if they do find his charred body? No man can prove I had a hand in it. I defy you to prove it!”

Shaking his trembling hands in the air, the wretch almost shrieked these words.

“This,” muttered Bart Hodge, “is retribution.”

“I must go away,” whispered Worthington. “I must hide where they can’t see me. Look how every one stares at me! They seem to know I have done it! These infernal lights betray me! I must hide in the darkness. Some one is following me everywhere. I am afraid of the darkness! I will always be afraid of the darkness! In the darkness or in the light, there is no rest for me – no rest! Did you hear that voice? Do you hear? It accuses me of murder! I am haunted! My God! Haunted, haunted!”

With this heartbroken cry he sank on his knees and crept toward Frank.

“You’re the ghost that haunts me!” he exclaimed. “It is my punishment! I must always be near you, and you must haunt me forever!”

Merry touched him gently.

“Get up, Worthington,” he said regretfully. “Your punishment has been too much. Look at me. Look me straight in the eyes, Worthington. I am not dead. You didn’t kill me.”

“No use to tell me that; I know better.”

“It is hopeless now, Hodge,” said Merry, in a low tone. “The only chance for him is that time will restore his reason. You may go, Worthington.”

“I must stay near by, mustn’t I?”

“You may stay outside.”

With bowed head and unsteady steps the man left the cabin and disappeared.

Little Abe had remained speechless and frightened in a corner. Now he picked up his fiddle, and suddenly from it came a weird melody. It was a crazy tune, filled with wild fancies and ghostly phantoms.

“He is playing the music of that deranged soul,” murmured Frank.

The sound of the fiddle died in a wail, and the boy sat shivering and silent in the corner.

“This is a little too much of a ghostly thing!” exclaimed Merry as he arose and shook himself. “Let’s talk of something else, Hodge. To-morrow we start for the Mazatzals, and I have everything ready. If we can locate that mine, one-half of it is yours.”

He took from his pocket a leather case and removed from it a torn and soiled map, which he spread on the table. Together he and Bart examined the map once more, as they had done many times before.

“There,” said Frank, “is Clear Creek, running down into the Rio Verde. Somewhere to the northwest of Hawley Peak, as this fellow indicated here on the map, in the valley shown by this cross, is Benson Clark’s claim.”

“The location is vaguely marked,” said Bart. “We may search for it a year without discovering it.”

“That’s true; but we know approximately somewhere near where it is.”

“Well,” said Hodge, “we will do our best. That’s all any one can do. It is your fortune, Frank, to be lucky; and for that reason we may be successful.”

“Something tells me we shall be,” nodded Merriwell.

The start was made next day, and the journey continued until one afternoon Merry and Bart Hodge stood looking down into a deep, oblong valley in the heart of the Northern Mazatzals. With them was Cap’n Walter Wiley, a former seafaring man, who had been Frank’s friend in many thrilling adventures in the West. Little Abe had come with them from Mystery Valley, as had Worthington, but they were at the camp Merry had established some distance behind.

“I believe this valley is the one,” Merry declared; “but how are we going to get into it? That’s the question that bothers me.”

“There must be an inlet or outlet or something to the old valley,” said Hodge. “It cannot be just a sink hole dropped down here like a huge oval basin in the mountains. There is a stream running through it, too. It is wooded and watered, and there is plenty of grass for grazing.”

“I am almost positive this valley is the one Benson Clark told me of. I am almost positive it is the one marked on my map. Clark was shot and dying when I found him. He didn’t have time to tell me how to get into the valley.”

“We seem to have struck something that impedes navigation and investigation and causes agitation,” put in Cap’n Wiley. “I would truly love to have the wings of a dove that I could fly from these heights above. Poetry just bubbles from me occasionally. I must set my colossal intellect at work on this perplexing problem and demonstrate my astounding ability to solve entangling enigmas. (Webster’s Dictionary does contain the loveliest words!) Let me think a thought. Let all nature stand hushed and silent while I think a think.”

His companions paid little heed to him; but he continued to discuss the problem of descending into the valley.

“I have visited the northern end and the southern end,” said Frank, “and I have explored this side and surveyed the other side through my field glasses. There seems no break in these perpendicular walls. This valley seems like one of those Southwestern mesas inverted. They rise sheer from the plains, and it is impossible to reach the top of many of them. This drops straight down here, and it seems impossible to reach its bottom.”

“The more difficult it is,” said Bart, “the greater becomes my desire to get down there.”

“Same here,” smiled Frank. “The difficulty makes it something of a mystery. Scientific expeditions have spent thousands of dollars in reaching the top of the Mesa Encantada, in New Mexico. By Americans it is called the Enchanted Mesa. Now, the mere fact that we can’t seem to get down into this valley throws an atmosphere of mystery over it, and to me it is an enchanted valley.”

“Hush!” whispered Wiley, with one finger pressed against his forehead. “A mighty thought is throbbing and seething in my cohesive brain. If I only had my gravity destroyer here! Ha! Then I could simply jump down into the valley and look around, and, when I got ready, jump back up here. By the way, mates, did you ever know why it was that Santos-Dumont retired from this country in confusion and dismay? You know he came over here with his old flying machine, and was going to do stunts to amaze the gaping multitudes. You know he suddenly packed his Kenebecca and took passage to foreign shores. The secret of his sudden departure has never been told. If you will promise to whisper no word of it to the world, I will reveal the truth to you.

“Just before Santy arrived in the United States I succeeded in perfecting my great gravity destroyer. As I have on other occasions explained to you, it was about the size of an ordinary watch, and I carried it about in my pocket. By pressing a certain spring I immediately destroyed the force of gravity so that, by giving an easy, gentle sort of a jump into the air, I could sail right up to

the top of a church steeple. When I got ready to come down, I just let go and sailed down lightly as a feather. When I heard that Santy was going to amaze this country with his dinky old flying machine, I resolved to have a little harmless amusement with him.

“With this object in view, I had a flying machine of my own invented. It was made of canvas stretched over a light wooden frame, and along the bottom, to keep it upright, I had a keel of lead. My means of expulsion was a huge paddle wheel that I could work with my feet. That was the only thing about the machine that I didn’t like. There was some work connected with it. To the rear end of the arrangement I attached a huge fanlike rudder that I could operate with ropes running to the cross pieces, like on ordinary rowboats.

“Mates, there never was a truer word spoken from the chest than that the prophet is not without honor save in his own country. I had this flying machine of mine constructed in Cap’n Bean’s shipyard, down in Camden, Maine, my home. The villagers turned out in swarms, and stood around, and nudged each other in the ribs, and stared at my contrivance, and tried to josh me. Even Billy Murphy gave me a loud and gleeful ha-ha! They seemed to think I had gone daffy, but I kept right on about my business, and one day the *Snowbird*, as I called her, was finished. She was a beauty, mates, as she lay there, looking so light and airy and fragile.

“By that time I had become decidedly hot under the collar on account of so much chaffing from the rustic populace. Says I to myself, says I: ‘Cap’n, these Rubes don’t deserve to see you fly. If you let them see you fly you will be giving every mother’s son of them two dollars’ worth of entertainment free of charge.’ Now, it isn’t my custom to give anything free of charge. Therefore I advertised in the *Herald* that on a certain day I would sail the aërial atmosphere. I stated that before doing so I would pass around the hat, and I expected every person present to drop two dollars into it. I thought this was a clever idea of mine.

“On the day and date the people came from near and far. They journeyed even from Hogansville, South Hope, and Stickney’s Corner. When I saw them massed in one great multitude in and around that shipyard and on the steamboat wharf, I made merry cachinnation.

“But alas! when I passed through that crowd with my hat and counted up the collection, I found I had a lead nickel, a trousers button, and a peppermint lozenger. That was all those measly, close-fisted people donated for the pleasure of seeing me navigate the ambient air. Although I am not inclined to be over-sensitive, I felt hurt, and pained, and disappointed. I then made a little speech to them, and informed them that over in Searsmont there was a man so mean that he used a wart on the back of his neck for a collar button to save the expense of buying one, but I considered him the soul of generosity beside them. I further informed them that I had postponed sailing. I minded it not that they guffawed and heaped derision upon me. I was resolute and unbending, and they were forced to leave without seeing me hoist anchor that day.

“In the soft and stilly hours of the night which followed I seated myself in the *Snowbird*, applied my feet to the mechanism, pressed the spring of the gravity destroyer, and away I scooted over Penobscot Bay. When the sun rose the following morning it found Cap’n Bean’s shipyard empty and little Walter and his flying machine gone.

“I was on hand when Santos-Dumont arrived in New York. I sought an interview with him, and I told him I proposed making him look like a plugged quarter when he gave his exhibition. I challenged him to sail against me and told him I would show him up. Santy didn’t seem to like this, and he made remarks which would not look well in the *Sabbath School Herald*. Indeed, he became violent, and, though I tried to soothe him, I discovered myself, when the interview ended, sitting on the sidewalk outside of the building and feeling of my person for bumps and sore spots.

“You can imagine with what dignity I arose to my feet and strode haughtily away. More than ever was I determined to make old Santy look like an amateur in the flying business. However, he took particular pains while in New York to scoot around in his machine when he knew I was not informed that such was his intention. With a great deal of craft and skill he avoided coming in

competition with me. One day some part of his jigger got out of gear and he had it removed into the country to fix it. I located him and followed him up. I have forgotten the name of the village where I found him; but the people were getting much excited, for he had stated that at a certain time he would show them what he could do.

“He had gathered scientific men from Oshkosh, Skowhegan, Chicago, and other centres of culture and refinement. Among them was Professor Deusenberry, of the Squedunk Elementary College of Fine Fatheads. I succeeded in getting at Professor Deusenberry’s ear. He had a generous ear, and there was not much trouble in getting at it. I told him all about my *Snowbird*, and informed him that I had her concealed near at hand and proposed to show up Santos when he broke loose and sailed. I took him around to see my craft; but when he looked her over he shook his head and announced that she’d never rise clear of the skids on which I had her elevated above the ground.

“Well, mates, the great day came around, and promptly at the hour set Santos rose like a bird in the air. I was watching for him, and when I saw him gliding about over the village I promptly started the *Snowbird* going. The moment I shut off the power of gravitation I scooted upward like a wild swan. I made straight for Dumont’s old machine, and there before the wildly cheering people, whose shouts rose faint and sweet to my ear, I proceeded to do a few stunts. I circled around Santos when he was at his best speed. I sailed over him and under him, and I certain gave him an attack of nervous prostration. In his excitement he did something wrong and knocked his machine out of kilter, so that he suddenly took a collapse and fell into the top of a tree, where his old craft was badly damaged. I gently lowered myself to the ground, and as I stepped out of the *Snowbird* Professor Deusenberry clasped me to his throbbing bosom and wept on my breast.

“‘Professor Wiley!’ he cried, ‘beyond question you have solved the problem of aërial navigation. Professor Wiley – ’ ‘Excuse me, Professor Deusenberry’ said I, ‘but I am simply plain Cap’n Wiley, a salty old tar of modesty and few pretensions. I have no rightful claim to the title of professor.’

“‘But you shall have – you shall have!’ he earnestly declared. ‘I will see that you’re made professor of atmospheric nullity at the Squedunk Elementary College of Fine Fatheads. Your name shall go ringing down through the corridor of the ages. Your name shall stand side by side in history with those of Columbus, Pizarro, and Richard Croker.’

“That night I was wined, and dined, and toasted in that town, while Santos-Dumont stood outside and shivered in the cold. The scientific men and professors and men of boodle gazed on me in awe and wonderment and bowed down before me. Professor Deusenberry was seized with a determination to own the *Snowbird*. He was fearful lest some one else should obtain her, and so he hastened to get me to set a price upon her. I was modest. I told him that I was modest. I told him that in the cause of science I was ready to part with her for the paltry sum of five thousand dollars. In less than ten minutes he had gathered some of the moneyed fatheads of his college and bought my flying machine.

“I suggested to them that the proper way to start her was to get her onto some eminence and have some one push her off. The following morning they raised her to the flat roof of a building, and, with no small amount of agitation, I saw that Professor Deusenberry himself contemplated making a trip in her. When they pushed her off he started the paddle wheels going, but without the effect of my little gravity destroyer to keep her from falling. She dropped straight down to the ground. When they picked the professor up, several of his lateral ribs, together with his dispendarium, were fractured. I thought his confidence in me was also broken. At any rate, I hastened to shake the dust of that town from my feet and make for the tall timber.

“Nevertheless, mates, my little experience with Santos-Dumont so disgusted and discouraged him that he immediately left this country, which explains something that has been puzzling the people for a long time. They wondered why he didn’t remain and do the stunts he had promised to do. Even now I fancy that Santy often dreams in terror of Cap’n Wiley and his *Snowbird*.”

CHAPTER III. THE MAP VANISHES

While Cap'n Wiley had been relating this yarn Merriwell seemed utterly unconscious of his presence. Having produced his field glasses from the case at his side, he was surveying the impregnable valley. Suddenly he started slightly and touched Bart's arm.

"Look yonder, Hodge," he said, in a low tone. "Away up at the far end of the valley where the timber is, I can see smoke rising there."

"So can I!" exclaimed Hodge. "What does it mean?"

"There is but one thing it can mean, and that is –"

"There's some one in the valley."

"Sure, sure," agreed Cap'n Wiley. "Somebody has found a passage into that harbor."

"Do you suppose," asked Hodge, in consternation, "that there are other parties searching for that mine?"

"It's not unlikely."

"But you were the only one told of its existence by Benson Clark."

"Still, it's likely others knew he was prospecting in this vicinity."

"It will be hard luck, Merry, if we find that some one has relocated that claim ahead of us."

"That's right," nodded Frank. "The fact that there is smoke rising from that part of the valley proves it is not impossible to get down there. It's too late to-day to make any further effort in that direction. We will return to the camp and wait for morning."

"And if you find other men on the claim, what will you do?"

"I haven't decided."

"But it belongs to you!" exclaimed Hodge earnestly. "Clark located it, and when he died he gave you the right to it."

"Nevertheless, if some one else has found it and has registered his claim, he can hold it."

"Not if you can prove Clark staked it off and posted notices. Not if you can prove he gave it to you."

"But I can't prove that. Clark is dead. He left no will. All he left was quartz in his saddlebags and some dust he had washed from the placer, together with this map I have in my pocket. You see, I would find it impossible to prove my right to the mine if I discovered other parties in possession of it."

Bart's look of disappointment increased.

"I suppose that's right, Merry," he confessed; "but it doesn't seem right to me. The Consolidated Mining Association of America tried to take your Queen Mystery Mine from you on a shabbier claim than you have on this mine here."

"But I defeated them, Bart. You must not forget that."

"I haven't forgotten it," Hodge declared, nodding his head. "All the same, you had hard work to defeat them, and, later, Milton Sukes made it still harder for you."

"But I triumphed in both cases. Right is right, Bart; it makes no difference whether it is on my side or the other fellow's."

"That's so," Hodge confessed. "But it would be an almighty shame to find some one else squatting on that claim. I'd like to get down into that valley now!"

"It can't be done before nightfall, so we will go back to camp."

They set out, and an hour later they reached their camp in a small valley. There they had pitched a tent near a spring, and close at hand their horses grazed. As they approached the tent, little Abe came hobbling up to them.

"I am glad you're back," he declared. "That man has been going on just awful."

"Who? Worthington?" questioned Merry.

"Yes; he said over and over that he knew his ghost would be lost. He declared his ghost was in danger. He said he could feel the danger near."

"More of his wild fancies," said Hodge.

"Mates," observed Cap'n Wiley, "if there's anything that upsets my zebro spinal column it is a crazy gentleman like that. I am prone to confess that he worries me. I don't trust him. I am afraid that some morning I will wake up and find a hatchet sticking in my head. I should hate to do that."

"I am positive he is harmless," declared Merry. "Where is he, Abe?"

"I don't know now. A while ago he just rushed off, calling and calling, and he's not come back."

Frank looked alarmed. "He promised me he would stay near the camp. He gave me his word, and this is the first time he has failed to obey me implicitly in everything."

"He said he'd have to go to save you."

"It was a mistake bringing him here, Frank," asserted Hodge.

"But what could I do with him? He wouldn't remain behind, and I knew the danger of leaving him there. Any day he might escape from the valley and lose himself in the desert to perish there."

"Perhaps that is what will happen to him now."

Merry was sorely troubled. He made preparations to go in search of Worthington without delay. But even as he was doing so the deranged man came running back into the camp and fell panting at his feet.

"I have found you again, my ghost!" he cried. "They are after you! You must beware! You must guard yourself constantly!"

"Get up, Worthington!" said Merry. "I am in no danger. No one can hurt a ghost, you know."

"Ah! you don't know them – you don't know them!" excitedly shouted the lunatic. "They are wicked and dangerous. I saw them peering over those rocks. I saw their evil eyes. Abe was asleep. I had been walking up and down, waiting for you to return. When I saw them I stood still as a stone and made them believe I was dead. They watched and watched and whispered. They had weapons in their hands! You must be on your guard every minute!"

"I have heard about crazy bedbugs," muttered Wiley; "but I never saw one quite as bad as this. Every time I hear him go on that way I feel the need of a drink. I could even partake of a portion of Easy Street firewater with relish."

Worthington seized Frank's arm.

"You must come and see where they were – you must come and see," he urged.

"Never mind that now," said Merry. "I will look later."

"No! no! Come, now!"

"Be still!" commanded Merry sharply. "I can't waste the time."

But the maniac continued to plead and beg until, in order to appease him, Merry gave in.

Worthington led him to a mass of boulders at a distance, and, pointing at them, he declared in a whisper:

"There's where they were hiding. Look and see. There is where they were, I tell you!"

More to pacify the poor fellow than anything else, Frank looked around amid the rocks. Suddenly he made a discovery that caused him to change countenance and kneel upon the ground. Bart, who had sauntered down, found him thus.

"What is it, Frank?" he asked.

"See here, Hodge," said Merry. "There has been some one here amid these rocks. Here's a track. Here's a mark where the nails of a man's boot heel scratched on the rocks."

Hodge stood looking down, but shook his head.

"You have sharper eyes than I, Frank," he confessed. "Perhaps Worthington has been here himself."

"No! no!" denied the deranged man. "I was afraid to come! I tell you I saw them! I tell you I saw their wicked eyes. This is the first time I have been here!"

"If he tells the truth," said Frank, "then it is certain some one else has been here."

Behind Worthington's back Bart shook his head and made signals expressive of his belief that whatever signs Frank had discovered there had been made by Worthington.

"Now, you see," persisted the madman; "now you know they were here! Now you know you must be on your guard!"

"Yes, yes," nodded Merry impatiently. "Don't worry about that, Worthington. I will be on my guard. They will not take me by surprise."

This seemed to satisfy the poor fellow for the time being, and they returned to the tent. There a fire was again started and supper was prepared. Shadows gathered in the valley and night came on. Overhead the bright stars were shining with a clear light peculiar to that Southwestern land.

After supper they lay about on the ground, talking of the Enchanted Valley, as Merry had named it, and of the mysterious smoke seen rising from it. Later, when little Abe and Cap'n Wiley were sleeping and Worthington had sunk into troubled slumber, through which he muttered and moaned, Frank and Bart sat in the tent and examined the map by the light of a small lantern.

"Beyond question, Merry, the mine is near here. There is not a doubt of it. Here to the east is Hawley Peak, to the south lies Clear Creek. Here you see marked the stream which must flow through that valley, and here is the cross made by Clark, which indicates the location of his claim."

They bent over the map with their heads together, sitting near the end of the tent. Suddenly a hand and arm was thrust in through the perpendicular slit in the tent flap. That arm reached over Frank's shoulder, and that hand seized the map from his fingers. It was done in a twinkling, and in a twinkling it was gone.

With shouts of astonishment and dismay, both Frank and Bart sprang up and plunged from the tent. They heard the sounds of feet running swiftly down the valley.

"Halt!" cried Merry, producing a pistol and starting in pursuit.

In the darkness he caught a glimpse of the fleeing figure.

"Stop, or I fire!" he cried again.

There was no answer. Flinging up his hand, he began shooting into the gloom. He did not stop until he had emptied the weapon. Having run on some distance, he paused and listened, stopping Bart with an outstretched hand.

Silence lay over the valley.

"Did you hit him?" asked Bart.

"I don't know," confessed Frank.

"I can hear nothing of him."

"Nor I."

"You may have dropped him here."

"If not –"

"If not, my map is gone."

As he was talking, Frank threw open his pistol and the empty shells were ejected. He deftly refilled the cylinder.

"By George, Merry!" whispered Bart, "Worthington may have been right when he told you he saw some one beyond those bowlders."

"He was."

"Then we have been followed! We have been spied upon!"

"No question about it."

"Who did it?"

“That’s for us to find out.”

Together they searched for the man at whom Frank had fired in the darkness. They found nothing of him. From the tent little Abe began calling to them. Then Worthington came hurrying and panting through the darkness seeking them.

“They have gone!” declared the man wildly. “They were here! In my sleep I felt them! In my sleep I saw them!”

“We must have a light, Hodge,” said Frank. “Bring the lantern.”

Bart rushed back to the tent and brought the lantern. With it Frank began examining the ground.

“Poor show of discovering any sign here,” he muttered.

After a time, however, he uttered an exclamation and bent over.

“What have you found?” questioned Hodge excitedly.

“See here,” said Frank, pointing on the ground before him.

On a rock at their feet they saw fresh drops of blood.

“By Jove, you did hit him!” burst from Bart’s lips. “If we can follow that trail – ”

“We will find the man who has that map,” said Merry grimly. “I wonder how badly he is wounded.”

“Blood!” moaned Worthington. “There is blood on the ground! There is blood in the air! There is death here! Wherever I go there is death!”

“Keep still!” said Frank sharply. “Look out for Abe, Bart.”

Then he began seeking to follow the sanguine trail with the aid of the lighted lantern. It was slow work, but still he made some progress.

“We’re taking big chances, Merry,” said Bart, who had a pistol in his hand.

“It’s the only way we can follow him.”

“Beware!” warned Worthington, in a hollow whisper. “I tell you there is death in the air!”

They had not proceeded far when suddenly a shot rang out and the bullet smashed the lantern globe, extinguishing the light. Hodge had been expecting something of the sort, and he fired almost instantly in return, aiming at the flash he had vaguely seen.

“Are you hurt, Merry?” he asked.

“No; the lantern was the only thing struck. Did you see where the shot came from?”

“I caught a glimpse of the flash.”

Then a hoarse voice hailed them from the darkness farther down the valley.

“You gents, there!” it called.

They did not answer.

“Oh, Frank Merriwell!” again came the call.

“It’s somebody who knows you,” whispered Hodge.

“What is it?” called Merry, in response.

“You holds up where you are!” returned the voice, “or you eats lead a-plenty.”

“Who are you?”

“That’s what you finds out if you come. If you wants to know so bad, mebbe you ambles nearer and takes your chances o’ getting shot up.”

“It’s sure death to try it,” warned Hodge, in a whisper.

“Death and destruction!” Worthington screamed. “It is here! Come away! Come away!”

He seized Merry and attempted to drag him back. Frank was forced to break the man’s hold upon him.

“I must save you!” the deranged man panted. “I knew it would come! Once I left you to perish in the flames; now I must save you!”

He again flung himself on Frank, and during the struggle that followed both Hodge and Wiley were compelled to render assistance. Not until the madman had been tripped and was held helpless on the ground did he become quiet.

“It’s no use!” he groaned; “I can’t do it! It is not my fault!”

Merry bent close and stared through the gloom at the eyes of the unfortunate man.

“You must obey me,” he said, in that singular, commanding tone of his. “You have to obey me! Go back to the tent!”

Then he motioned for Hodge to let Worthington up, and Bart did so. Without further resistance or struggling, the man turned and walked slowly back to the tent.

“Go with him, Wiley, and take Abe with you.”

Although Wiley protested against this, Frank was firm, and the sailor yielded. Then, seeking such shelter as they could find amid the rocks and the darkness, Bart and Frank crept slowly toward the point from which that warning voice had seemed to come. A long time was spent in this manner, and when they reached the spot they sought they were rewarded by finding nothing.

“He has gone, Frank,” muttered Hodge. “While we were struggling with Worthington, he improved the opportunity to escape.”

“I fear you are right,” said Merriwell.

Further investigation proved this was true. In vain they searched the valley. The mysterious unknown who had snatched the map and who had been wounded in his flight by Frank had made good his escape.

CHAPTER IV. THE NIGHT WATCH

They were finally compelled to give up the search, although they did so with the greatest reluctance.

“Unless it aids the other fellow to locate the claim first,” said Bart, “the loss of the map cannot be much of a disadvantage to you, Merry. It could give us no further assistance in finding the claim.”

“That’s true,” muttered Frank. “But the fact that mysterious men have been prowling around here and one of them has secured the map seems to indicate there are others who are searching for Benson Clark’s lost claim. If they locate it first – ”

“It’s rightfully yours!” growled Hodge. “No one else has a real claim to it. Clark gave it to you.”

“But he made no will.”

“All the same, you know he gave it to you.”

“We have discussed all that, Hodge,” said Merry as they returned to the tent. “If other parties find the claim first and begin work on it, they can hold it.”

Wiley was teetering up and down in front of the tent, apparently in an uneasy state of mind.

“I have faced perils by sea and land!” he exclaimed, as they approached. “It doesn’t behoove any one to shunt me off onto a lunatic and a cripple when there is danger in the air. My fighting blood is stirred, and I long to look death in the mouth and examine his teeth.”

Neither Merry nor Bart paid much attention to the spluttering sailor. They consulted about the wisdom of changing their camping place for the night.

“I don’t think it is necessary,” said Frank. “Whoever it was, the prowler secured the map, and I fancy it will satisfy him for the present. Something assures me that was what he was after, and we have nothing more of interest to him now.”

After a time they decided to remain where they were and to take turns in guarding the camp. The first watch fell on Bart, while Frank was to take the middle hours of the night, and Wiley’s turn came toward morning. It was found somewhat difficult to quiet Worthington, who remained intensely wrought up over what had happened; but in time Merry induced him to lie down in the tent.

Little Abe crept close to Frank and lay there, shivering somewhat.

“You have so many enemies, Frank,” he whispered. “Who are these new enemies you have found here?”

“I don’t know at present, Abe; but I will find out in time.”

“Why must you always have enemies?”

“I think it is the fortune of every man who succeeds to make enemies. Other men become jealous. Only idiots and spineless, nerve-lacking individuals make no enemies at all.”

“But sometime your enemies will hurt you,” muttered the boy fearfully. “You can’t always escape when they are prowling about and striking at your back.”

“Of course, there is a chance that some of them may get me,” confessed Frank; “but I am not worrying over that now.”

“Worthington frightens me, too,” confessed the boy. “He is so strange! But, really and truly, he seems to know when danger is near. He seems to discover it, somehow.”

“Which is a faculty possessed by some people with disordered brains. I fancied the fellow was dreaming when he declared he saw some one hiding behind those rocks to-day; but now I know he actually saw what he claimed to see.”

“Oh, I hope they don’t get that mine away from you! You have taken so much trouble to find it!”

“Don’t worry,” half laughed Merry. “If they should locate the mine ahead of me, I can stand it. I have two mines now, which are owned jointly by myself and my brother.”

“Your brother!” exclaimed Abe, in surprise. “Why, have you a brother?”

“Yes; a half-brother.”

“Where is he?”

“He is attending school far, far away in the East. I received some letters from him while you were in Denver.”

“Is he like you?”

“Well, I don’t know. In some things he seems to be like me; in others he is different.”

“He is younger?”

“Yes, several years younger.”

“Oh, I’d like to see him!” breathed Abe. “I know I’d like him. What’s his name?”

“Dick.”

“Perhaps I’ll see him some day.”

“Yes, Abe, I think you will. By and by we will go East, and I will take you to see him at Fardale. That’s where he is attending school.”

“It must be just the finest thing to go to school. I never went to school any. What do they do there, Frank?”

“Oh, they do many things, Abe. They study books which prepare them for successful careers, and they play baseball and football and take part in other sports. They have a fine gymnasium, where they exercise to develop their bodies, which need developing, as well as their brains. In some schools, Abe, the development of the body is neglected. Scholars are compelled to study in close rooms, regardless of their health and of their individual weaknesses. And many times their constitutions are wrecked so that they are unfitted to become successful men and women through the fact that they have not the energy and stamina in the battle of life, at which successes must be won.

“I don’t know that you understand all this, Abe, but many parents make sad mistakes in seeking to force too much education into the heads of their children in a brief space of time. It is not always the boy or girl who is the smartest as a boy or girl who makes the smartest and most successful man or woman. Some of the brightest and most brilliant scholars fail after leaving school. Although at school they were wonders in their classes, in after life others who were not so brilliant and promising often rise far above them.”

“I don’t know nothing about those things, Frank,” said the boy. “You seem to know all about everything. But I want you to tell me more about the school and the games they play and the things they do there.”

“Not to-night, Abe,” said Merry. “Go to sleep now. Sometime I will tell you all about it.”

Long after Merry’s regular breathing indicated that he was slumbering, little Abe lay trying to picture to himself that wonderful school, where so many boys studied, and lived, and prepared themselves for careers. It was a strange school his fancy pictured. At last he slept also, and he dreamed that he was in the school with other boys, that he was straight, and strong, and handsome, and that Dick Merriwell was his friend and companion. He dreamed that he took part in the sports and games, and was successful and admired like other lads. It was a joyful dream, and in his sleep he smiled and laughed a little. But for the poor little cripple it was a dream that could never come true.

In the night Frank was aroused by Bart, who lay down, while Merry took his place on guard outside the tent. The night was far spent when Frank awakened Wiley to take a turn at watching over the camp.

“Port your helm!” muttered the sailor thickly, as Merry shook him. “Breakers ahead! She’s going on the rocks!”

“Turn out here,” said Frank. “It’s your watch on deck!”

“What’s that?” mumbled the sailor. “Who says so? I am cap’n of this ship. I give off orders here.”

Merry seized him by the shoulders and sat him upright.

“In this instance,” declared Frank, “you’re simply the man before the mast. I am captain this voyage.”

“I deny the allegation and defy the alligator,” spluttered Wiley, waving his arms in the dark. “I never sailed before the mast.”

Frank was finally compelled to drag him bodily out of the tent, where at length Wiley became aware of his surroundings and stood yawning and rubbing his eyes.

“This is a new turn for me, mate,” he said. “It has been my custom in the past to lay in my royal bunk and listen to the slosh of bilge water and the plunging of my good ship through the billows, while others did the real work. I always put in my hardest work at resting. I can work harder at resting than any man I know of. I have a natural-born talent for it. Nevertheless, Cap’n Merriwell, I now assume my new duties. You may go below and turn in with the perfect assurance that little Walter will guard you faithfully from all harm. Though a thousand foes should menace you, I will be on hand to repel them.”

“That’s right, Wiley; keep your eyes open. There may be no danger, but you know what happened early this night.”

“Say no more,” assured Wiley. “I am the embodied spirit of active alertness. Permit rosy slumber to softly close your dewy eyes and dream sweet dreams of bliss. Talk about real poetry; there’s a sample of it for you.”

Smiling a little at the eccentricities of the sailor, Frank slipped into the tent and again rolled himself in his blanket.

Rosy dawn was smiling over the eastern peaks when Frank opened his eyes. The others were still fast asleep, and Merry wondered if Wiley had already started a fire preparatory for breakfast. It seemed singular that the sailor had not aroused them before this. Stealing softly from the tent, Merry looked around for the captain. At first he saw nothing of him, but after some minutes he discovered Wiley seated on the ground, with his back against a bowlder and with his head bowed. Approaching nearer, Frank saw the sailor was fast asleep, with a revolver clutched in his hand.

“Sleeping at your post, are you?” muttered Frank, annoyed. “Had there been enemies near, they might have crept on us while you were sleeping and murdered the whole party. You deserve to be taught a lesson.”

Making no noise, he drew nearer, keeping somewhat to one side and behind the sailor, then bent over and uttered a piercing yell in Wiley’s ear. The result was astonishing. With an answering yell, the sailor bounded into the air like a jack-in-the-box popping up. As he made that first wild, electrifying leap he began shooting. When his feet struck the ground he started to run, but continued shooting in all directions.

“Repel boarders!” he yelled. “Give it to them!”

Frank dropped down behind the bowlder to make sure that he was protected from the bullets so recklessly discharged from the cap’n’s revolver. Peering over it, he saw Wiley bound frantically down the slope toward the spring, catch his toe, spin over in the air, and plunge headlong. By a singular chance, he had tripped just before reaching the spring, and he dived into it, splashing the water in all directions. This termination of the affair was so surprising and ludicrous that Merry was convulsed with laughter. He ran quickly out, seized the sailor by the heels, and dragged him out. Wiley sat up, spluttering and gurgling and spouting water, very stupefied and very much bewildered.

This sudden commotion had brought Hodge leaping from the tent, a weapon in hand, while Abe and Worthington crawled forth in alarm.

Merry's hearty laughter awoke the echoes of the valley.

"Why do you disturb the placid peacefulness of this pellucid morning with the ponderous pyrotechnics of your palpitating pleasure?" inquired Wiley. "Did it amuse you so much to see me take my regular morning plunge? Why, I always do that. I believe in a cold bath in the morning. It's a great thing. It's a regular thing for me. I do it once a year whether I need it or not. This was my morning for plunging, so I plunged. But what was that elongated, ear-splitting vibration that pierced the tympanum of my tingling ear? Somehow I fancy I heard a slight disturbance. I was dreaming just at that moment of my fearful encounter with Chinese pirates in the Indian Ocean some several years ago. Being thus suddenly awakened, I did my best to repel boarders, and I fancy I shot a number of holes in the ambient atmosphere around here."

"You did all of that," smiled Merry. "I found it necessary to get under cover in order to be safe. Cap'n, you certainly cut a queer caper. It was better than a circus to see you jump and go scooting down the slope; and when you plunged into the spring I surely thought you were going right through to China."

"Well," said the sailor, wiping his face and hands on the tail of his coat, "that saves me the trouble of washing this morning. But I still fail to understand just how it happened."

"You were sleeping at your post."

"What? Me?"

"Yes, you."

"Impossible; I never sleep. I may occasionally lapse a little, but I never sleep."

"You were snoring."

Wiley arose, looking sad and offended.

"If I did not love you even as a brother I should feel hurt by your cruel words," he muttered, picking up an empty pistol that had fallen near the spring. "But I know you're joking."

"You just said you were dreaming, Wiley," reminded Frank. "Is this the way you are to be trusted? What if our enemies had crept upon us while you were supposed to be guarding the camp?"

"Don't speak of it!" entreated the marine marvel. "It hurts me. In case I closed my eyes by accident for a moment, I hope you will forgive me the oversight. Be sure I shall never forgive myself. Oh, but that was a lovely dream! There were seventeen pirates coming over the rail, with cutlasses, and dirks, and muskets, and cannon in their teeth, and I was just wading into them in earnest when you disturbed the engagement."

"In that dream I was simply living over again that terrible contest with the Chinese pirates in which I engaged while commanding my good ship, the *Sour Dog*. That was my first cruise in Eastern waters. The *Sour Dog* was a merchantman of nine billion tons burthen. We were loaded with indigo, and spice, and everything nice. We had started on a return voyage, and were bound southward to round the Cape of Good Hope. I had warned my faithful followers of the dangers we might encounter in the Indian Ocean, which was just literally boiling over with pirates of various kinds."

"One thing that had troubled us greatly was the fact that our good ship was overrun with rats. I set my nimble wits to work to devise a scheme of ridding us of those rats. I manufactured a number of very crafty traps, and set them where I believed they would be the most efficacious. You should have seen the way I gathered in those rats. Every morning I had thirty or forty rats in those traps, and soon I was struck with a new scheme. Knowing the value of rats in China, I decided to gather up those on board, put about, and deliver them as a special cargo at Hongkong. With this object in view, I had a huge cage manufactured on the jigger deck. In this cage I confined all the rats captured, and soon I had several hundred of them. These rats, Mr. Merriwell, saved our lives, remarkable though it may seem to you. Bear with me just a moment and I will elucidate."

“We had put about and set our course for the Sunda Islands when an unfortunate calm befell us. Now, a calm in those waters is the real thing. When it gets calm there it is so still that you can hear a man think a mile away. The tropical sun blazed down on the blazing ocean, and our sails hung as still and silent as Willie Bryan’s tongue after the last Presidential election. The heat was so intense that the tar in the caulking of the vessel bubbled and sizzled, and the deck of the *Sour Dog* was hot as a pancake griddle. Suddenly the watch aloft sent down a cry, ‘Ship, ho!’ We sighted her heaving up over the horizon and bearing straight down on us.”

“But I thought you said there was no wind,” interrupted Merry. “How could a ship come bearing down upon you with no wind to sail by?”

“It was not exactly a ship, Mr. Merriwell; we soon saw it was a Chinese junk. She was manned with a great crew of rowers, who were propelling her with long oars. We could see their oar blades flashing in the sun as they rose and fell with machine-like regularity. I seized my marine glasses and mounted aloft. Through them I surveyed the approaching craft. I confess to you, sir, that the appearance of that vessel agitated my equilibrium. I didn’t like her looks. Something told me she was a pirate.

“Unfortunately for us, we were not prepared for such an emergency. Had there been a good breeze blowing, we could have sailed away and laughed at her. As there was no breeze, we were helpless to escape. It was an awful moment. When I told my crew that she was a pirate they fell on their knees and wept and prayed. That worried me exceedingly, for up to that time they had been the most profane, unreligious set of lubbers it was ever my fortune to command. I told them in choice language just about what I thought of them; but it didn’t seem to have any effect on them. I told them that our only chance for life was to repel those pirates in some manner. I warned them to arm themselves with such weapons as they could find and to fight to the last. We didn’t have a gun on board. One fellow had a good keen knife, but even with the aid of that we seemed in a precarious predicament.

“The pirate vessel came straight on. When she was near enough, I hailed her through my speaking trumpet and asked her what she wanted. She made no answer. Soon we could see those yellow-skinned, pigtailed wretches, and every man of them was armed with deadly weapons. Having heard the fearful tales of butcheries committed by those monsters, I knew the fate in store for us unless we could repulse them somehow. Again I appealed to my men, and again I saw it was useless.

“The pirate swung alongside and fastened to us. Then those yellow fiends came swarming over the rail with their weapons in their teeth, intent on carving us up. The whole crew boarded us as one man. Just as they were about to begin their horrid work a brilliant thought flashed through my brain. I opened the rat cage and let those rats loose upon the deck. As the Chinamen saw hundreds of rats running around over the deck they uttered yells of joy and started in pursuit of them.

“When they yelled they dropped their cutlasses and knives from their teeth, and the clang of steel upon the deck was almost deafening. It was a surprising sight to see the chinks diving here and there after the rats and trying to capture them. To them those rats were far more valuable than anything they had expected to find on board. For the time being they had wholly forgotten their real object in boarding us.

“Seeing the opening offered, at the precise psychological moment I seized a cutlass and fell upon them. With my first blow I severed a pirate’s head from his body. At the same time I shouted to my crew to follow my example. They caught up the weapons the pirates had dropped, and in less time than it takes to tell it that deck ran knee-deep in Chinese gore. Even after we had attacked them in that manner they seemed so excited over those rats that they continued to chase the fleeing rodents and paid little attention to us.

“It was not more than ten minutes before I finished the last wretch of them and stood looking around at that horrible spectacle. With my own hand I had slain forty-one of those pirates. We had

wiped out the entire crew. Of course, I felt disappointed in having to lose the rats in that manner, but I decided that it should not be a loss, and straightway I began shaving the pigtails from the Chinamen's heads. We cut them off and piled them up, after which we cast the bodies overboard and washed the deck clean.

"When I arrived in New York I made a deal with a manufacturer of hair mattresses and sold out that lot of pigtails for a handsome sum. It was one of the most successful voyages of my life. When Congress heard of the wonderful things I had done in destroying the pirates, it voted me a leather medal of honor. That's the whole story, Mr. Merriwell. I was dreaming of that frightful encounter when you aroused me. Perhaps you may doubt the veracity of my narrative; but it is as true as anything I ever told you."

"I haven't a doubt of it," laughed Frank. "It seems to me that the most of your wonderful adventures are things of dreams, cap'n. According to your tell, you should have been a rich man to-day. You have had chances enough."

"That's right," nodded the sailor. "But my bountiful generosity has kept me poor. In order to get ahead in this world a fellow has to hustle. He can't become a Rockefeller or a Morgan if he's whole-souled and generous like me. I never did have any sympathy with chaps who complain that they had no chance. I fully agree with my friend, Sam Foss, who wrote some touching little lines which it would delight me to recite to you. Sam is the real thing when it comes to turning out poetry. He can oil up his machine and grind it out by the yard. Listen, and I will recite to you the touching stanzas in question."

In his own inimitable manner Wiley began to recite, and this was the poem he delivered:

"Joe Beall 'ud set upon a keg,
Down to the groc'ry store, an' throw
One leg right over t'other leg,
An' swear he'd never had a show.
'O, no,' said Joe,
'Hain't hed no show;'
Then shift his quid to t'other jaw,
An' chaw, an' chaw, an' chaw, an' chaw.

"He said he got no start in life,
Didn't get no money from his dad
The washing took in by his wife
Earned all the funds he ever had.
'O, no,' said Joe,
'Hain't hed no show;'
An' then he'd look up at the clock,
An' talk, an' talk, an' talk, an' talk.

"I've waited twenty year – let's see —
Yes, twenty-four, an' never struck,
Altho' I've sot roun' patiently,
The fust tarnation streak er luck.
'O, no,' said Joe,
'Hain't hed no show;'
Then stuck like mucilage to the spot,
An' sot, an' sot, an' sot, an' sot.

“‘I’ve come down regeler every day
For twenty years to Piper’s store;
I’ve sot here in a patient way,
Say, hain’t I, Piper?’ Piper swore.
‘I tell yer, Joe,
Yer hain’t no show;
Yer too dern patient’ – ther hull raft
Just laffed, an’ laffed, an’ laffed, an’ laffed.”

“That will about do for this morning,” laughed Frank. “We will have breakfast now.”

That day Frank set about a systematic search for some method of getting into the Enchanted Valley, as he had called it. Having broken camp and packed everything, with the entire party he set about circling the valley. It was slow and difficult work, for at points it became necessary that one or two of them should take the horses around by a détour, while the others followed the rim of the valley.

Midday had passed when at last Merry discovered a hidden cleft or fissure, like a huge crack in the rocky wall, which ran downward and seemed a possible means of reaching the valley. He had the horses brought to the head of this fissure before exploring it.

“At best, it is going to be a mighty difficult thing to get the horses down there,” said Bart.

“We may not be able to do it,” acknowledged Merry; “but I am greatly in hopes that we can get into the valley ourselves at last.”

When they had descended some distance, Frank found indications which convinced him that other parties had lately traversed that fissure. These signs were not very plain to Bart, but he relied on Merry’s judgment.

They finally reached a point from where they could see the bottom and look out into the valley.

“We can get down here ourselves, all right,” said Hodge. “What do you think about the horses?”

“It will be a ticklish job to bring them down,” acknowledged Merry; “but I am in for trying it.”

“If one of the beasts should lose his footing and take a tumble – ”

“We’d be out a horse, that’s all. We must look out that, in case such a thing happens, no one of us is carried down with the animal.”

They returned to the place where Wiley, Worthington, and little Abe were waiting. When Frank announced that they could get into the valley that way, the deranged man suddenly cried:

“There’s doom down there! Those who enter never return!”

“That fellow is a real cheerful chap!” said the sailor. “He has been making it pleasant for us while you were gone, with his joyful predictions of death and disaster.”

They gave little heed to Worthington. Making sure the packs were secure on the backs of the animals, they fully arranged their plans of descent and entered the fissure. More than an hour later they reached the valley below, having descended without the slightest mishap.

“Well, here we are,” smiled Merry. “We have found our way into the Enchanted Valley at last.”

“Never to return! Never to return!” croaked Worthington.

“It’s too late to do much exploring to-night, Merry,” said Hodge.

“It’s too late to do anything but find a good spot and pitch our tent.”

“Where had we better camp?”

After looking around, Merriwell suggested that they proceed toward the northern end of the valley, where there was timber.

“It’s up that way we saw smoke, Frank,” said Hodge.

“I know it.”

As they advanced toward the timber they came to a narrow gorge that cut for a short distance into the side of a mighty mountain. The stream which ran through the valley flowed from this gorge, and further investigation showed that it came from an opening in the mountainside itself. Beside this stream they found the dead embers of a camp fire.

“Who built it, Frank?” asked Bart, as Merry looked the ground over. “Was it Indians, do you think?”

Merriwell shook his head.

“No; it was built by white men.”

Hodge frowned.

“It makes little difference,” he said. “One is likely to be as dangerous as the other.”

“We will camp here ourselves,” decided Merry.

The animals were relieved of their packs, and they busied themselves in erecting a tent and making ready for the night. Little Abe was set to gathering wood with which to build a fire. Darkness came on ere they had completed their tasks, but they finished by the light of the fire, which crackled and gleamed beside the flowing stream.

Wiley had shown himself to be something of a cook, and on him fell the task of preparing supper. He soon had the coffeepot steaming on a bed of coals, and the aroma made them all ravenous. He made up a batter of corn meal and cooked it in a pan over the fire. This, together with the coffee and their dried beef, satisfied their hunger, and all partook heartily.

“Now,” said Wiley, as he stretched himself on the ground, “if some one had a perfect pipe which he could lend me, I would be supinely content. As it is, I shall have to be satisfied with a soothing pipe.”

He filled his pipe, lighted it, and lay puffing contentedly. Bart and Merry were talking of what the morrow might bring forth, when suddenly Worthington uttered a sharp hiss and held up his hand. Then, to the surprise of all, from some unknown point, seemingly above them, a voice burst forth in song. It was the voice of a man, and the narrow gorge echoed with the weird melody. Not one of them could tell whence the singing came.

“Where dead men roam the dark
The world is cold and chill;
You hear their voices – hark!
They cry o’er vale and hill:
‘Beware!
Take care!
For death is cold and still.’”

These were the words of the song as given by that mysterious singer. They were ominous and full of warning.

“That certainly is a soulful little ditty,” observed Wiley. “It is so hilariously funny and laughable, don’t you know?”

Frank kicked aside the blazing brands of the fire with his foot and stamped them out, plunging the place into darkness.

“That’s right,” muttered Hodge. “They might pick us off any time by the firelight.”

A hollow, blood-chilling groan sounded near at hand, and Wiley nearly collapsed from sudden fright. The groan, however, came from the lips of Worthington, who was standing straight and silent as a tree, his arms stretched above his head in a singular manner.

“The stars are going to fall!” he declared, in a sibilant whisper that was strangely piercing. “Save yourselves! Hold them off! Hold them off! If they strike you, you will be destroyed!”

“Say, Worth, old bughouse!” exclaimed Wiley, slapping the deranged man on the shoulder; “don’t ever let out another geezly groan like that! Why, my heart rose up and kicked my hair just about a foot into the air. I thought all the ghosts, and spooks, and things of the unseen world had broken loose at one break. You ought to take something for that. You need a tonic. I would recommend Lizzie Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound.”

“Keep still, can’t you!” exclaimed Hodge, in a low tone. “If we hear that voice again, I’d like to locate the point from whence it comes.”

“Oh, I will keep still if you will guarantee to muzzle Worth here,” assured the sailor.

The deranged man was silent now, and they all seemed to be listening with eager intentness.

“Why doesn’t he sing some more, Merry?” whispered Bart.

After some moments, the mysterious voice was heard again. It seemed to come from the air above them, and they distinctly heard it call a name:

“Frank!”

Merry stood perfectly still, but, in spite of himself, Bart Hodge gave a start of astonishment.

“Frank Merriwell!”

Again the voice called.

“Great Cæsar’s ghost!” panted Hodge in Merry’s ear. “Whoever it is, he knows you! He is calling your name. What do you think of that?”

“That’s not so very strange, Bart.”

“Why not?”

“Since we came into the valley, either you, or Wiley, or Abe have spoken my name so this unknown party overheard it.”

“Frank Merriwell!” distinctly spoke the mysterious voice; “come to me! You must come! You can’t escape! You buried me in the shadow of Chaves Pass! My bones lie there still; but my spirit is here calling to you!”

“Booh!” said Wiley. “I’ve had more or less dealings with spirits in my time, but never with just this kind. Now, ardent spirits and *spritis fermenti* are congenial things; but a spooky spirit is not in my line.”

“I tell you to keep still,” whispered Hodge once more.

“I am dumb as a clam,” asserted the sailor.

“Do you hear me, Frank Merriwell?” again called the mysterious voice. “I am the ghost of Benson Clark. I have returned here to guard my mine. Human hands shall never desecrate it. If you seek farther for it, you are doomed – doomed!”

At this point Worthington broke into a shriek of maniacal laughter.

“Go back to your grave!” he yelled. “No plotting there! No violence – nothing but rest!”

“Now, I tell you what, mates,” broke in Cap’n Wiley protestingly; “between spook voices and this maniac, I am on the verge of nervous prostration. If I had a bottle of Doctor Brown’s nervura, I’d drink the whole thing at one gulp.”

Having shouted the words quoted, Worthington crouched on the ground and covered his face with his hands.

“What do you think about it now?” whispered Bart in Frank’s ear. “Whoever it is, he knows about Benson Clark and his claim. He knows you buried Clark. How do you explain that?”

“I can see only one explanation,” answered Frank, in a low tone. “This man has been near enough at some time when we were speaking of Clark to overhear our words.”

“This man,” muttered Wiley. “Why, jigger it all! it claims to be an ethereal and vapid spook.”

“Don’t be a fool, Wiley!” growled Hodge. “You know as well as we do that it is not a spook.”

“You relieve me greatly by your assurance,” said the sailor. “I have never seen a spook, but once, after a protracted visit on Easy Street, I saw other things just as bad. I don’t think my nerves have gained their equilibrium.”

“What will we do about this business, Merry?” asked Hodge.

“I don’t propose to be driven away from here by any such childish trick,” answered Frank grimly. “We will not build another fire to-night, for I don’t care to take the chances of being picked off by any one shooting at us from the dark. However, we will stay right here and show this party that he cannot frighten us in such a silly manner.”

“That’s the talk!” nodded Hodge. “I am with you.”

“Don’t forget me,” interjected the sailor.

“You!” exclaimed Frank sharply. “How can we depend on a fellow who sleeps at his post when on guard?”

“It’s ever thus my little failings have counted against me!” sighed Wiley. “Those things have caused me to be vastly misunderstood. Well, it can’t be helped. If I am not permitted to take my turn of standing guard to-night, I must suffer and sleep in silence.”

Having said this in an injured and doleful manner, he retreated to the tent and flung himself on the ground.

Frank and Bart sat down near the tent, and listened and waited a long time, thinking it possible they might hear that voice once more. The silence remained undisturbed, however, save for the gurgle of the little brook which ran near at hand.

CHAPTER V. WILEY'S DISAPPEARANCE

Night passed without anything further to disturb or annoy them. The morning came bright and peaceful, and the sun shone pleasantly into the Enchanted Valley. Wiley turned out at an early hour, built the fire, and prepared the breakfast.

"Seems like I had an unpleasant dream last eve," he remarked. "These measly dreams are coming thick and fast. Night before last it was pirates; last night it was spooks. It seems to be getting worse and worse. If this thing keeps up, I will be in poor condition when the baseball season opens in the spring."

"Then you intend to play baseball again, do you, cap'n?" asked Merry.

"Intend to play it! Why, mate, I cannot help it! As long as my good right arm retains its cunning I shall continue to project the sphere through the atmosphere. To me it is a pleasure to behold a batter wildly swat the empty air as one of my marvelous curves serenely dodges his willow wand. I have thought many times that I would get a divorce from baseball and return to it no more. But each spring, as the little birds joyfully hie themselves northward from their winter pilgrimage in the Sunny South, the old-time feeling gets into my veins, and I amble forth upon the turf and disport myself upon the chalk-marked diamond. Yes, I expect to be in the game again, and when little Walter gets into the game he gets into it for keeps."

"What if some one should offer you a prominent position at a salary of ten thousand a year where you would be unable to play baseball?" inquired Merry, with a sly twinkle in his eye. "You'd have to give it up then."

"Not on your tintage!" was the prompt retort.

"What would you do?"

"I'd give up the position."

Frank laughed heartily.

"Cap'n, you're a confirmed baseball crank. But if you live your natural life, there'll come a time when your joints will stiffen, when rheumatism may come into your good arm, when your keen eye will lose its brightness, when your skill to hit a pitched ball will vanish – then what will you do?"

The sailor heaved a deep sigh.

"Don't," he sadly said, wiping his eye. "Talk to me of dreadful things – funerals, and deaths, and all that; but don't ever suggest to me that the day will dawn when little Walter will recognize the fact that he is a has-been. It fills my soul with such unutterable sadness that words fail me. However, ere that day appears I propose to daze and bewilder the staring world. Why, even with my wonderful record as a ball player, it was only last year that I failed to obtain a show on the measly little dried-up old New England League. I knew I was a hundred times better than the players given a show. I even confessed it to the managers of the different teams. Still, I didn't happen to have the proper pull, and they took on the cheap slobs who were chumps enough to play for nothing in order to get a chance to play at all.

"I knew my value, and I refused to play unless I could feel the coin of the realm tickling my palm. I rather think I opened the eyes of some of those dinky old managers. But even though Selee, McGraw, and others of the big leagues have been imploring me on their knees to play with them, I have haughtily declined. What I really desire is to get into the New England League, where I will be a star of the first magnitude. I had much rather be a big toad in a little puddle than a medium-sized toad in a big puddle. The manager who signs me for his team in the New England League will

draw a glittering prize. If I could have my old-time chum, Peckie Prescott, with me, we'd show those New England Leaguers some stunts that would curl their hair.

"Speaking of Peckie, Mr. Merriwell, reminds me that there is a boy lost to professional baseball who would be worth millions of dollars to any manager who got hold of him and gave him a show. Play ball! Why, Peckie was born to play ball! He just can't help it. He has an arm of iron, and he can throw from the plate to second base on a dead line and as quick as a bullet from a rifle. As a backstop he is a wizard. And when it comes to hitting – oh, la! la! he can average his two base hits a game off any pitcher in the New England League. To be sure, the boy is a little new and needs some coaching; but give him a show and he will be in the National or American inside of three seasons."

"Are you serious about this fellow, cap'n?" asked Frank. "I am aware that you know a real baseball player when you see him, but you have a little way of exaggerating that sometimes leads people to doubt your statements."

"Mr. Merriwell, I was never more serious in all my life. I give you my word that everything I have said of Prescott is true; but I fear, like some sweet, fragile wild-woods flower, he was born to blush unseen. I fear he will never get the show he deserves. While these dunkhead managers are scrabbling around over the country to rake up players, he remains in the modest seclusion of his home, and they fail to stumble on him. He is a retiring sort of chap, and this has prevented him from pushing himself forward."

"You should be able to push him a little yourself, cap'n."

"What! When I am turned down by the blind and deluded managers, how am I to help another? Alas! 'tis impossible! Coffee is served, Mr. Merriwell. Let's proceed to surround our breakfast and forget our misfortunes."

After breakfast Frank and Bart discussed the programme for the day. They decided to make an immediate and vigorous search for the lost mine. It was considered necessary, however, that one of the party should remain at the camp and guard their outfit. Neither Abe nor Worthington was suitable for this, and, as both Frank and Bart wished to take part in the search, Wiley seemed the only one left for the task.

"Very well," said the sailor, "I will remain. Leave me with a Winchester in my hands, and I will guarantee to protect things here with the last drop of my heroic blood."

In this manner it was settled. The sailor remained to guard the camp and the two pack horses, while the others mounted and rode away into the valley.

Late in the afternoon they returned, bringing with them a mountain goat which Merry had shot. As they came in sight of the spot where the tent had stood they were astonished to see that it was no longer there.

"Look, Frank!" cried Bart, pointing. "The tent is gone!"

"Sure enough," nodded Merriwell grimly. "It's not where we left it."

"What do you suppose has happened?"

"We will soon find out."

Not only had the tent and camping outfit disappeared, but the two pack horses were missing. Nor was Wiley to be found.

Hodge looked at Merry in blank inquiry.

"Where is this fellow we left to guard our property?" he finally exclaimed.

"You know as well as I," confessed Frank.

"As a guard over anything, he seems to be a failure."

"We can't tell what has happened to him."

"What has happened to him!" cried Bart. "Why, he has taken French leave, that's what has happened! He has stolen our horses and piked out of the valley."

Merry shook his head.

"I don't believe that, Hodge," he said. "I don't think Wiley would do such a thing."

"Then, why isn't he here?"

"He may have been attacked by enemies."

"If that had been the case, we would see some signs of the struggle. You can see for yourself that no struggle has taken place here."

"It's true," confessed Merry, "that there seem to be no indications of a struggle."

"Do you know, Frank, that I never have fully trusted that chap."

"I know, Bart, you made a serious mistake on one occasion by mistrusting him. You must remember that yourself."

"I do," confessed Hodge, reproved by Merry's words. "All the same, this disappearance is hard to explain. Our tent and outfit are gone. We're left here without provisions and without anything. In this condition it is possible we may starve."

"The condition is serious," Frank acknowledged. "At the same time, I think it possible Wiley decided this location was dangerous and transferred the camp to some other place. That's a reasonable explanation of his disappearance."

"A reasonable one perhaps; but if that had happened! he should be here on the watch for our return."

"Perhaps we have returned sooner than he expected."

"Well, what's to be done, Merry?"

"We will sit here a while and see if he doesn't turn up. At least, we can make some sort of a meal off this mountain goat."

"A mighty poor meal it will be!" muttered Hodge disgustedly.

A fire was built, however, and the mountain goat served to appease their hunger somewhat, although without salt it was far from palatable. There was plenty of feed and drink for the horses, therefore the animals did not suffer. In vain they waited for Wiley to return. Afternoon faded into nightfall and the sailor came not.

"Do you propose to remain here all night, Merry?" inquired Bart.

Frank shook his head.

"I don't think it advisable. We will find another spot."

With the gloom of night upon them, they set out, Frank in the lead. He had taken notice of a clump of thick timber in another part of the valley, and toward this he rode. In the timber they ensconced themselves and prepared to pass the night there. Worthington was strangely silent, but seemed as docile and as harmless as a child. When all preparations to spend the night in that spot were made, Frank announced to Bart that he proposed to go in search of their missing companion.

"What can you do in the night?" questioned Hodge. "You can't find him."

"Perhaps not," said Merry; "but I am going to try."

"I hate to have you do it alone."

"You must remain here to look out for Abe and Worthington."

When this was settled, Merry set out on foot. During their exploration of the valley he had observed a deep, narrow fissure near the southern extremity, into which the stream plunged before disappearing into the underground channel. To him on discovering this it had seemed a possible hiding place for any one seeking to escape observation. Something caused him to set his course toward this spot.

An hour later, from a place of concealment high up on a steep bank, Frank was peering into the fissure. What he discovered there surprised and puzzled him not a little. On a little level spot close by the stream a tent had been pitched. Before the tent a small fire was burning, and squatted around this fire were three persons who seemed to be enjoying themselves in fancied security. The moment Merry's eyes fell on two of them he recognized them as having been members of the Terrible Thirty. They were the ruffians Hank Shawmut and Kip Henry. The third person, who

seemed perfectly at his ease as he reclined on the ground and puffed at a corn-cob pipe, was Cap'n Wiley!

Was Wiley a traitor? This question, which flashed through Frank's mind, seemed answered in the affirmative by the behavior of the sailor, who was chatting on intimate terms with his new associates.

Of course Frank had decided at once that Shawmut and Henry had somehow learned of his expedition in search of Benson Clark's lost mine and had followed him. Henry's left hand was swathed in a blood-stained bandage, the sight of which convinced the watching youth that it was this fellow who had snatched the map and who afterward had been winged in the pursuit. In spite of appearances, Frank did not like to believe that Cap'n Wiley had played him false. From his position he was able to hear the conversation of the trio, and so he lay still and listened.

"We sartain is all right here fer ter-night," observed Shawmut. "We will never be disturbed any afore morning."

"Perchance you are right, mate," said the sailor; "but in the morning we must seek the seclusion of some still more secure retreat. My late associate, the only and original Frank Merriwell, will be considerable aroused over what has happened. I am positive it will agitate his equipoise to a protracted extent. My vivid imagination pictures a look of supine astonishment on his intellectual countenance when he returns and finds his whole outfit and little Walter vanished into thin, pellucid air."

Shawmut laughed hoarsely.

"I certain opine he was knocked silly," he said.

"But he is a bad man," put in Henry. "To-morrow he rakes this valley with a fine-toothed comb. And he is a heap keerless with his shooting irons. Look at this yere paw of mine. He done that, and some time I'll settle with him."

The fellow snarled the final words as he held up his bandaged hand.

"Yes," nodded the sailor, "he has a way of shooting in a most obstreperous manner. The only thing that is disturbing my mental placitude is that he may take to the war path in search of my lovely scalp."

"Confound you!" thought Frank, in great anger. "So you are a traitor, after all! Hodge was right about you. You're due for a very unpleasant settlement with me, Cap'n Wiley."

"What binds me to you with links of steel, mates," said the sailor, "is the fact that you are well supplied with that necessary article of exuberancy known to the vulgar and unpoetical as tanglefoot. Seems to me it's a long time between drinks."

"You certain must have a big thirst," observed Shawmut, as he produced a cold bottle and held it toward the sailor, who immediately arose and clutched it with both hands.

"Mates, it has been so long since I have looked a drink in the face that it seems like a total stranger to me. Excuse me while I absorb a small portion of mountain dew."

His pipe was dropped, and he wiped the mouth of the bottle with his hand after drawing the cork. He then placed the bottle to his lips and turned its bottom skyward.

"So it is for that stuff you sell your friends, is it?" thought Frank.

Having remained with his eyes closed and the bottle upturned for some moments, the sailor finally lowered it and heaved a sigh of mingled satisfaction and regret.

"My only sorrow," he said, "is that I haven't a neck as long as a giraffe's. If the giraffe should take to drink, what delight he would enjoy in feeling the ardent trickle down his oozle! Have something on me, boys."

He then returned the bottle, and the ruffians drank from it.

"There," said Wiley, picking up his pipe, "my interior anatomy glows with golden rapture. I am once more myself. Oh, booze, thou art the comforter of mankind! You cause the poor man to forget his sorrows and his misfortunes. For him you build bright castles and paint glorious pictures.

For him you remove far away the cares and troubles of life. You make him a king, even while you make him still more of a pauper. You give him at first all the joys of the world and at last the delirium tremens.

“Next to women, you are the best thing and the worst thing in this whole wide world. Mates, you see I am both a poet and a philosopher. It’s no disparagement to me, for I was born that way, and I can’t help it. Ever since my joyful boyhood days on Negro Island I have looked with a loving eye on the beauties of nature and on the extracted fluid of the corn. But what of this world’s riches has my mighty intellect and my poetic soul brought me? I am still a poor man.”

“But you won’t be long arter we diskeevers this mine,” said Shawmut. “If you sticks by us, we gives you a third share.”

“Your generosity overwhelms me. But it must not be forgotten that we yet have Frank Merriwell to dispose of. It is vain for you to try to frighten him away from this valley. Last night you attempted it with your spook trick, but it didn’t work.”

“What’s that?” exclaimed Henry. “What are you talking about?”

“Oh,” said the sailor, “you can’t deceive little Walter. We heard you doing that spook turn. But it was time wasted.”

Henry and Shawmut exchanged puzzled looks.

“You certain will have to explain what you are driving at,” growled Shawmut.

“Don’t you know?”

“None whatever.”

“I fear you are still seeking to deceive me.”

“Not a bit of it,” averred Henry. “Whatever was yer talking about, Wiley?”

“Why, last eve, after we had partaken of our repast and were disporting ourselves in comfort on the bosom of mother earth, there came through the atmosphere above us a singing voice which sang a sweet song all about dead men and such things. Afterward the voice warned us to hoist anchor, set sail, and get out of this port. It claimed to be the voice of Benson Clark, the man who first found the mine here, and who was afterward shot full of holes by some amusement-seeking redskins. I surely fancied you were concerned in that little joke, mates.”

Both the ruffians shook their heads.

“We has nothing to do with it,” denied Shawmut.

“Well, now it is indeed a deep, dark mystery,” observed the sailor. “Do you suppose, mates, that the spook of Benson Clark is lingering in this vicinity?”

“We takes no stock in spooks,” asserted Henry.

“And thus you show your deep logical sense,” slowly nodded the sailor. “I congratulate you; but the mystery of that voice is unsolved, and it continues to perplex me.”

The listening man high up on the embankment was also perplexed. If Shawmut and Henry knew nothing of the mysterious warning voice, the enigma was still unsolved. As he thought of this matter, Merry soon decided that these ruffians had spoken the truth in denying all knowledge of the affair. These men talked in the rough dialect of their kind. The unseen singer had not used that dialect; and, therefore, the mystery of the valley remained a mystery still.

Frank continued to watch and listen.

“It’s no spook we’re worried about,” declared Henry. “If we dispose of this yere Merriwell, we will be all right. With you ter help us, Wiley, we oughter do the trick.”

“Sure, sure,” agreed the sailor.

“Thar is three of us,” said Shawmut, “and that certain makes us more than a match for them. The kid and the crazy galoot don’t count. We has only Merriwell and Hodge to buck against.”

“They are quite enough, mates – quite enough,” put in the sailor. “We will have to get up early in the morning to get ahead of them.”

“This yere Merriwell certain is no tenderfoot,” agreed Shawmut.

Wiley arose and slapped the speaker on the shoulder in a friendly, familiar manner.

"Now you're talking," he nodded. "He is a bad man with a record longer than your arm. I have dealt with hundreds of them, however; and I think my colossal brain will be more than a match for him. Did you ever hear how I got the best of Bat Masterson? It's a thrilling tale. Listen and I will unfold it to you. You know Bat was the real thing. Beyond question, he was the worst bad man that ever perambulated the border. Yet I humbled him to his knees and made him beg for mercy. That was some several years ago. At that time – "

Wiley was fairly launched on one of his yarns, but at that moment Frank Merriwell heard a slight movement and attempted to turn quickly, when he was given a thrust by a powerful pair of hands, which hurled him forward from the embankment and sent him whirling down toward the tent below.

Frank struck on the tent, which served to break his fall somewhat, but he was temporarily stunned. When he recovered, he found himself bound hand and foot and his three captors surveying him by the light of the fire.

"Well, wouldn't it jar you!" exclaimed the sailor. "It was almost too easy. Why, mates, he must 'a' been up there listening to our innocent conversation, and somehow he lost his hold and took a tumble."

Shawmut laughed hoarsely.

"It was a mighty bad tumble for him," he said. "He falls right into our paws, and we has him foul. Now we're all right. Talk about luck; this is it!"

Kip Henry shook his wounded and bandaged hand before Frank's eyes.

"You did that, hang you!" he snarled. "Now you gits paid fer it!"

As the ruffian uttered these words he placed a hand on his revolver and seemed on the point of shooting the helpless captive.

"Wait a minute, mate," urged Wiley. "Let's not be too hasty. There are three of us here, and I have a sagacious opinion that any one of us will take morbid pleasure in putting Mr. Merriwell out of his misery. I propose that we draw lots to see who will do the little job."

"You seem mighty anxious to take a hand at it!" growled Henry.

"I wish to prove my readiness to stand by you through thick and thin," asserted the sailor. "In this way I shall win your absolute confidence. Should it fall on me to do this unpleasant task, you will see the job most scientifically done."

As he made this assertion Wiley laughed in a manner that seemed wholly heartless and brutal.

"I didn't think it of you, cap'n!" exclaimed Frank.

"That's all right," returned the sailor brazenly. "I'm a solicitor of fortune; I am out for the dust. These gents here have assured me that I shall have a third interest in the mine when it is located. Every bird feathers its own nest. I have a chance to feather mine, and I don't propose to lose the opportunity. If the task devolves upon me to transport you to the shining shore, rest easy in the assurance that I'll do a scientific job. I will provide you in short order with a pair of wings."

"That's the talk!" chuckled Shawmut. "How does we settle who does it?"

"Have you a pack of cards?" inquired Wiley.

"Sartin," said Shawmut, fishing in his pocket and producing a greasy pack. "We has 'em."

"Then I propose that we cut. The one who gets the lowest does the trick."

That was agreed to, and a moment later the cards had been shuffled and placed on a flat stone near the fire. Henry cut first and exposed a king.

"That lets you out," said the sailor. "I can beat that. Come ahead, Mate Shawmut."

Shawmut cut and turned up a trey.

"I reckon I'm the one," he said.

Then Wiley cut the cards and held up in the firelight a deuce!

Both Henry and Shawmut uttered exclamations.

“Well, you has your wish,” said the latter. “Now it’s up to you to go ahead with the business.” Wiley actually smiled.

“Let me take your popgun, mate,” he said, extending his hand toward Henry. “Mine is a little too small to do the trick properly.”

Henry handed over his pistol.

Wiley examined it critically, finally shaking his head.

“It’s a mighty poor gun for a man of your standing to carry, mate,” he asserted. “Perhaps you have a better one, Shawmut? Let me see.”

Shawmut also gave up his pistol.

Having a revolver in each hand, Cap’n Wiley cocked them both.

“They seem to be in good working order,” he said. “I should fancy either of them would kill a man quicker than he could wink his eye.”

“You bet your boots!” said Henry.

“That being the case,” observed Wiley, “I will now proceed to business.”

Then, to the surprise of the two ruffians, he leveled the pistols straight at them.

“Now, you double-and-twisted yeller dogs!” he cried, “if you so much as wiggle your little finger, I will perforate both of you! I have the pleasure to inform you that I am a fancy pistol shot, and I think I can soak you with about six bullets each before you can say skat.”

The astounded ruffians were taken completely by surprise.

“What in blazes does you mean?” snarled Shawmut.

“I mean business,” declared the sailor. “Did you low-born whelps think that Cap’n Wiley would go back on his old side pard, Frank Merriwell? If you fancied such a thing for the fraction of a momentous moment, you deceived yourselves most erroneously. Now you keep still where you are, for I give you my sworn statement that I will shoot at the first move either of you make.”

As Wiley said this he stepped close to Frank, beside whom he knelt, at the same time keeping the ruffians covered. He placed one of the revolvers on the ground and drew his hunting knife. With remarkable swiftness he severed the cords which held Frank helpless.

“Pick up that shooting iron, Merry,” he directed. “I rather think we have these fine chaps just where we want them.”

Frank lost no time in obeying, and the tables were completely turned on Shawmut and Henry.

“Stand up, you thugs!” ordered Merry. “Stand close together, and be careful what you do.”

Infuriated beyond measure, they obeyed, for they were in mortal terror of their lives.

“Take those ropes, Wiley, and tie their hands behind their backs,” directed Frank.

“With the greatest pleasure,” laughed the sailor. And he proceeded to do so.

When the ruffians were thus bound Merry turned to Wiley, whose hand he grasped.

“Cap’n, forgive me!” he cried. “I was mistaken in you. I couldn’t believe it possible; still, everything was against you. How did it happen?”

“A few words will clear up my seeming unworthiness,” said the sailor. “When you departed to-day I found everything calm, and peaceful, and serene about the camp, and, after smoking my pipe a while, I fell asleep beside the tent. When I awoke these fine gentlemen had me. They proceeded to tie me up to the queen’s taste. Seeing my predicament, I made no resistance. I permitted them to do just as they liked. I depended on my tongue, which has never failed me, to get me out of the predicament, I saw them gather up the outfit, pack it on the horses and prepare to remove it. During this I craftily assured them that I would gleefully embrace the opportunity to join issues with them.

“It’s needless to enter into details, but they decided that it was best to let me linger yet a while on this mundane sphere while thinking my proposition over. So I was brought thither, along with the goods and chattels, and I further succeeded in satisfying them that they could trust me. It was my object, when I found they were well supplied with corn juice, to get them both helplessly

intoxicated, after which I hoped to capture them alone and unaided. Your sudden tumble into this little nest upset my plans in that direction, but everything has worked out handsomely.”

CHAPTER VI. WILEY MEETS MISS FORTUNE

When they returned with their captives and the stolen horses and outfit to the timber in which Frank had left Hodge and the others it was learned that Worthington had disappeared. In vain they searched for him. He had slipped away without attracting Hodge's attention, and he failed to answer their calls. In the morning the search was continued. They returned to their former camping place at the head of the valley where the mysterious voice had been heard, and there Frank finally discovered some rude steps in the face of the cliff, by which he mounted to an opening which proved to be the mouth of a cave.

There were evidences that this cave had been occupied by some person. Merry saw at once that this unknown person might have been in the mouth of the cave at the time the mysterious voice was heard, and that beyond question he was the singer and the one who had warned them.

It was midday when Worthington was found. They discovered him in a thicket, locked fast in the arms of another man, whose clothes were ragged and torn, and who looked like a hermit or a wild man. The thicket in that vicinity was smashed and broken, and betrayed evidences of a fierce struggle. Worthington's hands were fastened on the stranger's throat, and both men were stone-dead.

"I know that man!" cried Merry, in astonishment. "I met him in Holbrook last spring. I told him of Benson Clark's death. He was once Clark's partner. Since that time he must have searched for Clark's mine and made his way to this valley. This explains the mystery. This explains how he knew me and knew of Benson Clark."

"Yes, that explains it," nodded Hodge. "But now, Frank – what are we to do?"

"We will give these poor fellows decent burial, and after that –"

"After that – what?"

"Shawmut and Henry must be turned over to the law. We must dispose of them as soon as possible. Then there will be plenty of time to return here and locate Benson Clark's lost mine."

And that plan was carried out. In a few days Frank Merriwell, Bart Hodge, Cap'n Wiley and little Abe rode into Prescott, Arizona, escorting their captives, whom they turned over to the officers of the law. Merry was ready to make a serious charge against the men, but, after listening to his story, the city official said:

"Better not trouble yourself about it, Mr. Merriwell. Those chaps are old offenders! They have been wanted for some time for stage robbing, horse stealing, and for the malicious murder of a man in Crown King and another in Cherry. Did you ever hear of Spike Riley?"

"Seems to me," said Frank, "I have heard of him as a bad man who was associated with the Kid Grafton gang."

"Well, sir, this chap you call Shawmut is Spike Riley. Since then little has been heard from him. I am glad to get my hands on him."

"Then I'll leave him to your gentle care," said Frank, with a smile. "You will relieve me of further bother on his part. As for Henry –"

"Henry!" laughed the official. "Why, he's got a record pretty nearly as bad as that of Riley. He is known down in Northern Mexico as one Lobo, and he has been concerned with Juan Colorado in some few raids. I think there is a reward offered for both of these men. In that case I presume you will claim it, sir."

Cap'n Wiley, who had listened with his head cocked on one side and a peculiar look in his eyes, now coughed suggestively. Frank glanced at the sailor and smiled.

"In case there is a reward, sir," he said, "it belongs to this gentleman."

As he rested a hand on Wiley's shoulder the latter threw out his chest and swelled up like a toad taking in air.

"Thanks, mate," he said. "My modesty would have prevented me from mentioning such a trifling matter."

"Oh, I will give you all the credit that's your due, cap'n," assured Merry. "You pulled me out of a bad pickle and tricked those ruffians very handsomely."

"That will do, that will do," said the sailor. "Let it go at that, Frank, old side partner. It is as natural for me to do such things as for the sweet flowers to open in the blooming spring. I never think anything about them after I do them. I never mention them to a soul. Why, if I were to relate half of the astounding things that have happened to me some people might suspect me of telling what is not strictly true. That's what binds my tongue to silence. That's why I never speak of myself. Some day my history will be written up, and I shall get great glory even though I do not collect a royalty."

"This is a pretty good thing, Merry," said Hodge. "It relieves you of all responsibility in regard to those ruffians, and you can now go about your business."

In this manner it was settled, and Frank left the two ruffians to be locked up in the Prescott jail.

Rooms were obtained at the best hotel in the place, and both Frank and Bart proceeded without delay to "spruce up." Having bathed, and shaved, and obtained clean clothes, they felt decidedly better.

It was useless for Cap'n Wiley to indulge in such needless trouble, as he regarded it.

"This is not my month to bathe," he murmured, as he sat with his feet on the sill of Frank's window and puffed leisurely at a cigar. "Besides, I am resting now. I find myself on the verge of nervous prostration, and therefore I need rest. Later I may blossom forth and take the town by surprise."

Later he did. Although he had jocosely stated that it was not his month to bathe, he indulged in such a luxury before nightfall, was shaved at a barber's shop and purchased a complete outfit of clothes at a clothing store. He even contemplated buying a silk hat, but finally gave this up when he found that silk hats of the latest style were decidedly scarce in Prescott. When he swaggered into Frank's room, where Merry and Hodge were holding a consultation, they both surveyed him in surprise.

"I am the real thing now," he declared.

"What has brought about this sudden change on your part?" questioned Frank.

"Hush!" said the sailor. "Breathe it softly. When I sat by yonder window musing on my variegated career I beheld passing on the street a charming maiden. I had not fancied there could be such a fair creature in this town. When I beheld her my being glowed. I decided that it was up to me to shed my coat of dust and grime and adorn myself. I have resolved to make my ontray into the midst of society here."

"But aren't you going back with us to the Mazatzals?" questioned Merry.

"When do you contemplate such a thing?"

"We expect to leave to-morrow."

"Why this agitated haste?"

"You know we've not definitely located Benson Clark's lost claim, although we feel certain it must be in the Enchanted Valley or in that vicinity. We're going back to prospect for that mine. If you return with us and we discover it, of course you will have an interest in it."

"Thanks for your thoughtful consideration, mate. At the same time, it seems to me that I have had about enough prospecting to do me for a while."

"Do you mean that you're not going with us?" exclaimed Hodge, in surprise. "Why, if we discover that mine it may make you rich!"

“Well, I will think the matter over with all due seriousness,” said Wiley easily. “I know you will miss my charming society if I don’t go.”

“It may be the chance of your lifetime,” said Merry.

“I’m not worrying about that. Wherever I go, Dame Fortune is bound to smile upon me. I have a mash on that old girl. She seems to like my style.”

“I think you will make a mistake, Wiley, if you don’t go,” asserted Frank.

“Possibly so; but I’ve made so many mistakes in the brief span of my legitimate life that one or two more will hardly ruffle me. If I have to confess the truth to you, that valley is to me a ghastly and turgid memory. When I think of it I seem to hear ghostly voices, and I remember Worthington raving and ranting about death and destruction, and I picture him as we discovered him in the thicket, dead in the clutch of another dead man. These things are grewsome to me, and I fain would forget them.”

“All right, cap’n,” said Frank; “you are at liberty to do as you like.”

Then he and Bart continued arranging their plans.

That evening Wiley disappeared. Frank and Bart left little Abe at the hotel and went out to “see the sights.” In the biggest gambling place of the town they found the sailor playing roulette. Wiley had a streak of luck, and he was hitting the bank hard. Around him had gathered a crowd to watch his plunging, and the coolness with which he won large sums of money commanded their admiration.

“It’s nothing, mates,” he declared – “merely nothing. When I was at Monte Carlo I won eleventeen thousand pesoses, or whatever they call them, at one turn of the wheel. Such a streak of luck caused the croupier to die of apoplexy, broke the bank, and put the Prince of Monte Carlo out of business for twenty-four hours. The next day the prince came to me and besought me to leave the island. He declared that if I played again he feared he would die in the poorhouse. As it was, he found it necessary to mortgage the Casino in order to raise skads to continue in business. To-night I am merely amusing myself. Five thousand on the red.”

“Well, what do you think of that?” asked Hodge in Frank’s ear.

“I think,” said Frank, “that it is about time for Cap’n Wiley to cash in and stop playing.”

He pushed his way through the throng and reached the sailor.

“Now is the time for you to stop,” said Frank in Wiley’s ear, speaking in a low tone, in order not to attract attention, for he knew such advice would not be relished by the proprietor and might get him into trouble.

“Never fear about me, mate,” returned the sailor serenely. “Ere morning dawns I shall own this place. Talk about your gold mines! Why, this beats them all!”

“It’s a wise man who knows when to stop,” said Frank.

“It’s a wise man who knows how to work a streak clean through to the finish,” was the retort. “I have my luck with me to-night, and the world is mine. In the morning I shall build a fence around it.”

“Red wins,” quietly announced the croupier.

“You observe how easy it is, I presume,” said Wiley, smiling. “I can’t help it. It’s as natural as breathing.”

Frank saw that it was useless to argue with the sailor, and so he and Hodge left him still playing, while they strolled through the place. There was a dance hall connected, which provided amusement for them a while, although neither danced. Barely half an hour passed before Frank, who was somewhat anxious about Wiley, returned to note how Wiley was getting along.

Luck had turned, and Wiley was losing steadily. Still he continued to bet with the same harebrained carelessness, apparently perfectly confident that his bad luck could not keep up.

“He will go broke within twenty minutes if he sticks to it, Frank,” said Hodge.

Merry nodded.

“That’s right,” he agreed; “but he won’t listen to advice. If we attempt to get him away, we will simply kick up a disturbance and find ourselves in a peck of trouble. Even if he should cash in now and quit ahead of the game, he’d come back to it and lose all he’s won. Therefore we may as well let him alone.”

They did so, and Bart’s prophecy came true. The sailor’s reckless betting lowered his pile so that it seemed to melt like dew before the sun. Finally he seemed to resolve on a grand stroke, and he bet everything before him on the red.

The little ball clicked and whirled in the whirling wheel. The spectators seemed breathless as they watched for the result of that plunge. Slower and slower grew the revolutions of the wheel. The ball spun around on its rim like a cork on the water. At length it dropped.

“He wins!” panted an excited man.

“No – see!” exclaimed another.

The ball had bobbed out of its pocket and spun on again.

“Lost!” was the cry, as it finally settled and rested securely in a pocket.

Wiley swallowed down a lump in his throat as the man behind the table raked in the wager.

“Excuse me,” said the sailor, rising. “I hope you will pardon me while I go drown myself. Can any one direct me to a tub of tanglefoot?”

As he left the table, knowing now that it would cause no disturbance, Frank grasped his arm and again advised him to leave the place.

“I admit to you,” said Wiley, “that I was mistaken when I stated that I had a mash on Dame Fortune. I have discovered that it was her daughter, Miss Fortune. Leave me – leave me to my fate! I shall now attempt to lap up all the liquids in the place, and in the morning I’ll have a large aching head.”

Frank insisted, however, and his command led Wiley reluctantly to permit them to escort him from the place.

“I might read you a lecture on the evils of gambling, cap’n,” said Merry; “but I shall not do so to-night. It strikes me that you have learned your lesson.”

“It is only one of many such lessons,” sighed the sailor. “By this time I should have them by heart, but somehow I seem to forget them. I wish to tell you a secret that I have held buried in my bosom these many years. It is this:

“Somewhere about my machinery there is a screw loose. In vain I have sought to find it. I know it is there just as well as I know that I am Cap’n Wiley. Now, you are a perfect piece of machinery, with everything tight, and firm, and well oiled, and polished. As an example you are the real thing. Perhaps to-morrow I may conclude to follow in your footsteps. Just tuck me in my little bed and leave me to dreamy slumber.”

After being left in his room, however, Wiley did not remain long in bed. Knowing they would not suspect such a thing of him, he arose, and dressed, and returned to the gambling house. When morning came he was not only broke, but he had pawned everything of value in his possession and was practically destitute.

“Well,” said Merry, having discovered the cap’n’s condition, “I presume now you will return with us to the Mazatzals?”

“No use,” was the answer; “I shall stay here in Prescott. I have my eye on a good thing. Don’t worry about me.”

It was useless to urge him, for he persisted in his determination to stay there. And so before leaving Frank made some final arrangements with him.

“I have wired for my mail to be forwarded here, Wiley,” he said. “If anything of importance comes, anything marked to be delivered in haste, I wish you would see that it reaches me. Cannot you do so?”

“Depend upon me, Frank,” assured the sailor. “I will not fail you in this. But before departing it seems to me that you should make arrangements that any such message be delivered into my hands.”

“I will do so,” said Merry. “Now, see here, cap’n, I don’t like to leave you strapped in this town. At the same time, I don’t care to let you have money of mine to gamble with. If I provide you with some loose change, will you give me your word not to use it in gambling?”

“Your generosity is almost ignoble!” exclaimed Wiley. “However, I accept it in the same manner that it is tendered. I give you my word.”

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