

Stratemeyer Edward

**The Rover Boys Down East:
or, The Struggle for the
Stanhope Fortune**



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The Rover Boys Down East; or, The Struggle for the Stanhope Fortune

INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: This is a complete story in itself, but forms the fifteenth volume of the “Rover Boys Series for Young Americans.”

Twelve years ago the line was started with the publication of the first three stories, “The Rover Boys at School,” “On the Ocean,” and “In the Jungle.” I earnestly hoped that the young people would like the tales, but never did I anticipate the tremendously enthusiastic welcome which was given to the volumes from the start, nor the steady sale, ever increasing, which has been accorded the series up to the present time. The publication of the first three books immediately called for a fourth, “The Rover Boys Out West,” and then followed yearly “On the Great Lakes,” “In Camp,” “On Land and Sea,” “On the River,” “On the Plains,” “In Southern Waters,” “On the Farm,” “On Treasure Isle,” and then “At College,” where we last left our heroes.

Dick, Tom and Sam are older than when we first made their acquaintance and told how they went to Putnam Hall. They are now college boys, attending a well-known institution of learning in the middle-west. But though older, they are as lively as ever, and Tom, at least, is just as full of fun. They have a great struggle to save the Stanhope fortune, and have to work hard to get the best of several enemies. They take a long journey Down East, and their adventures are both mysterious and exciting.

Again I take this opportunity to thank my friends, both young and old, for all the nice things they have said about my books. I am more than sorry that I cannot answer all the letters that pour in upon me from everywhere praising the stories. I earnestly hope the present volume will please all my readers and do them some good.

*Affectionately and sincerely yours,
Edward Stratemeyer*

CHAPTER I

A GAME OF BASEBALL

“Hurrah! that’s the way to do it!”

“Now, then, Tom, see if you can’t bring Dick home!”

“Give him a swift one, Frank! Don’t let him hit it!” cried Sam Rover, merrily.

“I’ll knock it down into the river!” retorted Tom Rover, as he caught up a bat and walked to the home plate.

“I’m waiting for you, Tom!” sang out Dick Rover, who had just reached second base on a beautiful drive to right field. “Come now, it’s time we tied the score.”

“Everybody in the game!” yelled Stanley Browne, who was in the coacher’s box. “Here is where we do ’em up!”

“Get ready to run, Dick!” came from Songbird Powell. “Tom is going to land it on the other side of the river.”

“If he does that I’ll walk home,” answered Dick, with a grin.

“Now then, here is where Tom misses!” called out Sam, who was behind the bat, and he thumped his fist in his catcher’s mitt. “Give him a double-ender curve, Frank.”

“Oh, I’ll give him a regular corkscrew curl,” retorted Frank Holden, who occupied the pitcher’s box. “Tom, prepare to die!” And he drew back to pitch the ball.

Eighteen of the students of Brill College were having a game of baseball on the athletic field of that institution of learning. The regular season for baseball was at an end, and the youths had fixed up their nines to suit themselves, with Dick Rover as captain of one side and Frank Holden as captain on the other. On Dick’s side were his brother Tom, and a number of their chums, while Sam was doing the catching for Frank.

It was only a friendly contest and all of the students were in the best of spirits. The main examinations for the term were practically over, and in a few days more the students were to scatter for the summer vacation.

It was the ending of the fourth inning and the score stood 6 to 4 in favor of Frank Holden’s nine. If Tom should manage to bring both Dick and himself in it would tie the score. But Tom was not known for his home-run qualities.

Frank Holden made a signal to Sam and then sent in a low, swift ball. Tom made a swing at it. But he was too slow.

“Strike one!” sang out Will Faley, the umpire. “Try it some more, Tom.”

Again the ball came in and this time Tom struck at it with all his might.

Crack! The ashen stick met the horsehide and the ball went whizzing off to the right of the home plate, in the direction of a number of students who were crossing the grounds.

“Foul!” sang out the umpire, as the sphere curved through the air.

“You can’t get it, Sam!” called out Max Spangler. “It’s too far off already!”

“Look out, you fellows!” yelled Frank, from the pitcher’s box. “If you don’t – ”

Before he could finish the crowd walking across the grounds looked up and commenced to scatter, to give Sam a chance to catch the ball, which had gone quite high in the air. But before the youngest Rover could reach the sphere down it came – straight on the fancy straw hat of a dudish youth, crushing the article over its wearer’s head.

“Whoop! there’s a strike for you, Tom!” murmured Dick.

“Do you call that knocking the ball over the river?” demanded Songbird, dryly.

“Here’s a case where a straw shows how the ball blows,” misquoted Stanley Browne.

“Hi! hi! what do you mean by smashing my hat!” roared Dudd Flockley, the student who had been thus assaulted. “Who did this, I demand to know?”

“I knocked the ball – but I didn’t aim for your hat,” answered Tom. And as Dudd Flockley held up the damaged hat he could not help but grin.

“You did it on purpose, Tom Rover!” growled the dudish student. “You needn’t deny it!”

“Nonsense, Dudd!” put in Stanley. “He wanted to make a home run – he wasn’t aiming at your hat at all.”

“I know better!” answered the other student, bitterly. “Say, Tom Rover, it’s up to you to buy me a new hat,” he added.

“All right, if that’s the way you feel about it,” answered Tom. “You get the hat and I’ll pay for it. But I didn’t smash it on purpose, Dudd.”

“That hat cost me five dollars, and I don’t know where to get one like it,” growled the dudish pupil.

“Oh, I can tell you where to get a hat like that!” piped in a drawling voice. “Try the Melrose English Shop, on Broadway. They have all styles, don’t you know?”

“Good for William Philander Tubbs!” cried Dick. “He knows the directory on straw hats.”

“Huh! Think I’m going all the way to New York for a new hat?” growled Dudd Flockley. “I want one to go home in.”

“Maybe I can lend you an old one,” suggested Tom, dryly.

“I don’t want your old hat,” growled Dudd Flockley. “I’ll get a new one – and you can foot the bill!” and he turned and walked away, his face full of sourness.

“The same old Flockley,” whispered Sam to his brother. “After all we did for him, too!”

“You beware of Dudd,” put in Songbird, who was near. “He pretends to be friendly, since you put in a good word for him to the doctor, but, just the same, he has got it in for you.”

“Play ball!” called out the umpire; and then the ball was thrown down to Frank Holden, and the game went on. Tom gave one more glance in the direction of Dudd Flockley and saw that the dudish student had stopped in his walk, turned around, and was glaring at him savagely.

To my old readers the lads who have thus far taken a part in this story will need no special introduction. But for the benefit of others who have not read the former volumes in this “Rover Boys Series,” let me state that Dick, Tom and Sam Rover were three brothers, who, when at home, lived with their father, Anderson Rover, and their Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha, on a beautiful farm called Valley Brook.

From the farm, and while their father was in Africa, the three boys had been sent to a military academy, as related in the first volume of this series, called “The Rover Boys at School.” At the school they made a large number of friends, and also a few enemies, and had “the best time ever,” as Sam expressed it.

A term at school was followed by a trip on the ocean, as set down in the second volume of this series, and then by a journey to Africa, where the boys went to locate their father, who had become a captive of the natives. After that came a trip out West, to locate a mine belonging to the Rovers, and then trips to the Great Lakes, and to the mountains, and then, returning to the school, the lads went into camp with the other cadets.

“I guess we had better settle down now,” said Dick. But this was not to be. Not much later they took a long trip on land and sea, and followed this up by a voyage on the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers on a flatboat. Then came some thrilling adventures on the plains, and a little later found the dauntless boys in Southern waters, where they solved the mystery of a deserted steam yacht.

“The farm for mine!” said Tom, after traveling north from the Gulf, and all of the boys were glad to take it easy for some weeks, and also get ready to graduate from Putnam Hall. They had an idea they were to go directly from the military school to college. But something turned up which made them change their plans.

Through Mr. Rover it was learned that a small fortune belonging to a certain Stanhope estate was missing. It had been secreted on an island of the West Indies, and it was settled that the Rovers and some of their friends should go in quest of it.

The boys were particularly anxious to locate this treasure, and with good reason. While at Putnam Hall they had made the acquaintance of Dora Stanhope and also of Nellie and Grace Laning, Dora's cousins. From the very start Dick was attracted to Dora, and now the pair were practically engaged to be married. Tom had taken a particular liking to Nellie Laning and it must be confessed that Sam was equally smitten with Grace.

It was learned that the treasure had been willed to Mr. Stanhope, and consequently, on his death, it had become part of his estate, which in turn had been willed in part to his wife and Dora, with a small share to Mrs. Laning, his sister.

"We'll get that treasure and make the girls happy," declared Dick, and how the whole crowd set off on the quest has already been told in the thirteenth volume of this series, entitled: "The Rover Boys on Treasure Isle." The treasure was also claimed by two of their enemies, Sid Merrick and his nephew, Tad Sobber, and they did all they could to gain possession of the valuables. But the treasure was at last brought safely to this country, and then it was learned that Sid Merrick had been lost at sea in a hurricane. Tad Sobber was saved, and carried on a passing vessel to England.

"And now for college!" cried all of the Rover boys, and wondered to what institution of learning they were to go.

"How would you like to go to Brill?" asked Mr. Rover. "It is a fine place, located in one of our middle-western states, and the head of it, Doctor John Wallington, is an old friend of mine."

The boys had heard that Dora, Grace and Nellie were going to an institution known as Hope Seminary, not far from the town of Ashton. As soon as they learned that Brill College was situated less than two miles from Hope they decided without hesitation to go to the institution their parent had mentioned.

"We'll be near the girls, and we ought to have lots of good times," said Tom.

"It will be our own fault if we don't," Dick had answered.

How the brothers went to Brill has already been related in the volume entitled "The Rover Boys at College." At Brill, as at Putnam Hall, they quickly made a number of friends, not the least of whom were Stanley Browne, Max Spangler, a German student, and Allen Charter, the leading senior. They also had with them their former school chums, John Powell, better known as Songbird because of his cleverness in writing and reciting doggerel, and William Philander Tubbs, a student whose entire spare time was spent in buying things to wear of the latest fashions, and in seeking the society of his young lady friends.

At Brill the Rovers soon came into contact with the dudish pupil, Dudd Flockley, and also with two bullies, Jerry Koswell and Bart Larkspur. Led by Koswell, who was a thoroughly bad egg, the three tried their best to make trouble for the Rovers, and finally succeeded. But the rascals overreached themselves, and when they were exposed Koswell and Larkspur became so frightened that they ran away from Brill and refused to return. Dudd Flockley remained, and he pleaded so earnestly to be forgiven that the Rovers finally decided to drop the case against him, and spoke a good word for him to the head of the college, and he was allowed to continue at Brill.

"I guess Flockley has learned his lesson," said Dick. But it looked as if he might be mistaken, for Flockley, as soon as he felt himself secure at Brill, acted in anything but a grateful manner. Yet he was not as assertive as he had been, for he missed the companionship and support of his former cronies.

With the fortune in their possession, and Sid Merrick dead, the Stanhopes and Lanings had felt secure of their wealth. But, returning from England, Tad Sobber had gone to a shyster lawyer, and put in a claim, and the lawyer had obtained a court injunction, restraining anybody from touching a dollar of the money. This depressed the girls greatly, and made them, for a time, leave Hope. But

in the end, the injunction was dissolved, and the Stanhopes and Lanings were told that they could do as they pleased with the fortune.

“That’s the best news yet!” Dick had said, on hearing it. “I guess that will put a spoke in Tad Sobber’s wheel.”

“It will take one out, you mean,” returned Tom, with a sly grin. “Wonder what Tad will do next?”

“He can’t do anything,” had come from Sam. “He is knocked out clean and clear. I always said he had no right to the fortune. That claim of Sid Merrick’s was a fake pure and simple.”

“I believe you,” Dick answered. “Just the same, I feel, somehow, that Tad won’t give up even yet.”

“But what can he do?” his two brothers had asked.

“I don’t know – but he’ll try to do something; see if he doesn’t.”

A few days later had come in some particulars of the case. After the injunction had been dissolved Tad Sobber and his lawyer had gotten into a big row and Sobber had ended by blackening the legal gentleman’s left eye. Then Sobber had mysteriously disappeared, but the next day he had sent a rambling letter to Mrs. Stanhope, stating that, even if thrown out of court, he considered that the fortune from Treasure Isle belonged to him, and, sooner or later, he meant to gain possession of it.

“We’ll have to watch out for Tad Sobber,” had been Dick’s comment, on learning the news. “He is growing desperate, and there is no telling what he will do next.”

“He’s the same old sneak he was at Putnam Hall,” declared Tom.

“This will scare Mrs. Stanhope, and Mrs. Laning, too,” had been Sam’s comment.

“And the girls,” his oldest brother had added. “I wish we could round Tad Sobber up, and put him where he couldn’t worry them any more.”

“Maybe he’ll drop out of sight,” said Tom. But this was not to be. Tad Sobber was to cause a great deal of trouble, as we shall learn in the near future. The young rascal had convinced himself that the Stanhope fortune belonged to him, and he meant to leave no stone unturned to get possession of it.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRE ON THE STEAMER

“That’s the way to do it!”

The cry came as Tom knocked a neat liner out to center field. He managed to get to first base with ease, while Dick, on the alert, slid to the home plate just before the ball came in.

“That gives us five runs, anyway!” was Stanley’s comment. “Now, Spud, see what you can do.”

“Here is where I knock one across the river and back,” declared Spud Jackson, as he came forward with a bat. “Better chase your men away out,” he added to Frank Holden.

“They can use nets,” answered the pitcher with a grin.

Spud had a ball and a strike called on him and then met the leather and sent it to the shortstop. Tom had to run for second and he legged it with might and main. But the ball got there ahead of him and he was put out, and so was the runner at first.

“Wow!” cried Songbird. “Thought you were going to knock the ball across the river and back, Spud.”

“So I did,” answered Spud, as he walked up from first. “It landed on the other side, bounced back, and the shortstop got it. Fierce luck, eh?” And he cut a face that made many of the students standing by laugh outright.

In the next inning the other side added two runs to their total. One of these runs was made by Sam, much to the youngest Rover’s satisfaction.

“We’ve got you going!” he cried, to his brothers and the others. “Might as well give up.”

“Huh! we haven’t started yet,” retorted Tom. He turned to William Philander Tubbs, who had strolled near. “Say, Tubby, old boy, lend me your green socks for luck, will you?”

“Oh, Tom, please don’t ask me to – ah – lend those socks,” pleaded William Philander, innocently. “They are the only pair of that shade I have, and the young ladies say – ”

“They can’t resist you when you have them on,” finished Tom. “All right, if you want me to lose the game, keep the socks,” and the fun-loving Rover put on a mournful look.

“But, my dear Tom, how can my socks have anything to do with the game?” questioned the dude, helplessly.

“Why, it’s a psychological phenomena, Tublets. Sort of an inter-mental telepathy, so to speak – a rhomboid compendium indexus, as it were. Of course you understand,” said Tom, soberly.

“Why – ah – I don’t think I do, Tom,” stammered the dude. “But I can’t loan the socks, really I can’t!” And he backed away with all possible haste, while some of the students poked each other in the ribs and some laughed outright.

“Now then, here is where we go at ’em, hammer and tongs!” cried Dick, as he walked to the plate. And he met the first ball pitched and lined a beautiful three-bagger to deep center.

“Hurrah! That’s the way to do it!” yelled Tom. “Leg it, old man, leg it!”

“We’ve struck our gait!” sang out another player. “Now, Tom, you’ve got to bring him home sure.”

Tom was on the alert and after one strike managed to send the ball down into left field. Dick came home and the batter got to second, although it was a tight squeeze.

Spud was up next, and this time his face wore a “do-or-die” look. He had two balls called on him, and then whack! his bat struck the ball and the horsehide went sailing far over the right fielder’s head.

“Say, that’s a beaut!”

“Come on in, Tom!”

“Make it a two-bagger, Spud!”

“You can get to third if you try!” yelled Dick, and Spud did try and landed in a cloud of dust on third base just a second before the ball got there.

“Now then, Wilson, bring Spud in,” said Dick, to the next fellow at the bat.

“Make it a homer and bring yourself in too, Wilson,” added Tom.

“By chimminy! Make him two home runs while you are at it alretty!” cried Max Spangler, with a broad smile. Since arriving at Brill the German American lad had become quite a baseball “fan.”

“Hi, there, you fellows!” came unexpectedly from the center fielder.

“What’s the matter?” yelled back Frank Holden, stepping out of the pitcher’s box and turning around.

“Something is wrong on the river.”

“Wrong on the river?” queried several, in a chorus.

“Yes. Don’t you hear the screaming?”

“Time!” cried the umpire, and the game came to a stop.

“Say, that *is* somebody screaming!” exclaimed Stanley. “Sounds like a girl’s voice.”

“It’s from that excursion boat!” said another student. And as he spoke he pointed to a small river steamer, gaily decorated with flags and bunting, that had appeared around a bend of the stream.

“Why, that’s the *Thistle*!” ejaculated Dick.

“The *Thistle*?” repeated Sam. “Oh, Dick, that’s the steamer the girls from Hope were going to use for their picnic up the river!”

“I know it.”

“Do you suppose Grace and Nellie and Dora are on board?”

“More than likely.”

“What’s the trouble?”

“They are yelling like Indians!” cried the center fielder. “Come on, something is wrong, sure!”

On the instant the game of baseball was forgotten, and like a drove of wild horses the college boys raced down to the edge of the river, which at this point was over a quarter of a mile wide but quite shallow. As they did this they heard the steam whistle of the *Thistle* sound out loud and long.

“That’s a call for assistance, that’s certain,” said Dick.

“Oh, I hope the girls are safe!” murmured his youngest brother.

“She’s on fire, that’s what’s the matter!” exclaimed Tom. “See the smoke coming from the cabin!”

“Fire! fire! fire!” was the cry taken up on all sides. “The steamer is on fire!”

“Why don’t they run to the dock?” asked one of the students.

“Can’t – it isn’t deep enough,” was the reply. “They are going to dredge out the channel this summer.”

“They are turning towards shore!” came, a second later, and then it could be seen that the *Thistle* had turned partly around. But the next instant the vessel ran into a mud shoal and there she stuck.

“Come on, let us get out and help those who are on board!” cried Dick, and started on a run for the college boathouse, located two hundred yards further up the shore.

The alarm was now general, and fully two score of students and several of the faculty, as well as some workmen, were running for the boathouse, to get out the rowboats and other craft usually housed there.

“Stanley, how about your gasoline launch?” questioned Dick, as they raced along the river bank.

“She’s all ready to use,” was the answer. “I had her out a little while early this morning.”

“Then I’ll go out with you in that, if you say so.”

“Sure,” was the ready response.

“Want us?” queried Tom.

“You and Sam better bring another boat,” answered Dick. “The more the better. The *Thistle* must have quite a crowd on board – if all the Hope students went on that picnic.”

“Grace said about thirty girls were going,” replied Sam. “Oh, if they get burned – ”

“They won’t wait for that – they’ll jump into the river first,” answered Tom soberly. For the time being all the fun was knocked out of him.

While talking, the boys had been busy with the boats. Stanley’s gasoline launch was pushed out, and he and Dick leaped aboard, and the latter set the flywheel going. The engine was in good running order, and soon a steady put-put! sounded out, and the craft headed for the burning steamer. But, as quick as Dick and Stanley were in their movements, Tom and Sam were equally alert, and as the launch moved away Tom and his brother scrambled into a rowboat, oars in hand, and caught fast to the power craft with a boathook.

“You can pull us as well as not,” said Tom.

“Right you are,” answered Stanley. “And the quicker both boats get to that steamer the better.”

As they drew closer to the *Thistle* they saw a volume of smoke roll up from the engine room. A barrel of oil had taken fire and the crew had found it impossible to subdue the conflagration. As yet the fire was only a small one, but there was no telling how soon it would spread, and the seminary girls on board were panic-stricken, more especially as the teacher who chanced to be with them was herself an extremely nervous person.

“Oh, girls, what shall we do?” asked Grace Laning, after the first dreadful alarm was at an end.

“Perhaps we had better jump overboard,” suggested Nellie Laning. “I don’t want to be burned alive!” And her wide-open eyes showed her terror.

“Don’t jump yet,” said Dora Stanhope, as bravely as she could.

“Oh, girls, we’ll be burned to death! I know it, I feel it!” wailed another seminary student.

“We are near Brill College,” said another. “Let us cry for help!” And then commenced the screaming that reached the players on the ball field and others near the water’s edge.

In the meantime, the captain of the steamer, aided by his men, was doing all in his power to subdue the flames. But oil when on fire is a hard thing to fight. The blaze was close to the engine room, and presently both the engineer and the firemen were driven from their posts. Then the steamer became unmanageable and drifted on the mud shoal, as already mentioned.

“We’ll have to get out the small boats,” cried the captain. But even as he spoke he knew that the small boats were of no avail, for they had not been used since the *Thistle* had been put into commission, three years before, and they were dried out, and would fill with water as soon as unshipped. Life preservers were to be had, and a few of the girls were thoughtful enough to supply themselves with these.

“Crowd her, Stanley!” cried Dick, as the launch headed straight for the burning steamer.

“I’ll give her all she will stand,” responded the owner of the launch, and he turned the lever down another notch. The revolutions of the flywheel increased, and the water was churned up in a white foam at the stern.

“Look out, back there, that you aren’t swamped!” yelled Stanley to Tom and Sam.

“We’ll look out!” was Sam’s answer. “Only hurry up, that’s all!”

As the launch and the rowboat it was towing neared the burning steamer the college students gazed eagerly at the forms on the forward deck of the *Thistle*. Nearly all of the seminary girls were still screaming, and some were waving their arms wildly.

“Help! help! help!” was the cry wafted over the water.

“We are coming!” yelled Dick. “Don’t jump overboard unless you are good swimmers!”

“Dick! Dick!” screamed Dora. “Oh, Dick!”

“Dora!” he answered.

“Oh, Tom!” came from Nellie. “Please take us off!”

“Sam, you are just in time!” added Grace.

“We’ll get you off – don’t worry!” cried Dick. “Just wait till we can bring the boats alongside and then – ”

He was interrupted by a mad yell from one of the men on the steamer.

“Hurry up and leave!” yelled the man in terror. “We can’t get at the boilers no more and I guess she is going to blow up!”

CHAPTER III

COLLEGE BOYS TO THE RESCUE

“Oh, Dick! do you think the steamer will really blow up?” gasped Sam, as the two small boats ranged up beside the larger vessel.

“Perhaps – if they can’t get at the boilers to let off steam,” was Dick’s answer. “But they ought to have safety valves.”

“Maybe the man is so excited he doesn’t know what he is talking about,” put in Tom.

Fortunately the *Thistle* was not a high boat, but broad and shallow, so the rail of the vessel was but a few feet above that of the launch and the rowboat.

“Come, Dora, and Nellie and Grace!” called out Dick. “We’ll help you down.” He turned to Stanley. “Can you hold her?”

“Sure! But what are you going to do?”

“Climb up to the rail and help them down.”

“I’ll do the same!” cried Tom. “Steady the rowboat, Sam!”

In a few seconds Dick and Tom were at the rail of the *Thistle*. All of the girls who had been out for a picnic were in a bunch, and many of them were still screaming for help. But Dora and the Laning girls were now quiet, realizing that aid was close at hand. Another gasoline launch was coming up, dragging behind it nearly every rowboat Brill possessed.

It did not take Dick long to assist Dora over the rail and into the launch, and Nellie and Grace and several other girls followed. In the meantime Sam rescued a teacher and two girls. By this time the other launch was at hand, with the additional rowboats, and in a very few minutes all of the passengers of the *Thistle* had been transferred. In the excitement one of the college boys and one of the seminary girls fell overboard, but the other Brill lads promptly came to the rescue.

“Let us land the girls on the shore and then try to save the steamer,” suggested Dick.

“That’s the talk!” cried Stanley.

“Be careful – if she is ready to blow up!” warned Spud. “I don’t want to be blown into the middle of next year!”

“She won’t blow up!” cried the captain, who was still trying to direct his men as to what to do. “Don’t you hear the steam going off?”

“Then we’ll do what we can for you,” answered several of the college youths.

One after another the small boats landed on the shore, which was but a hundred yards away.

“Sam, you stay with the girls,” said Dick to his youngest brother. “They may want you to do something for them.”

“Oh, Dick, don’t get into trouble!” begged Dora, and bent her tender eyes full upon him.

“Don’t worry, Dora.”

“And, Tom, you be careful, too,” added Nellie.

“I will, Nellie,” he answered.

Both of the gasoline launches, with eight of the college boys on board, returned to the *Thistle*. The thick smoke of the burning oil was still rolling up the companionways and hatchways. But, with the deck cleared of passengers, the crew had a better chance to fight the flames.

“Captain, what can we do?” demanded Dick, as he climbed on deck, followed by Stanley and by Allen Charter, who owned the second launch.

“I don’t know,” answered the master of the vessel, almost helplessly. “That oil burns like fury.”

“Wouldn’t sand be good for the flames?” questioned Allen.

“Yes – but I ain’t got none – that is, not more’n a shovelful or two.”

“There is sand up at the boat dock!” cried Stanley. “They are going to use it for the new garage foundation.”

“Maybe we can haul the steamer up there,” suggested another student.

“We can try it,” answered Allen Charter. “What do you say, Captain?”

“I’m willing – if you can budge her.”

“She can’t be stuck very fast,” said Tom.

The college boys got into the two launches once more, and as speedily as possible ropes were fastened to the *Thistle*. Then the launches were started up and all power was turned on. At first the big vessel refused to budge.

“Don’t seem to be making any headway,” observed Frank Holden.

“Here we go!” cried Dick, and he was right. Slowly the *Thistle* moved off the mud shoal and commenced to turn. Then as slowly the vessel followed the two launches in the direction of the dock.

“We want sand!” yelled some of the boys on board. “Get the sand ready!”

The cries were understood, and by the time the *Thistle* was brought close to the dock, fully a score of boys stood ready with boxes and pails of sand to come on board. A gangplank was thrown out, and on deck hurried the sand carriers.

“That’s the stuff!” cried the captain, and his face brightened with hope. “Just give that sand to me and the engineer. We know where to put it.”

Boxes and pails were passed over with great rapidity, and the sand was taken below and thrown on the burning oil. It was hard and dangerous work and some of the men were all but overcome. While the work was going on Doctor Wallington arrived, followed by the college janitor and some others, all carrying fire extinguishers.

“Here, use these!” cried the master of the institution, and the fire extinguishers were soon brought into play. Dick got one and Tom another and with them succeeded in putting out the flames that had reached one end of the cabin.

All of the men and the boys worked like Trojans, and before long it could be seen that they were getting the best of the conflagration. The smoke was growing thinner and only an occasional spurt of flames showed itself.

“Hurrah! we’ll have it out soon!” cried Tom, enthusiastically.

“Yes, and I’ll be mighty glad of it,” muttered the captain of the vessel.

“I hope you are insured, Captain,” said Dick.

“I am – but a fire is always a loss, anyhow.”

“That is true.”

The boys and the men continued their labors, and inside of half an hour the fire was under control. Some of the men went below to make an examination.

“It’s mostly around the boilers,” said the engineer. “It’s a great mess.”

The hands of the *Thistle* continued to labor and in a short while the last spark of fire was put out. Then a tug was telephoned for to tow the vessel down the river to the town.

In the meanwhile Dick and Tom rejoined their brother and the girls. The students from Hope, with their teacher, had been invited to make themselves at home in the reception rooms of the college, and word of the disaster to the *Thistle* had been telephoned to the seminary. Word was also sent to the town, and a large number of persons came out to learn the extent of the disaster.

“The newspapers will make a spread of this,” was Tom’s comment. “We’d better send word home that everybody is safe.”

“Yes, do!” cried Nellie. “Mamma will be so worried when she hears about it.”

“Yes, we must send word at once,” added Dora. “Mamma can’t stand any excitement. She has had more than enough lately.”

“You mean because of this affair about the fortune, I suppose,” returned Dick. “It was an outrage for Tad Sobber to hold up the money the way he did.”

“Yes, Dick, but that is not all,” answered Dora. “I was going to tell you of something else the first chance I got.” She looked around, to see if anybody else was listening.

“About what, Dora?” he questioned, quickly.

“About old Josiah Crabtree.”

“Crabtree!” exclaimed the eldest Rover boy in astonishment. “What about him.”

The person mentioned will be well remembered by my old readers. Josiah Crabtree had once been a teacher at Putnam Hall and had caused the Rover boys a good deal of trouble. When Crabtree had discovered that the widow Stanhope was holding some money in trust for Dora, and also had quite some money of her own, he had done his best to get the widow to marry him. At that time Mrs. Stanhope had been sickly and easily led, and Crabtree had exercised a sort of hypnotic influence over her and all but forced her into a marriage. But his plot had been thwarted by the Rovers, and later on, Josiah Crabtree had been caught doing something that was against the law and had been sent to prison for it.

“He has been bothering mamma again,” went on Dora.

“Been bothering your mother! How can that be, since he is in prison?”

“He is out again. It seems that while he was in prison he acted so well that some folks took pity on him and got up a petition to have him pardoned. Now he is out, and almost the first thing he did was to call on mamma.”

“What did he have to say?”

“I don’t know, exactly. But I do know that mamma was greatly frightened, almost as much so as when Tad Sobber called and said he was going to get the fortune.”

“Did your mother think that Crabtree had reformed?”

“She wasn’t sure about that. What scared her was the fact that he called at all. She expected never to see him again.”

“Why didn’t she order him to keep away? That is what she ought to do.”

“I know it. But you know how mamma is, rather weak and not wanting to make trouble for anybody. She said she wished he wouldn’t call again, and she was greatly upset.”

“Then it’s a good thing you are going home soon, Dora. You’ll have to stay with her this summer.”

“Yes, we and the Lanings are going to stay altogether.”

“I wish we were going off on another trip together, Dora,” said Dick, in a lower voice. “Wasn’t our trip to Treasure Isle great?”

“Perfectly lovely – in spite of the troubles we had,” answered the girl.

“That’s the kind of a trip I am going to take again – when we go off on our honeymoon, Dora.”

“Oh, Dick!” And Dora flushed prettily. “How can you say such things, and in a crowd! Somebody may hear you!”

“Oh, I only want you to know – ” began Dick, but just then Tom and Sam brushed up with Nellie and Grace, so the sentence was not finished. Dora gave him a meaning look and he held her arm considerably tighter than was necessary.

“Well, the picnic is off, and they are going to tow the steamer back,” explained Tom.

“And the young ladies are to be taken back to the seminary in the college carryall and carriages,” added Sam.

“What a shame!” murmured Tom innocently. “Now they are here I thought they’d stay till we went home.”

“Tom Rover! what an idea!” shrieked Nellie. “Why, we’ve got to go back for our last examination, and to pack.”

“Remember, we are to go East on the same train,” warned Dick. “Let me know just when you can start and I’ll arrange for the tickets.”

“We are to leave Hope on Wednesday,” said Grace.

“That will suit us,” answered Tom. “We might leave Tuesday afternoon, but it won’t hurt to stay here one night more.”

“It will give us time to rest up from the last day’s fun,” added Dick.

“Do you expect any fun on the last day?” questioned Dora.

“Do we?” cried Tom. “Just you wait and see, that’s all! We’ll turn old Brill inside out and upside down!” he added, with emphasis.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT FLOCKLEY HAD TO TELL

It was not long before the carryall of the college and several carriages were brought into use and in these the girls and their teacher were placed.

“We’ll see you Sunday!” called out Dick to Dora.

“Yes, we might as well go to church together,” added Sam; and so it was arranged.

“But about those messages home?” asked Nellie.

“We’ll send ’em – don’t you worry,” answered Tom. “We’ll go right down to Ashton now – on our bicycles.” And then the turnouts rolled away, and the students of Brill were left once more to themselves.

“Well, those girls can be thankful that the fire was no worse,” was Stanley’s comment.

“I reckon they are thankful,” answered Dick.

“They were mighty glad we came up with the boats,” said another student. “Some of them thanked us over and over again.”

“Huh! I don’t think the boats were needed,” muttered Dudd Flockley. “The water isn’t over two feet deep. They could have waded ashore.”

“The water is four to six feet deep and the bottom out there is soft mud!” cried Tom, “They’d either have to swim or run the risk of getting stuck in the mud!”

“Oh, Dudd is sore – because his hat was mashed,” cried another pupil.

“He’s sore because none of the girls thanked him,” added another.

“And he wasn’t thanked because he didn’t do anything,” said Spud.

“Aw! give us a rest!” muttered Flockley, and then walked away without another word.

“Say, did anybody notice William Philander Tubbs?” queried Will Faley. “He didn’t do much towards rescuing the girls, but when they got ashore he ran all the way to the college to get a whisk broom, to brush them off!”

“Hurrah for Washtub! He’s the real hero!” cried Tom. “He thinks of the truly important things!”

“It was a grand spectacle – the thick black smoke pouring from that steamer,” came from Songbird. “I – er – I helped to get the sand. But even as I worked I couldn’t help but make up a few lines. They run like this:”

“All wrapt in flames, behold our craft!
She’ll plough the main no more!
Her gallant crew may well shed tears – ”

“She’s burnt out to the core!”

finished Tom. “Only that isn’t true, for the *Thistle* wasn’t burnt to the core – in fact, the captain says she was burnt very little – thanks to the unswerving devotion of the gallant band of Brill fire-fighters who, undaunted by the terrifying perils of the horrible occasion succeeded, after almost superhuman endeavors, in quelling – ”

“Great hambones! Tom’s sprung a leak!” interrupted Sam. “Tom, put on your low speed, or you’ll run away with yourself.”

“Ha, wretch! to interrupt such a superb flow of oratory!” cried the fun-loving Rover, in assumed grieved tones.

“As if you didn’t interrupt my poetry,” came ruefully from Songbird. “The next time I – er – recite I’ll see to it that you are not around.”

“Don’t do it, Birdie, I beg of you. I wouldn’t miss your verses for a quart of freckles.”

“Ashton – and the telegraph office!” sang out Dick. “Who is going along?” And the touch of hard feelings between Tom and Songbird was forgotten. Tom knew he had no right to interrupt the would-be poet the way he did, but – well, Tom was Tom, and he couldn’t help it.

The matter was talked over, and a party of nine was made up, including the Rovers and Songbird and Stanley. Soon the lads were on the way, having received permission from Doctor Wallington to be a little late for supper.

“We’ll return home by the Carlip Road,” said Dick.

“Right you are,” added Tom. He knew this would please Songbird, for the route mentioned would take them past the Sanderson farm, and the would-be poet would have a chance to see Minnie, the farmer’s daughter, with whom Songbird had of late been quite smitten.

The messages for the Lanings and Mrs. Stanhope were soon despatched, and the Rovers also sent word to their folks, saying when they might be expected home. Then the crowd divided, and Tom, Dick, Sam and Songbird took to the road leading past the Sanderson cottage.

“Remember how we pitched into Flockley and Koswell here?” remarked Sam, as the farm came into view.

“Indeed I do,” answered Dick. He turned to Songbird. “You can ride ahead if you wish. We’ll go on slowly.”

“All right,” answered the other. “I won’t be long. I only want to leave a volume of ‘Poems of Love’ I picked up in a bookstore yesterday,” and away Songbird pedaled towards the Sanderson house.

“He’s got ’em sure,” said Sam, with a grin. “Well, Minnie is a nice girl.”

“Huh! I suppose Songbird has as much right to be soft on her as you have to be soft on Grace!” was Tom’s blunt comment.

“Not to mention you and Nellie,” retorted his younger brother.

The three Rovers rode past the house and then stopped to rest under a wide-spreading tree. Some June apples were handy, and they munched on these until Songbird reappeared, about a quarter of an hour later.

“Say, it took more than two minutes to deliver that book,” remarked Dick. “We were just getting ready to go on without you.”

“Don’t forget we want some supper,” added Sam.

“I – er – I just stopped to point out several poems of special interest,” explained Songbird. “One was on ‘Her Eyes So Blue and True.’ It’s a grand poem, and – ”

“Let me see, Miss Sanderson’s eyes are blue, aren’t they?” questioned Sam, gravely.

“I wasn’t speaking of her eyes – I meant the poem’s – that is – those spoken of in the poem,” stammered Songbird. “By the way,” he added, hastily, to hide his confusion, “I just heard strange news. Minnie and her father were down in Ashton a couple of days ago and they saw Dudd Flockley at the depot, and he was talking with Jerry Koswell and Bart Larkspur.”

“Koswell and Larkspur!” exclaimed Dick. “I didn’t think they would dare to show themselves around here.”

“Just what I thought, but Mr. Sanderson and Minnie were both sure they saw the pair. They were talking very earnestly to Flockley, as if trying to get him to do something, and Minnie says Flockley said, ‘I’ll see about it – maybe I can go.’”

“Humph! Flockley promised that he would drop Koswell and Larkspur,” said Sam.

“He’d better – if he knows where he is well off,” added Tom.

“What became of Koswell and Larkspur?” questioned Dick.

“Minnie says they took the night train for the East.”

“The through train?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then they must be a good many miles from Ashton – and I am glad of it.”

“Speaking of Flockley puts me in mind of one thing – I mustn’t forget to pay for that hat I smashed,” said Tom.

“Better see him tonight and settle up,” said Dick. “And I’ll go with you. I want to speak to Flockley,” he added, thoughtfully.

When the boys returned to the college they found their classmates just finishing supper. Professor Blackie looked at them rather severely, but Sam explained that they had permission from the Head to be late, so nothing was said further.

From one of the other students Dick and Sam learned that Flockley had gone for a walk behind the gymnasium, where a path led to the river. As soon as they had finished eating Tom got some money, and he and his brother set off to find the dudish student.

“There he is!” cried Dick, after quite a long walk, and he pointed to Dudd Flockley, seated on a rustic bench, smoking a cigarette. The student was alone, and looked to be in a thoughtful mood.

“Flockley, I want to settle with you for that hat,” said Tom, as he came up. “And let me tell you honestly that I am sorry I mashed it.”

“I think you did it on purpose,” grumbled the dudish student. “You Rovers think you can do just as you please at Brill. I suppose you’ll feel more important than ever – after that affair of the burning steamer,” he added, bitterly.

“Dudd, let Tom pay you for the hat and then let me talk to you,” said Dick, quietly. “How much did it cost?”

“Five dollars.”

“Here you are then,” came from Tom, and he passed over a five-dollar bill. “I didn’t mash it on purpose, no matter what you think.”

“All right – have your own way about it, Rover,” and Dudd pocketed the bill carelessly.

“Dudd, you met Koswell and Larkspur the other day,” went on Dick, sitting down on the rustic bench.

“Did Minnie Sanderson tell you that?”

“She told Songbird Powell and he told us.”

“Well, what of it? They came to Ashton on business – they had to get their stuff away from the college.”

“Did you meet them by accident?”

“What business is that of yours?” And Dudd Flockley’s voice grew aggressive.

“Perhaps it is none of my business, Dudd. But, just the same, I am going to talk to you about it. You know all about what happened in the past. Koswell and Larkspur are bad eggs – and if they can drag you down with them they will do it. Now, you promised to turn over a new leaf and on the strength of that we went to Doctor Wallington and persuaded him to give you another chance. It isn’t fair for you to go back on your word, and take up with Koswell and Larkspur again.”

“Are you going to tell the doctor that I met them?” asked Flockley, in alarm.

“No – at least, not for the present. But I want you to promise to drop that pair.”

“I have dropped them – that is, as much as I can.”

“Then why do you meet them?”

“I’ll tell you why!” burst out the dudish student, bitterly. “Because I can’t drop them altogether. They know everything of what happened as well as I do, and they said if I dropped them entirely – refused to help them – they would expose me to the whole world! If they should tell my folks –” Flockley did not finish, but his head sunk on his breast, and Dick and Tom understood.

“It’s too bad – a burning shame!” murmured Tom. “Flockley, I am sorry from the bottom of my heart!”

“I don’t think I would take their threats too seriously,” said Dick. “They are down and out, and, of course, very bitter. But they don’t dare to come out against you openly.”

“Yes – but they can do a whole lot of things behind my back!” groaned Dudd Flockley. “Oh, you don’t know what I have suffered since Jerry and Bart ran away! They have written me letters, and they have demanded money – ”

“Demanded money. Then they are blackmailers, Dudd!”

“Oh, they said I owed them the money on bets. But I didn’t – at least, I don’t think I did. But I had to give up. At the depot that day I gave them thirty dollars – all I could scrape up.”

“Where did they go to?”

“To New York, and from there they are going to Boston and then to some place off the coast of Maine.”

“And they wanted you to join them?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t you do it!” cried Dick, earnestly. “Don’t you do it, Dudd! Wash your hands of them and refuse to have anything more to do with them.”

“I will – if I can,” murmured Dudd Flockley. And then, as some other students approached, the talk had to come to an end.

CHAPTER V

A CELEBRATION ON THE CAMPUS

"Say, Tom, this is great!"

"What now, Sam?"

"All of us have passed the exams with credit marks."

"All of us? Are you sure?"

"Yes, I was in the classroom not five minutes ago and got the good word."

"Say, that makes me feel like dancing a jig!" cried Tom Rover, and he did a few steps on the floor of the gymnasium. "Won't the folks at home be tickled when they hear of it!"

"Dick got the highest marks of the class," went on the youngest Rover. "Stanley is next."

"Where do we come in?"

"You are seventh."

"Oh, lucky seventh!" murmured the fun-loving Rover. "It's always that way! At baseball if I do anything at all it is usually in the seventh innings."

"Don't grow superstitious, Tom."

"Where do you come in?"

"I stand fifth."

"That's splendid, Sam! Oh, come on and jig!" And Tom caught his brother by the waist and whirled him around. Over the gymnasium floor they went, to land suddenly into the form of William Philander Tubbs, who had just entered.

"Oh, I say, don't you know –" spluttered William Philander. He had the breath all but knocked out of his body.

"Excuse me, Tublets," cried Tom.

"Don't call me Tublets, please," expostulated the tall student. "And please don't run into me again."

"Oh, Sam and I were only doing a war dance," cried Tom, gaily. "We have passed our exams."

"You are very rude, don't you know?"

"It shan't occur again, Philliam Willander."

"William Philander, Tom."

"To be sure, I am glad I am sorry that I remember I forgot," answered Tom, gravely. "It shan't occur again the last time, I assure you."

"Oh, Tom, let up!" put in Dick, who had come up. "We have passed – doesn't that make you feel good?"

"And you at the head of the class, Dick! Say, if I had wings, or an aeroplane, I'd fly!"

"Come on for a last swing on the rings!" exclaimed Dick, and led the way, and soon all of the brothers were exercising on the flying rings with which the college gymnasium was equipped.

It was Monday afternoon and studies were practically at an end and all the boys had to do was to pack up their things and wait for the time to go home.

On Sunday morning the three Rovers had driven over to Hope Seminary and taken Dora and the Lanings to church. At that time it had been arranged that all should start for home on the early morning train on the following Wednesday. They would travel together as far as a place called Cartown and then separate, the girls to go on to Cedarville and the lads to journey to Oak Run, the nearest railroad station to the farm.

"Some of the fellows are going home Tuesday night," said Dick. "So if we are going to have any fun we had better have it Monday night," and so it was arranged.

The Rovers had had no further opportunity to talk to Dudd Flockley. They noticed that Flockley avoided them and seemed to be in deep thought.

"I suppose he is thinking of Koswell and Larkspur," said Dick. "Poor fellow, I feel sorry for him! I hope he doesn't let them drag him down any deeper."

"He has only himself to blame for the position he is in," said Sam. "We did what we could for him – more than most fellows would do, Dick."

"That is true, Sam."

Supper was had at the usual hour and then the students commenced to gather on the campus and down by the river. Nearly everybody was in good humor, and they sang, and made a racket generally. Bonfires were lit, and also a string of paper lanterns.

"I've got a surprise for the crowd," said Tom to Sam. "Come on and help me to wake Brill up."

"How?" questioned the younger Rover.

"I'll soon show you – come with me."

Tom led the way to a storeroom behind the gymnasium. In one corner, under some old canvas, was a box several feet long, that had come in by express.

"I had the time of my life getting this here without having it pass inspection by the Head," said Tom.

"What's in it, Tom?"

"Fireworks – a regular Fourth of July outfit – rockets, Roman candles, pinwheels, bombs, and all. I sent the order to the city a week ago."

"Good for you!" cried Sam, with a grin. "This will certainly wake up the natives."

"See if you can get Dick to help us. But be careful – I want to surprise all the rest, even Stanley."

"I'll get him," answered Sam, and hurried off.

A little later, when it was quite dark, the three Rover boys shouldered the big box and carried it to the edge of the woods beside the campus. Then they opened the box and took out the fireworks.

"Guess we'll send up a few bombs first, just to wake everybody up," said Tom.

A minute later a large-sized bomb went whistling upward in the air. It flew high over the college building, to burst with a deafening report.

"Hello, what's that?" yelled several.

"Who fired that shot?"

"Did a cannon go off?"

"It was an aerial bomb – and there goes another!" cried Allen Charter. "Somebody is celebrating in earnest."

All of the students on the campus stared at the bombs in wonder, while others came rushing from various buildings, to learn the meaning of the reports.

"Who shot off the cannon?" stormed Professor Sharp. "It's against the rules to shoot off that cannon without permission."

"It wasn't the cannon, Professor," explained Frank Holden. "It was a bomb. Somebody –"

Boom! went another bomb, and it was right over the professor's head. The professor was scared and ducked wildly.

"I want the person who is doing that –" he commenced, but got no further, for just then a big rocket went hissing through the air, to burst a second later and let fall a beautiful shower of golden rain.

"Oh, isn't that grand!"

"Say, this is something like!"

"Must be that Doctor Wallington meant to surprise us."

Far into the sky flew two more rockets, one letting fall some chains of red, white and blue and the other some strange fish-like shapes that darted hither and thither.

“This is certainly all to the merry!” murmured Stanley. “It’s as good as a Fourth of July exhibition.”

“Look at the Roman candles!” cried Max, pointing over to the woods. From among the trees three large Roman candles were sending their balls of various colors high into the air.

“This is a surprise and no mistake,” murmured Doctor Wallington, as he gazed at the fireworks.

“Didn’t you know about them, Doctor?” questioned Allen Charter.

“No. It must be the work of some students.”

“I’m going to see who is doing it!” cried Stanley, and ran for the woods, followed by a score of others.

When the crowd arrived they found Dick, Tom and Sam in the act of setting off more rockets and Roman candles.

“Say, you sure surprised us!” cried Stanley.

“It’s out of sight!” murmured Spud.

“Huh! I am sorry,” murmured Tom. “I thought it was very much in sight.”

“Oh, you know what I mean, Tom. It’s bang-up.”

“It sure is that!” cried Sam, as one of the rockets exploded with a loud report.

“Here are some packages of red lights,” said Tom. “I want every fellow here to take one and light it. Then we’ll form a procession and march around the buildings.”

“That’s the talk!” cried Stanley. “Say, if we only had a band!”

“I’ll go and git my drum,” cried Max, who chanced to own one.

“And I’ll get my bugle,” added a student who possessed such an instrument.

By the time the drum and bugle were brought the red lights were lit, and amid a general cheering the students got into line and the march around the college buildings began.

“Come on in, Dudd!” cried Dick, to Flockley, who stood looking on, and he passed over a red light which the student took rather unwillingly. “Everybody in this march!”

Around and around the buildings marched the students. William Philander Tubbs wanted to keep out of the procession, but he was caught by Sam and Tom and made to carry a flag consisting of an old red sweater tied to the handle of a broom. Other boys carried the college colors, and they added to the din with tin horns and wooden rattles.

“My! but this is disgraceful!” muttered Professor Sharp, in disgust.

“Disgraceful?” cried Doctor Wallington. “Not at all, sir. Let the young men enjoy themselves. They are doing no harm.”

“I don’t like so much noise,” snapped Asa Sharp, and retired to the college building.

“I’ve got about a dozen packs of firecrackers,” said Tom, a little later. “We mustn’t forget to shoot them off.”

“Pass ’em around, Tom!” cried Stanley, and the firecrackers were quickly distributed.

“Come on and give old Filbury a scare,” suggested Spud, and before anybody could stop him he went off after the old man who worked around the dormitories. He found Filbury on a step-ladder, fixing a lamp, and he very quietly pinned his firecrackers to the old man’s coat tail.

“What do you want, sir?” asked the old man, as he started to come down the step-ladder.

“I wanted to ask you if you knew where my baseball was,” asked Spud, innocently.

“No, I don’t know nuthing about baseballs,” growled Filbury. He sniffed the air. “Say, smells like something burning around here!” he cried. “Did any of them fireworks set fire to the buildings?”

“I guess not,” answered Spud. “But about that ball – ”

Crack! bang! crack! went a number of the firecrackers and poor Filbury leaped several feet into the air. Then he turned hastily around.

“What are you doing?” he demanded, and then a long string of the firecrackers went off, causing him to whirl first to one side and then another. He put his hands behind him. “Ouch! I’m burnt!” he screamed.

“Whoopla! that’s the way to celebrate!” roared Spud. “Nothing like having fun while you are at it!”

“I’ll ‘fun’ you!” yelled Filbury, in anger, and of a sudden he drew off his coat and commenced to chase Spud. Down the corridor went the pair. And then Filbury cast the coat with the firecrackers still exploding, at Spud’s head.

Spud ducked and the coat sailed over his head, to enter a doorway that was partly open. Then another person appeared. It was Professor Asa Sharp. He stepped on the coat and as he did so several of the firecrackers went off, one hitting him directly in the chin.

“Oh!” he screamed. “I am hit! Take those fireworks away!” And he bolted down the hallway with all the speed he could command. He ran out on a porch and then down on the campus, where Tom and Sam were bending over something on the ground.

“Look out! Run!” yelled Tom, and then he and his brother leaped back. In bewilderment Professor Asa Sharp stood still. Then a terrific explosion rent the air, and a great shower of sparks flew in all directions.

CHAPTER VI

GOOD-BYE TO BRILL

“Say, that was an explosion!”

“Who was that stood so close?”

“Was he hurt?”

These and a number of other cries and questions came from the students of Brill who had witnessed the setting off, by Tom and Sam, of the last of the fireworks.

As for the two Rover boys, they knew not what to say. Both stared helplessly for a moment at Professor Sharp.

“Hi! hi!” spluttered that individual. “Stop it! Do you want to blow me to pieces? Oh, I’m all on fire!” And, seeing that his coat had ignited from some of the sparks, he commenced to dance around in terror.

“Here – wait, Professor!” called out Tom. “Let me knock out that fire!” And he began to beat out the flames with his hands.

“Don’t – don’t hit me so hard, Rover!” snarled the professor, for in his excitement Tom was pounding away harder than intended. Sam also came forward to put out the sparks, and so did Dick and some others.

“Here, give me that broom, Tubbs!” cried the eldest Rover, and catching the article, Dick whipped off the red sweater and then used the broom to sweep from Asa Sharp what was left of the fire.

In a few seconds more the danger was over. In the meanwhile a big crowd commenced to collect around the instructor and those who had set off the fireworks.

“This is an outrage!” fumed Professor Sharp. “An outrage! I’ll have the law on you for it!” And he glared savagely at Tom and Sam.

“I don’t see how you can blame us, sir,” answered Tom, stoutly. “We were just setting off the fireworks when you ran right into the midst of them.”

“Nonsense! nonsense! You did it on purpose!”

“You certainly ran right into the things, just as we had lit them,” said Sam. “I don’t see how you can blame us for that.”

“You’ll see! I shall report to Doctor Wallington at once!” stormed Asa Sharp, and hurried off with his face drawn down in sour determination.

“Phew! I guess we are in hot water, Tom!” whispered Sam.

“I don’t see how he can blame us, Sam.”

“Well, in one way, we had no right to set off the fireworks.”

“Indeed! And why not, on the last day of the term, I’d like to know? The doctor saw us, and he didn’t say anything about stopping.”

“I really think it was Professor Sharp’s fault,” said Allen Charter, who had been standing near. “He certainly ran right into the midst of the lighted fireworks. I saw him do it.”

“Will you say a word for us, Charter, if we are reported to the Head?” asked Tom.

“Certainly.”

“And so will I,” added Stanley.

“And I – if you won’t make me carry that horrid broom any longer,” lisped William Philander Tubbs.

“Say, I guess I’m as much to blame as anybody!” came from Spud, who had followed Asa Sharp from the college building. And then he told of what had happened between himself, Filbury and the instructor.

“I doubt if you hear any more about it,” said Charter. And he was practically right. The subject was barely mentioned by Doctor Wallington, and neither Tom nor Sam were censured for what had occurred. And that was fair, for the Rover boys had really not been to blame.

Later in the evening the college boys had something of a feast. A number had “chipped in” and bought some soda water, ginger ale, ice-cream and cake in Ashton, and the improvised feast was held in the boathouse, which was strung with lanterns. Several of the students made speeches, others sang, and Songbird was called on to recite an original poem, a request that pleased him greatly.

“Say, boys, Brill is a great place after all!” remarked Dick, when he and his brothers were retiring for the night “At first I thought I shouldn’t like it quite as well as dear old Putnam Hall, but I am gradually changing my mind.”

“This place grows on one,” returned Tom. “I suppose by the time we finish up here we’ll hate to leave, just as we hated to leave old Putnam.”

“Well, we won’t be college boys so very long,” remarked Sam. “Almost before you know it, we’ll be men and out in the world of business.”

“And settled down, maybe, with a family of children to support,” added Tom, with a grin.

After the strenuous times of the evening before, the Rovers were glad to take it easy on Tuesday. They finished the last of their packing and Tom played a last joke on William Philander Tubbs by placing in the trunk of the fastidious student a pair of old overalls and three old farm hats found in the barn of Brill. They were hidden in the middle of the dude’s things, and he locked up the trunk without discovering them.

“I hope he unpacks that trunk when the ladies are around,” said Tom. “Then he can show ’em how he used to play farm hand, and wear three big straw hats at a time.”

“It’s too bad to part!” sighed Songbird. “Wish we were all going on another treasure hunt!” And then he commenced to warble softly:

“I love to sail the briny deep!
The briny deep for me!
I love to watch the sunlit waves
That brighten up the sea!
I love to listen to the wind
That fills the snowy sails!
I love to roam around the deck – ”

“And eat the fishes’ tails!”

interrupted Tom. And then he went on:

“I love to swim upon the sand,
And dance upon the brine,
And write my name in salty waves,
And hope for dinner time
To come, so I can eat my fill
Of sea-foam snaps and cream;
And stand upon the quarter-deck
A halfback of the team!”

“Humph! do you call that poetry?” snorted Songbird. “It sounds as much like it as a dog’s bark sounds like a hymn!”

“Well, it would be a ‘him’ if he was a gentleman dog!” retorted Tom, and then Songbird turned away in momentary disgust. But soon his good humor returned and Tom and the others allowed him to “spout poetry” to his heart’s content.

It had been arranged that the Rovers, Dora, and the Laning girls should meet at the Ashton depot, and it is needless to say that the three boys were on time. They were alone, for Songbird and Stanley and some of their other chums were going to take different trains.

“Don’t forget to let me hear from you this summer!” said Songbird, on parting.

“Oh, we’ll be sure to write,” answered Dick. “Come and see me – if you get anywhere near my home,” said Stanley.

“We’ll remember that,” returned Tom.

The boys were taken to Ashton depot in an automobile belonging to the college. Their trunks and dress-suit cases had preceded them, and as soon as they arrived they had their baggage checked straight through to Oak Run.

“I see the girls’ trunks,” announced Sam, who had been looking the pile of baggage over. “We could get them checked, too, if we had their tickets.”

“Wonder where the girls are?” came from Tom, as he looked at his watch.

“How much time, Tom?”

“Ten minutes yet – and this train will most likely be late.”

Rather impatiently the Rover boys walked up and down the platform. Presently they saw one of the Hope carryalls coming and went to meet it.

“They aren’t in that,” cried Sam, disappointedly.

“Another carriage coming from Hope?” queried Tom, of the carryall driver.

“Two of ‘em,” was the reply.

The second carriage arrived a minute later. It contained six girls and among them was Grace.

“Dora and Nellie are in the last carriage,” announced the younger Laning girl. “I came on ahead to get the trunks and bags checked.”

“We’ll do that,” answered Sam promptly. “Got the railroad tickets?”

“Yes, here they are,” and Grace handed the tickets over.

It took several minutes to check the baggage, for the agent was busy, and all of the Rovers gave a hand in shifting the heavy trunks out to a place close to the tracks. Then Dick looked at his watch.

“Time for the train now,” he announced. “Wonder why that carriage doesn’t get here?”

“Dick is getting nervous,” said Sam, with a wink.

“Oh, you are all right – with Grace here,” retorted his brother.

Tom had gone up to a bend of the road to take a look. Now he came back with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Nothing but a farm wagon in sight,” he announced. “And the horses are kicking up such a dust I can’t see behind it.”

“Oh, Tom, is it time for the train?” asked Grace, anxiously.

“It’s three minutes past the time,” answered Dick.

“Maybe the train is a good deal late,” said Sam, hopefully. “I’ll ask the agent.”

He went off and in the meantime the others continued to watch the country road leading to the railroad station. All they could see was a cloud of dust that betokened the coming of a big farm wagon, on the front seat of which sat an old farmer.

“The train is coming!” cried Sam in dismay, on returning. “The agent says it will be here in about two minutes.”

“Two minutes!” burst out Dick and Tom.

“Oh, they’ll get left!” moaned Grace. “What shall we do? I can’t go home alone! And I’ve got their tickets!”

“Perhaps the agent will hold the train a bit,” suggested Dick.

“I hear the train now!” cried Sam, as a distant whistle sounded through the air. A moment later they saw the cars, making a broad curve around the distant hills.

Dick ran to the man who sold tickets and looked after the baggage.

“Say, we are waiting for some more passengers – some young ladies from Hope Seminary,” he explained. “Can’t you hold the train till they come?”

“Not much!” was the sharp answer. “The train is late already, and orders are to make as short a stop as possible.”

“They are coming!” yelled Tom. “I see them away down the road!”

“Oh, call to them to hurry!” burst out Grace.

“They can’t hear me,” answered Tom. “They are coming as fast as the team can go.”

“Won’t you hold the train just a couple of minutes?” pleaded Dick.

“No, sir!” And the agent spoke with a positive snap in his voice.

Dick looked across the tracks. The farm wagon had come up, and on the seat he recognized the fat and jolly Mr. Sanderson, the father of the girl they had once saved from the annoyances of Dudd Flockley and Jerry Koswell.

“I’ll get Mr. Sanderson to do the trick for me!” he muttered to himself, and ran to where the farm wagon had come to a halt.

CHAPTER VII

DREAMS OF YOUTH

“Mr. Sanderson!”

“Why, if it ain’t Mr. Rover!” cried the old farmer. “Glad to see ye! Bound fer hum, I suppose?”

“Yes.” Dick stepped close to the old farmer’s side. “Mr. Sanderson do you want to do me a great big favor and do it quick?” he went on, earnestly.

“O’ course. Wot is it?”

“Do you see that train coming?”

“Well, as my eyesight is putty good, I do,” and the old farmer chuckled.

“And do you see that carriage on the road?”

“Yes – it’s one of them turnouts from the gals’ school.”

“Some of our friends are in that carriage and I want to hold that train till they get here,” continued Dick, quickly. “The station agent won’t hold the train for me – so I want you to do it.”

“Me? I ain’t got nuthin’ to do with the railroad.”

“I know that. But you can hold the train, nevertheless. The train will stop just below this crossing – it always does. When it is about ready to start you drive on the track – and then your horse balks, see? You try to start him but he won’t start. You fuss and pull, but the horse don’t budge until those young ladies are on the train.”

“By gum! I’ll do it!” exclaimed the fat farmer, with a twinkle in his eyes. “This hoss is jest the one to balk, too.”

“I can depend on you?”

“You kin, Mr. Rover.”

“Thank you a thousand times!” returned Dick; and then he went off to rejoin his brothers and Grace.

The train had already rolled in and passengers were getting off and on, and the agent was loading on the trunks and handbags.

“Oh, if they would only hurry!” cried Grace.

“You can get aboard,” said Dick. “This train won’t leave just yet.”

“But it is going to go before they get here,” declared Sam. “It’s a shame! Two minutes more would fix it – and they could hold the train as well as not.”

“All aboard!” sang out the conductor, as the last of the baggage disappeared into the baggage car.

Dick looked ahead. Mr. Sanderson’s farm wagon had just started to cross the tracks. He was sawing on the reins and the horse was acting in a strange manner, not knowing what to make of it. He turned part way around and faced the locomotive.

“G’lang!” sang out the old farmer. “Consarn ye! What’s the matter of ye, Franky?”

“Oh, Dick, he’ll be killed!” burst out Sam, in horror.

“Looks as if the horse wanted to climb over the engine,” came from Tom.

“It’s all right,” answered the elder Rover boy in a whisper. “The engineer sees him and won’t start the train. Mr. Sanderson is doing it on purpose.”

“On purpose?” came from Sam and Tom, and then of a sudden they understood, and both had to turn away to hide the grins that broke out on their faces.

“Go ahead!” cried the conductor, and then he saw the trouble and ran forward to watch proceedings.

From the antics of the horse in front of the locomotive, the Rover boys turned their attention to the carriage that was approaching. As it came closer they saw Dora and Nellie waving their hands frantically.

“Wait! Wait for us!” cried out Dora, and as the carriage came to a stop she leaped out, followed by Nellie and the other girl students.

“Just in time!” sang out Dick, loudly. “Come on, here is our car!”

“Oh, what made you so late?” asked Grace. “We have been worried to death about you.”

“One of the girls forgot her pocketbook and we had to drive back for it,” explained Nellie. “Oh, we thought sure we would miss the train, when we saw it stop. We were so far off.”

“I’ll explain why you caught it later on,” whispered Dick. “Now excuse me a moment,” and he ran towards the locomotive.

A crowd had commenced to collect, and several folks were offering Mr. Sanderson advice. But though he seemed to try his best, his horse and wagon remained in front of the train.

“Here, let me aid you, Mr. Sanderson,” cried Dick, and gave the farmer the wink. “It’s all right,” he added, in a whisper. “I’m your friend for life after this.”

“Glad to be of service,” answered the old farmer, in an equally low tone. “G’lang, Franky!” he roared suddenly, and touched the horse with his whip. At once the animal turned partly around and ran off the tracks and down the country road as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

“Confound that fool nag!” muttered the conductor of the train, as he consulted his watch. “Here we’ve lost six minutes more. Tom, can you make it up?”

“I can try,” answered the engineer.

“All right! Let her go!” And Dick and the other passengers who had gone forward hopped on the train in a hurry, and the conductor followed. The train official did not suspect that the “blockading” had been done purposely, and Dick did not enlighten him.

The Rovers had secured seats for the girls and themselves in one of the parlor cars, and all were together. As the train rolled onward Dick related the particulars of the trick that had been played with the aid of Mr. Sanderson.

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