

ON GUARD



LIEUT. FREDERICK GARRISON

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Cadet Mallory received a letter from a friend.

"Cadet Mallory received a letter from a friend." (See [page 7](#))

ON GUARD OR MARK MALLORY'S CELEBRATION

BY
LIEUT. FREDERICK GARRISON, U. S. A.

AUTHOR OF
"Off for West Point," "A West Point Treasure," "A
Cadet's Honor," etc.

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On Guard

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ON GUARD.

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER FROM A "FURLOUGH MAN."

"A letter for me, did you say?"

The speaker was a tall, handsome lad, a plebe at the West Point Military Academy. At the moment he was gazing inquiringly out of the tent door at a small orderly.

The boy handed him an envelope, and the other glanced at it.

"Cadet Mark Mallory, West Point, N. Y.," was the address.

"I guess that's for me," he said. "Thank you. Hello in there, Texas! Here's a letter from Wicks Merritt."

This last remark was addressed to another cadet in the tent. "Texas," officially known as Jeremiah Powers, a tall, rather stoop-shouldered youth, with a bronzed skin and a pair of shining gray eyes, appeared in the doorway and watched his friend with interest while he read.

"What does he say, Mark?" he inquired, when the latter finished.

"Lots," responded Mark. "Lots that'll interest our crowd. They ought to be through sprucing up by this time, so bring 'em over here and I'll read it."

"Sprucing up" is West Point for the morning house-cleaning in the summer camp. A half hour is allowed to it immediately after breakfast, and it is followed by "the A. M. inspection."

In response to Mark's suggestion, Texas slipped over to the tent in back of theirs in "B Company" Street, and called its three occupants. They came over and joined those in Mark's tent; and then Mark took out the letter he had just received.

"I've got something here," said he, "that I think ought to interest all of us. I guess I'll have time to read it before inspection. We are a secret society, aren't we?"

"That's what we are," assented the other six.

"But what's that got to do with it?" added Texas.

"And we've banded ourselves together for the purpose of preventing the yearlings from hazing us?" continued Mark, without noticing his friend's inquiry. "Well, it seems that they've been doing about the same thing down at Annapolis, too. This is from Wicks Merritt, a second class cadet up here, who's home on furlough this summer. He took a trip to Annapolis, and this is what he says. Listen very dutifully now, and don't get impatient:

"DEAR MALLORY: I have heard a lot about you since the last time I wrote. Several of the fellows have written to me, and they haven't been able to mention anything but you. They tell me you are kicking up a fine old fuss in West Point during my absence. They say that you won't let anybody haze you. They say that you've gotten a lot of plebes around you to back you up, and that the yearlings are half wild in consequence.

"I don't know what to make of you. You always were an extraordinary genius, and I suppose you have to do things in your own sweet way, whether it's rescuing ferryboats or sailboats or express trains, or else locking us yearlings in ice houses. I cannot imagine what will be the end of the matter. I am sure the yearlings will never give in.

"I'm told that when they tried to lick you into submission you did up Billy Williams, the best fighter in the class. Also that Bull Harris, whom I warned you against as being a sneaky fellow, tried to get you dismissed by skinning you on demerits, but that you circumvented that. Also that you and your friends have made it hot for him ever since, upon which fact I congratulate you.

"I don't know what the yearlings will do next, but I imagine that they're 'stalled.' Since you've started, I suppose the best thing for you to do is to keep up the good work and not let them rest. But for Heaven's sake, don't let any of them see this! They'd cut me for aiding and abetting a plebe rebellion. You are certainly the boldest plebe that every struck West Point; nobody in our class ever dared to do what you've done.

"It seems, though, that you have imitators, or else that you are imitating somebody. Down here at Annapolis this year pretty much the same state of affairs is going on just now. There's a plebe down here by the name of Clif Faraday (I've met him, and I told him about you), and he's raising the very old boy with the third class fellows. It seems that he outwitted them in all their hazing schemes, and has got them guessing at what he'll do next, which is about

as B. J. as anything you ever did, I imagine. It looks as if plebes both at West Point and here would get off with almost no hazing this year. And it's all on account of you, too.

"Genius knows no precedent, they say. Farewell.

"Your friend,
"WICKS MERRITT.

"P. S.—They tell me you've saved the life of Judge Fuller's daughter. Just take a word of advice—make the most of your opportunity! She's the prettiest girl around the place, and the nicest, too, and she has half the corps wild over her. If you can make friends with her, I think the yearlings would stop hazing you at her command."

Mark finished the reading of the letter and gazed at his comrades, smiling.

"You see," he said, "our fame has spread even to Annapolis. Gentlemen, I propose three cheers for our crowd!"

"An' three fo' Clif Faraday!" cried Texas.

"Only don't give any of them," added Mark, "for somebody might hear us."

There was a moment's pause after that, broken by a protest from one of the Seven, Joseph Smith, of Indianapolis, popularly known as "Indian," a fat, gullible youth, who was the laughingstock of the post.

"I tell you," said he, his round eyes swelling with indignation, "I don't think what Clif Faraday did was a bit more B. J. than some of our tricks!" (B. J. is West Point dialect for "fresh.")

"That's what I say, too, b'gee!" chimed in another, a handsome, merry-eyed chap with a happy faculty of putting every one in a good humor when he laughed.

"Just look at how Mark shut two of 'em up in an ice house. Or look at how, when they took Indian off to the observatory to haze him, b'gee, we made 'em think the place was afire and had 'em all scared to death, and the fire battalion turning out besides. Now, b'gee, I want to know where you can beat that!"

And his sentiment was echoed with approval by the remainder of those present. The seven had by this time scattered themselves about the tent in picturesque and characteristic attitudes, listening to the discussion carried on by the excitable

Master Dewey.

First of all and foremost was the grave and learned "Parson," the Boston geologist. The Parson was stretched on his back in one corner with nothing but his long, bony shanks visible. Somehow or other Parson Stanard always managed to keep those legs of his with their covering of pale green socks the most conspicuous thing about him.

Sitting erect and stately on the locker, was Master Chauncey, the "dude" of the party. A few weeks of West Point had already worked wonders with Chauncey; his aristocratic friends on Fifth Avenue would scarcely have known him. In the first place, he, with the rest of the plebes, were compelled to walk, whenever they went abroad, with "head erect, chest out, eyes to the front, little fingers on the seams of the trousers, palms outward." Try this and you will find, as Chauncey was finding, that it is hard to do that and at the same time keep up the correct London "stoop." Chauncey had been obliged to leave his cane and monocle behind him also, and a few days later, when plebe fatigue uniforms were donned, his imported clothes and high collar went by the board, too.

But Chauncey still clung to his accent, "bah Jove;" and was still known to the seven as "the man with a tutor and a hyphen"—his name being Mount-Bonsall, if you please—and to the rest of the corps as the dude who most did up six yearlings.

The corner opposite the Parson's contained the dozing figure of Methusalem Zebediah Chelvers, the "farmer" from Kansas, popularly known as "Sleepy."

Sleepy never did anything or said anything unless he had to; the seven had known him for weeks now, and knew no more about him than at the start. Sleepy was still sleepy, and that was all.

The other members of this bold and desperate secret "anti-hazing" society were Dewey, the prize story-teller of the party, "b'gee;" Indian, the "prize pig;" Texas, a wild and woolly cowboy just from the plains, with a right arm that had paralyzed four cadets in as many minutes, and, last of all, Mark Mallory, the leader.

"Just look at the things we've done, b'gee!" continued Dewey. "Look at the times they've tried to haze us and we've outwitted them! See how we had the nerve to yank 'em out of bed the other night, b'gee. Or, if that isn't enough, just think of Bull Harris."

This last remark was greeted with a chuckle of laughter from the seven, in which even Sleepy found sufficient energy to join. And, indeed, the recollection was enough to make one laugh.

As readers of the first books in this series, "Off for West Point" and "A Cadet's Honor," know, Bull Harris was the sworn enemy of the seven, and of Mark in particular. He never had ceased plotting in his mean, cowardly way to get Mark into trouble, and it was the joy of the plebes' lives to outwit him. On the day previous they had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Given a bloodhound that had been sent out from a neighboring village to trail a burglar who had stepped into a barrel of pitch, the seven had put pitch on Bull Harris' shoe and started the dog after him during the evening's dress parade. The dog had chewed Bull's trousers to ribbons, had broken up the parade, had made Bull the laughingstock of the place and earned him the deathless nickname of "Bull, the Burglar." Naturally, Bull was wild with rage, and the seven with hilarity.

They were still chuckling over it and the general discomfiture of the yearling class and their own future prospects as triumphant plebes, when inspection put an end to the discussion and scattered the crowd.

"But just you keep in mind," was Dewey's parting declaration, "that we're the B. J.-est plebes that ever were, are, will be or can be. And, b'gee, we're going to show it every day, too!"

Which the Parson punctuated with a solemn "Yea, by Zeus!"

CHAPTER II.

MARK'S IDEA.

The yearling corporal who did the inspecting had done his criticising and gone his way, leaving four of the seven in their tent—Mark, Texas, the Parson and Sleepy—who, being the tallest, had been assigned to Company A. And the four sat down to await the signal to "fall in" for drill.

"I reckon, Mark," said Texas, meditatively surveying his new uniform in the looking-glass. "I reckon that we fellows kin say that hazing's most over now."

"Assuredly!" said the Parson, gravely, "for indeed we have completely broken the spirit of the enemy, and he knows not which way to turn. I think that, in words of the song of Miriam, we may say:

"'Sing, for the sword of the tyrant is broken!
His chariots and horsemen are rent in twain.'

"Yea, by Zeus!"

The Parson said this with his usual classic solemnity. Mark smiled to himself as he sat down upon the locker and gazed at his friends.

"I've got something to tell you fellows," said he. "I think now's about as good a time as any. I haven't said anything about it to the crowd yet. When I do they'll have their eyes opened, and realize that if we're going to subdue the yearlings, we've got to start right at it all over again. We've scarcely begun yet."

The three others looked at him in surprise; Texas rubbed his hands gleefully, seeing that Mark's statement, if true, meant lots more fun for the future.

"You remember last night," Mark continued, "about midnight, how the Parson shouted out in his sleep and woke the whole camp?"

"Yes," added Texas, "and scared me to death. I thought I was down home and the ole place was being run in by rustlers or somethin'."

"You met me at the door of the tent," Mark went on. "I didn't tell you where I'd been; I'll tell you now. Last night a dozen or two of the yearlings took me out of camp—they surprised me, and held me so that I couldn't move. They tied me to a tree, and were just on the point of beating me."

"What!"

The three were staring at Mark in unutterable amazement.

"Yes," said Mark. "They told me I'd either have to promise to be a milk-and-water plebe after this or else be licked until I would. And Bull Harris took a big rope and——"

"Did he hit ye?" cried Texas, springing to his feet excitedly. "Wow! I'll go out an' I'll——"

"Sit down!" said Mark. "He didn't hit me, for the Parson yelled just then and scared 'em all back to camp. And you needn't tackle Bull anyhow, for I'm going to do that myself pretty soon. The point just now is that the yearlings haven't given up. They're still fighting."

"I didn't know there were so many cowards in the place!" muttered Texas.

"They're desperate," said Mark. "They've got to do something. Now we'll watch out for such surprises the next time, and meanwhile we'll show them that we're determined not to stop."

And Mark saw by the faces of the other three that that was just what they wanted. Texas especially was twitching his fingers nervously and looking as if he were wishing for some yearling to tackle right then and there.

"I tell you what we'll do, Mark," he broke out, suddenly. "We'll tie ourselves together an' sleep that way, an' then if they take one they'll have to take all."

"That's quite an idea," said the other, laughing. "But the main point now is just this: We're to set out with only one idea in our heads to think of; perhaps it might be well to offer a prize to the fellow who thinks of the best scheme. We want to keep those cadets fairly on the jump from the start."

"Bully!" cried Texas.

"And it seems to me, moreover," continued the leader, "that we make a big mistake if we let this day pass without doing something."

"Yea, by Zeus!" vowed the Parson, his solemn face glowing with interest. "For this day is the day of all days in the calendar of Freedom. This day is the day when our immortal colonies did vow and declare that the dragon of tyranny they would trample beneath their feet. This day is the day when first the eagle screamed, when humanity cast off its fetters and stood in the light of God's truth. This day is the glorious Fourth of July!"

The Parson had arisen to his feet, the better to illustrate the casting off of the fetters, and his long black hair was waving wildly and his long white arms yet more so. Boston and Boston "liberty" were dangerous topics with him; he got more excited over them than he did when he found his immortal cyathophylloid coral "in a sandstone of Tertiary origin."

"Yea, by Zeus!" he continued. "Such are the auspices, the hallowed recollections of this immortal moment that I verily believe no revolution can fail on it. I say that if ever we strike boldly, we do it to-day. And I, as a citizen of Boston, pledge my aid to any plan."

"Yaas. An' we got a half holiday to-day, tew."

This rather prosaic peroration to the Parson's speech came from one corner, where Sleepy sat lazily regarding the scene. That was the first hint that the "farmer" had offered, and it had corresponding weight. The four shook hands on it then and there, that by the time dinner was over they would have a brand new and startling plan to work for the yearlings' edification. The signal to fall in for drill found them still pledging themselves to that.

Mark said nothing more to any one upon the subject; he left his friends to think for themselves, and he, when he got a chance, started out likewise on his "own hook." In the first place, it was necessary to find out just how the yearlings meant to spend that half-holiday afternoon; having found that, it would then be time to think up a plan for spoiling the fun.

There was a member of the plebe class who had been a plebe the year before, that is, who had failed on examinations and had not been advanced. Naturally, he knew all the yearlings, and, having been through camp once, knew also what would be apt to happen on the Fourth of July. Mark himself knew nothing about it, for no one thought it necessary to tell plebes about such things; and so to this

"hold-over" Mark went to learn.

That gentleman, in response to some diplomatic interrogation, emitted the information that there was nothing "on." That a ball game had been intended, but prevented at the last moment. That probably most of the cadets would go walking, or amuse themselves any way—some of them do a little hazing. That it was a pleasant custom to make the plebes dress up in masquerade and give a parade or something. And that finally there was to be an entertainment in the evening.

What sort? Well, it was dignified and patriotic. There were programmes issued—not given to plebes, of course. Would Mallory like to see one? Perhaps he could get one, would see after drill, etc., etc. "Much obliged. Good-morning."

The affable young gentleman did manage to get Mallory a programme. He gave it to him just before dinner. "Thank you." "Oh, not at all, only too glad to oblige you," etc. And Mark rushed into the tent and eagerly read the handsomely printed pasteboard:

United States Military Academy.
July 4th, 8.30 P. M.
PROGRAMME.
Overture.
Prayer.
Music.
Reading of The Declaration of Independence.
Cadet George T. Fischer, Pennsylvania.
Music.
Oration.
Cadet Edmund S. Harris——

Mark read not another word; he stared at the paper in amazement and incredulity, rapidly changing to glee. Harris! Bull Harris delivering an oration! Mark turned and faced his companions, feeling about ready to burst with hilarity.

"Listen here, fellows!" he cried. "Here's a chance, a chance of a lifetime! Oh, say! Bull's going to make a speech! Gee whiz! We'll——"

"Didn't you fellows know about that?" put in a voice in the doorway, as Dewey's face appeared there. "I heard the yearlings talking about it. They say Bull's a fine orator, that he's been working at an elegant speech for months. And, b'gee, he

means to bring down the house."

Mark's face was simply a picture of merriment at that.

"Fellows," he said, as soon as he could manage to get breath to say anything at all. "Fellows, I'll go you just one bargain more."

"What is it?" cried the others.

"It's very simple. It's just that we spoil that beautiful speech of Bull Harris', if we have to bust to do it."

And the seven cried "Done!" in one breath.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW ALLY.

The more they thought over that scheme the better they liked it; the more they imagined Bull Harris, pompous and self-conscious, spouting his magnificent periods and then brought to an ignominious and ridiculous conclusion, the more they chuckled with glee. They felt no prickings of conscience in the matter, for Bull was not a personage to inspire such. His devices had been cowardly and desperate; only last night he had been on the point of lashing Mark with a rope when the latter was helplessly tied to a tree. With such a man ordinary standards of fairness did not hold good.

The only trouble with the "scheme" was its general indefiniteness. And that the seven recognized. It was all very well to say you were going to "bust up" Bull Harris' speech. But how? It would not do to guy him, or to use any device of which the authors might be found out. It was quite a problem.

Texas suggested an alarm of fire, which was outvoted as dangerous, likely to produce a panic. Some one else wondered how about kidnaping Bull and tying him up. This suggestion was put on file as being possible, to be consulted in case no better appeared, which bid fair just then to be the case.

Mark and his friends marched down to dinner without any further ideas appearing. The plebes still marched separate from the rest of the corps, though they were allowed to share the privilege of the spirited band which enlivened the proceedings. They still sat at separate tables, too, which made most of them feel very much outcast indeed.

The command "Break ranks," after the march from mess hall again, marked the beginning of that holiday during which the seven had vowed to do so much. And still nobody had seemed to hit upon any suitable plan for the discomfiture of Bull Harris.

"We've got to hurry up about it, too," Mark declared. "For, if there's any fixing up to be done, we ought to be doing it now."

"Where's the thing to be, anyway?" inquired Dewey.

"In the big gymnasium building, they say," was the answer. "They'll probably cover the floor with seats. But I don't think we can do anything inside the place. I think we ought to kick up some sort of rumpus outside."

And with this advice the seven heads got to work again.

Ideas come slowly when you want them badly. It would seem that with those seven minds busy on the same subject something should have resulted. But it didn't. The seven strolled away from camp and wandered about the grounds cudgeling their brains and calling themselves names for their stupidity. And still no plan came forward.

They strolled down to the gymnasium building in hopes that proximity to the scene itself would prove efficacious. They stared at the vestibule and the windows blankly, wondering what the place might be like inside, wondering if there would be much of a crowd, wondering if Bull would have much of a speech—wondering about everything except the matter in hand.

"Plague take it all!" they muttered. "Let's walk out Professor's Row and find some quiet place to sit down. Perhaps we can think better sitting."

Professor's Row is a street that bounds the parade ground on the west. It is cool and shady, with benches and camp chairs on the lawn. But there were plenty of people to occupy the seats, and so the seven found no place there to cogitate.

They had not gotten much farther before all ideas of plots and orations were driven from Mark's head a-flying. They were passing a group of people standing on the opposite side of the street, and suddenly one of them, a girl, hurried away from the others, and cried out:

"Mr. Mallory! Oh, Mr. Mallory!"

Mark turned the moment he heard the voice, and, when he saw who it was, he promptly excused himself from his friends and crossed the street. The six strolled on, smiling and winking knowingly at one another.

"Hope he'll remember what Wicks Merritt said, b'gee!" laughed Dewey.

Mark had no time to remember anything much. He was too busy, watching the vision that was hurrying to meet him.

Grace Fuller certainly was a beautiful girl, beyond a doubt. She was a blonde of the fairest type; her complexion was matchless, and set off by a wealth of wavy golden hair. She was dressed in white, and made a picture that left no room to wonder why "half the cadets in the place were wild over her."

"I'm glad I swam out to save her," was the thought in Mark's mind.

A moment later he took the small white hand that was held out to him.

"Mr. Mallory," said the girl, gazing at him earnestly, "I shall not wait for any one to introduce you to me. I must tell you that I appreciate your bravery."

Mark bowed and thanked her; he could think of nothing more to say.

"They just let me out of the hospital to-day," she continued, "and I made up my mind that the very first thing I was going to do was to tell you what I thought of your courageous action on my behalf. I want to know you better, Mr. Mallory."

She said it in a plain and simple way that Mark liked, and he told her that nothing would please him more.

"I would ask you to take a walk with me now," said Grace, "but for all those cadets who are with me. I don't think they'd relish that, you being a fourth class man."

"I don't think they would," responded Mark, with a queer smile which the girl did not fail to notice.

"I don't care!" she exclaimed, suddenly. "They can get mad if they want to. I think a great deal more of some plebes than I do of yearlings. Excuse me just a moment."

And then, to Mark's infinite glee, this beautiful creature hurried over and said something to the group of cadets, at which they all bowed and walked off rather stiffly, sheepishly, Mark thought. The girl rejoined him, with a smile.

"I told them they'd have to excuse me," she said, as she took Mark's arm. "I told them I owed you a debt of gratitude, and I hoped they wouldn't mind."

"Probably they won't," observed Mark, smiling again.

"I don't care if they do," vowed Grace, pouting prettily. "They'll get over it. And they're awfully stupid, anyway. I hope you're not stupid."

With which Mark quite naturally agreed.

"I don't think the cadets like you much," she went on, laughing. "I had such fun teasing them by talking about your heroism. They didn't like it a bit, and they'd try all sorts of ways to change the subject, but I wouldn't let them. They say you are terribly B. J. Are you?"

"I suppose they think so," answered Mark. "I'm nothing like as B. J. as I shall be before I get through."

"That's right!" vowed the girl, shaking her head. "I like B. J. plebes. I think I should be B. J. if I were a plebe. I don't like these mild, obedient fellows, and I think the plebes stand entirely too much."

"I wish you were one to help me," laughed Mark, noticing the contrast between the girl's frail figure and her energetic look.

"I'm stronger than you think," said she. "I could do a lot." And then suddenly she broke into one of her merry, animated laughs, during which Mark thought her more charming than ever. "If I can't fight," she said, "you must let me be a Daughter of the Revolution. You must let me make clothes and bake bread the way the colonists' daughters did. It's just appropriate for to-day, too."

"I don't want any bread——" began Mark, looking at her thoughtfully.

"Perhaps not," she put in, with a peal of laughter. "If you saw the bread I make, you'd be still more emphatic. It's like the fruit of the tree of knowledge—'Whoso eateth thereof shall surely die.'"

"I see you read the Bible," said Mark, laughing. "But to get back where I was. I'll let the tailor make my clothes, also. What I need most just now are tricks to play on the yearlings."

"Do you?" inquired Grace. "I can tell you of lots of tricks the cadets have played. But that's the first time I ever heard of a plebe playing tricks on yearlings. It's usually the other way."

"Variety is the spice of life," said Mark. "The yearlings have tried rather contemptible tricks on me once or twice, very contemptible! I could tell you

what several of those cadets who were with you did to me last night, and I think you'd be angry. Anyway, I'm going to make them miserable in return."

"I helped the yearlings get up a beautiful joke last year," said Grace, looking at Mark in ill-concealed admiration. "Wicks Merritt was the ringleader. He wrote to me, by the way, and told me to be very nice to you now that you'd saved my life—just as if he thought I wouldn't! Anyway, I got them some powder to use for the scheme."

"Powder!" echoed Mark. "How did you get powder?"

"They couldn't manage to run off with any around here, so I got George to buy some. George is our butler. You'll see George when you come over to visit me, which I hope you will."

"I thought you lived across the river, beyond cadet limits," put in Mark.

"So I do, but the cadets come, all the same, lots of them."

"So will I, then!" laughed the other. "But you haven't told me what you did with the powder."

"Do you see that big gun over there?" she answered, indicating Trophy Point.

"Well, they stood that upon end and fired it off late one night. Wasn't that a fine joke?"

"Ye-es," said Mark, very slowly. "Ye-es, it was."

He was staring at the girl, a look as of an inspiration on his face.

"They stood that gun up on end and fired it off late one night," he repeated, scarcely heeding what he was saying, so rapt was he in his thought.

"Yes," said Grace, gazing at him curiously, and meeting his eyes. "Yes. Why?"

Mark studied her look for a moment; he saw mischief and fun dancing in it, and, in a moment more, he had made up his mind.

"Tell me, Miss Fuller," he said, speaking very low. "Would you—would you like to have 'George' buy some more powder?"

"More powder!" she echoed. "What do you——"

And then she caught the gleam in her escort's eye.

"Are you—do you mean you want to do it?" she cried.

"Yes," said Mark, simply. "Will you help?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Do you mean it?"

"I'll give you my hand on it," responded Grace.

Mark took it.

"When?" asked she.

And Mark answered, with a laugh, almost a shout of triumph.

"To-night!" he said. "To-night! Ye gods!"

CHAPTER IV.

A SURPRISE FOR THE SEVEN.

Six disconsolate plebes sat on a bench at the extreme northern end of Professor's Row late that afternoon, gazing unappreciatively at the magnificent view of the upper Hudson. Those plebes had been cudgeling their stupid heads ever since dinner time to no purpose.

"Durnation!" growled one of them. "I dunno what we air goin' to do. Mark won't let us blow up the durnation ole building. He won't let me hold up the crowd, cuz they'd expel me. He don't want to kidnap Bull, cuz Bull would tell. I dunno what!"

"B'gee!" added another. "I wish he'd come help us think instead of chasing around town with girls. He's been with her all afternoon——"

"Here they come now!" interrupted Texas, pointing down the street.

"Yea, by Zeus!" assented the Parson. "And our friend is much smitten already."

"Who wouldn't be?" laughed Dewey. "Isn't she a beauty, though? B'gee, I wish he'd bring her over and introduce her."

"Reckon she ain't a-hankerin' after plebes," drawled Sleepy, who, as usual, had half the bench for his tired form to cover.

This observation put a damper on Dewey's enthusiasm. It was true, and, besides that, it came from the silent member of the firm.

"She's beautiful, all the same," he vowed, as the two drew nearer still. "And, b'gee, she seems to be lively, too."

"If I mistake not," put in the Parson, gravely, "our friend is vastly excited over something."

This last observation seemed to be correct. The two were laughing; in fact, their faces seemed to express about as much glee as they could very well express, and once Mark was seen to slap his knee excitedly. The six were carried away by curiosity, which curiosity changed suddenly to the wildest alarm. For when the two were just opposite, what must Mark do but turn and lead the girl over to his friends?

The effect upon the latter was amusing. Chauncey made a wild grab for his collar to see if it were straight; Sleepy sat up and rubbed his eyes; the Parson cleared his throat—"ahem!" Indian gave vent to a startled "Bless my soul!" Dewey exclaimed "b'gee!" and poor Texas turned pale and trembled in his bold cowboy legs.

A moment later the vision in white was upon them.

"Miss Fuller," said Mark, "allow me to present my friends," etc., etc.

The Parson inclined his head gravely, with dignity becoming the immortal discoverer of a cyathophylloid coral in a sandstone of Tertiary origin; Chauncey put on his best Fifth Avenue salute; Indian gasped and hunted in vain for his hat; the "farmer" swept the ground with his; Dewey looked all broke up and Texas hid behind everybody.

There was vague uncertainty after that, changing to horror at the next speech.

"Miss Fuller," said Mark, smiling, "has proclaimed herself an ardent sympathizer and admirer of the purposes and principles of the Banded Seven. Miss Fuller desires to be known as a 'Daughter of the Revolution.' Miss Fuller knows about Bull Harris, and doesn't like him, and suggests a first-rate method of busting—if you will pardon my slang, Miss Fuller—to-night's celebration. Miss Fuller likes to hear cannon go off at night. She offers to procure the powder if we will do the loading; she even offers to fire it, if we'll allow her. Also, gentlemen, allow me to propose member number eight of the seven, and incidentally to suggest that the name Banded Seven be changed and that in future we go down to posterity as _____"

Mark paused one solemn moment, and cleared his throat——

"The Banded Seven and One Angel!"

And after that there was a deep, long, wide, and altogether comprehensive silence, while the six stared at Mark and his thoroughly amused friend in

incredulity, amazement, alarm, horror—who can say what?

It was fully a minute before any of them found breath. And then a perfect torrent of Bah Joves! Durnations! B'gees! Bless my souls! and By Zeuses! burst out upon the air, to be followed by another silence even longer and larger than the last.

What on earth had happened! The six couldn't seem to get it through their heads. Could it be possible that this girl, the belle of West Point, the beauty over whom half the cadets were wild, the daughter of a famous judge, was sympathizing with a few, poor, miserable plebes in an effort to upset West Point? And that she had actually offered to help them in a trick, the boldness of which was enough to make the boldest hesitate? Good stars! The world must be coming to an end! No wonder the amazed plebes gasped and stared, and then stared and gasped, unable to believe that they stood on the same earth as half a minute previously.

Mark and his companion, who understood their perplexity entirely, and who seemed to have gotten amazingly in sympathy during a brief afternoon's conversation, stood and regarded them meanwhile with considerable amusement.

Well, it must be true! Mark said so, and the girl heard him and seemed to say "yes" with her laughing blue eyes.

That was the conviction which finally forced itself upon the incredulous and befuddled six, and with it came a dim, undefined consciousness of the fact that possibly they were not doing the very politest thing in the world in staring at their "angel."

First to realize it was Texas, last of all to whom one would have looked for any species of gallantry.

Texas sprang forward and seized the girl's fair white hand in his own mighty paw.

"Hi, Miss Fuller!" he cried, "I'm glad to have you join! Whoop!"

Which broke the ice.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCHEME SUCCEEDS.

Dress parade in all its Fourth of July holiday splendor had passed, and the sunset gun marked the ending of that day of celebration. Through the dusk of evening the battalion had marched back from supper, to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia" from the band and the popping of sundry small firecrackers from mischievous small boys on the way. And then the cadets had scattered, still in their dress uniforms, each to join his own party of friends and go to the evening's entertainment.

Cadets are famous as "ladies' men," and during the gay holiday season, which was now on, West Point was crowded with girls, so that every cadet had his opportunities for gallantry, excepting, of course, the plebes, who do not go into "society."

As the hour approached, the big gymnasium hall took on a lively aspect. It ceased to be a gymnasium for a while; rings and trapezes were hung up, and rows of seats occupied the floor, instead of parallel bars. The big West Point Band was seated in front, and the rest of the room was devoted to pretty girls and their cadet escorts. The Fourth of July celebration was a cadet affair; the "president" occupied the small platform in solitary grandeur; the commandant and his staff were present, but they sat among the audience.

The plebes were there, too, on sufferance. The gallery was given up to their use, and they filled it entirely, and gazed on the scene below. The room with its decorations of flags and bunting, making them feel very patriotic indeed.

The plebes we are interested in were there with the rest. They sat off in one corner where they could whisper and keep their secret all to themselves. If any one had overheard them, which they took good care should not happen, he would have learned, to his amazement, that the night's plot was all perfected. He

might have learned that "George" had done his duty with fully as much delight as any of the Seven.

He might have learned that having been taken into the secret "George" had not only gotten the powder, but had volunteered to do the work himself, to save the seven "young gentlemen" all danger of discovery. He might have learned that down in a secluded woody hollow just east of camp lay three big siege guns in "Battery Knox," loaded and stuffed to the muzzle with powder and paper and rags.

There was lots more he might have learned. He might have learned that at the present moment the jolly, red-faced butler was lurking about the neighborhood of the Battery, anxiously surveying his watch at intervals of every minute or so, waiting for half-past nine, the precise minute when he was to touch off the fuse and run. Also that Grace was down with her father, in the audience, occasionally stealing a sly glance at Mark; also that Mark was bearing a good deal of merry banter upon his conquest; also that the Seven, having spent two hours or so with Grace, were vowing her the most original, daring and altogether charming girl that ever was anywhere, a most undoubtable and valuable ally of Mark and his anti-hazing society.

The seven were about as nervous and anxious as seven plebes could possibly be. What if "George" should be found out? What if the guns should not go off? It was such a colossal and magnificent plot that the mere thought of its failure was enough to make one's hair turn gray. What if the thing should begin too late, the guns go off before Bull started? Or on the other hand, suppose his speech was short and he shouldn't be interrupted!

Mark had calculated the time carefully. He had allowed five minutes for the "prelude." But suppose it should be longer, or shorter, or should begin after eight-thirty? As the hour drew near Mark and his friends sat and wriggled in their seats and glanced at their watches and——

"It's half past now," growled Texas. "Durnation, it's a minute after that! Ain't they ever—ah!"

The bandmaster arose from his seat, and raised his baton in the air. It was the "Star Spangled Banner," and the sound shook the flags that graced the walls and shook the hearts of the audience, too, and made them rise as one man.

"'Tis the Star Spangled Banner
And long may it wave.
O'er the land of the free
And the home of the brave!"

The notes died out and the Seven remembered that for a moment they had forgotten to be nervous.

The grave young chaplain arose, and raised his hands. His prayer was earnest, and his voice trembled as he spoke of the flag and its country. But alas! our friends had no eye or ear for beauty. It was time—time! Would he take more than the calculated five minutes? It was time for him to stop! Plague take it—six!—six and a half!—ah! There he had said "Finally," no, he was going off on another tack! Gee whiz—eight—thank heavens!

The sigh of relief that came at last from the Seven almost shook the roof.

Then came "music;" that had been problematical. Music might mean anything from two minutes to twenty. But there is no need of torturing the reader, even if the seven were tortured correspondingly. The piece took some ten minutes of agony, and then Cadet Captain Fischer stepped forward on the platform.

Fischer was an immensely popular man with his class, and they applauded him to the echo. He looked handsome, too, in his chevrons and sash. He read "The Declaration of Independence," and he read it in the voice that had made him first captain, a voice that was clear and deep and ringing, a voice that sounded in the open above the thunder and rattle of artillery drill, and that sounded still better in the hall, as it spoke the words that had made a continent tremble.

There was nothing in that to worry the Seven—they had gotten a copy of the "Declaration" and practiced it by the watch. Fischer finished on schedule time; but then came the tussle. And some poor plebes up in the gallery nearly had apoplexy from waiting.

There were fifteen minutes left. That allowed say ten minutes for the music, and five for Bull to get warmed up to his work.

The bandmaster arose; he played "Hail Columbia." The audience, wild with fervor, stormed and shouted; he played it again. The minutes fled by. The Seven gasped! The audience kept up their applause, and the music struck up "My

Country, 'Tis of Thee," while the time fled yet faster still.

Great heavens! and still the fools—the fools!—in that crowd clapped and waved handkerchiefs—would they never stop, would they never let Bull step forward? He was dying to. The Seven could see him in his seat, half-risen, waiting doubtless as impatiently as they. And still the people wouldn't behave themselves.

Bull rose up. Ah, at last. There was a cessation in the infernal racket! The amount of torture the plebes suffered during those brief moments cannot be told. The gun might go off at any moment now! It might go off before Bull started, might ruin the whole thing. Plague take him, what made him walk so slowly? Would he never get up on that platform? And the foolish audience, why didn't they stop and let him start? What did they want to be applauding that ugly old yearling for? And why didn't he stop that fool bowing and scraping? Some people are such chumps!

The applause stopped at last. An expectant hush fell upon the crowd. Bull Harris stood pompous and self-conscious, gazing upon the scene for a moment, and then began. The Seven gasped: "We've got him."

"Ladies and Gentlemen: We have assembled upon this memorable occasion to celebrate (Now let that gun go, b'gee!) one of the most glorious achievements (You bet we have!) that ever was attained by man. We have assembled (What on earth's the matter with "George?") to applaud with the voices of the present, words that echo from memories of the past, (Can his watch have stopped?) words that will ring through the halls of time (Plague take the luck!) as long as time shall be counted in the heart throbs of living men. The deeds of our ancestors live in the——"

At last!

With a boom and a rattle and a crash gun No. 1 of Battery Knox thundered out upon the still night air. Bull stopped in amazement; the audience sprang up in alarm; the seven shrieked—silently—for joy. And then——

Boom!

It was No. 2. The room rang with shouts of confusion; cadets stared and ran hastily about; women cried out in alarm.

Boom!

It was No. 3, and at the same instant from a hundred throats came the dreaded cry of "Fire!"

Three guns is West Point's fire alarm. Quick as a flash, before the audience had time to think of flight, of panic, the commandant of cadets sprang to the platform.

"Company fire battalion form on the street outside, immediately!"

At the same moment, in response to a command from outside, a drum orderly sounded the "long roll." The band struck up a quick march, and tramp, tramp, tramp, the grave cadets marched out of the hall, forgetting friends and entertainment, forgetting everything in the one important thought—discipline—obedience to orders.

And in half a minute more the gymnasium was empty; the street was crowded with the anxious audience, and the battalion was tramping steadily across the parade ground in a vain search for an imaginary fire.

In that battalion were seven wildly delighted plebes. They hugged themselves for joy; they gasped, choked with repressed laughter. They punched each other in the ribs and whispered:

"Didn't we do it? Oh, didn't we do it? Three cheers for the Banded Seven—B. B. J.!"

The fire, of course was not found. Near camp the corps halted, to wait for the person who fired the alarm guns to come out and lead the way. He didn't do it, and gradually it began to dawn upon the commandant and the assembled "tacs" that the whole thing was a hoax. "And then indeed the Philistines were wroth."

Captain Quincey, the commandant, stepped to the head of the line, determined to investigate the matter on the spot. Roll call disclosed the fact that no one was absent; that made him think the guns were fired with a time fuse, and so he tried another way to find out the culprits.

It is not good form in West Point to lie; cadets who do soon find themselves cut by the class. So Captain Quincey, knowing that, gave this order:

"Parties who fired those guns will remain standing. Those who are innocent will advance one step. March!"

Now that any plebe had dared to do such a bold trick had never occurred to the cadets. They were convinced that some of their number were guilty, and they protected them in the usual way. Not a man moved. They refused to obey the order.

The commandant was furious, of course. He tried it the other way, ordered the guilty ones to advance. Whereupon the whole corps stepped forward to share the blame. To punish them he tried the dodge of keeping them standing at attention for half an hour or so, but several dropped from well-feigned exhaustion, which stopped that scheme.

He ordered one of the "tacs" to march them around the parade ground. The cadets, who were out for fun by this time and angry besides, geyed the unpopular "tac" with a vengeance. It was too dark for him to distinguish any one, and so every one obeyed orders wrong, producing chaos and finally compelling him to summon the commandant to preserve order.

With the commandant watching, those weary cadets marched for an hour more. Then he asked some questions and again got no answers. And finally in disgust he sent them off to their tents, most of them still puzzled as to who did it, some of them wild with joy.

These last were the Banded Seven—"B. B. J."

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT MARK OVERHEARD.

"Now, captain, there are no two ways about it, this business has got to stop, and stop right where it is."

The speaker was Colonel Harvey, superintendent of the West Point Military Academy. He was sitting in the guardhouse tent of the camp and talking to Captain Quincey.

"Yes," he repeated, slapping his leg for emphasis, "it's got to stop."

"I quite agree with you, colonel," responded the other, deprecatingly. "Quite. But the only question is to find out the offenders."

"If the offenders are not found out," cried the other, "I shall punish the whole class until they confess. Discipline shall not be laughed at while I am in command of this academy. And that is just exactly what that matter amounts to."

"It certainly does seem," admitted the other, "that the yearling class has such an idea in mind."

"Never since I have been here has a class of yearlings dared to celebrate their release from plebehood by such a set of lawless acts. It began the very first night that the plebes entered camp. I do not know what had been going on before that, but the yearlings had evidently become entirely reckless of consequences, and careless of discovery. They woke the camp by a series of outrageous noises; one of them fired off a gun, I believe."

"Lieutenant Allen," put in the other, "told me that he made an investigation on the spot and could find nothing suspicious."

"The yearlings had probably seen to it that he wouldn't. Then night before last Lieutenant Allen, who was again on duty, reported to me personally that he was

awakened about midnight by a shout, and going outside of his tent found that about half the cadets had been out of bed and over in Fort Clinton, probably hazing some one. They were all rushing back to camp; he says that it was so dark he could recognize no one."

"It is perfectly outrageous!" exclaimed the commandant.

"It has got to be stopped, too," vowed the other. "That incident of the gun last night capped the climax. I have heard of the cadets playing that prank before, loading one of the guns and firing it at night. But this time they did it for the evident purpose of breaking up the entertainment, and moreover, they fired three so as to make people think it was an alarm of fire. I think myself that was carrying the matter a trifle too far. And as I said, I propose to see that it is punished."

The above was meant to be private. Neither the superintendent nor the commandant meant that their conversation should reach any one but themselves. There was one other auditor, however, and it was Mark.

He was a sentry and his beat lay by the tent. As he paced up and down every word that was said was audible to him.

Early that same morning, after having been spruced up and polished by his friends, he had turned out and received an elaborate set of instructions from a yearling corporal. Now he was putting them into effect during his two hours' turn "on guard."

One of his instructions had been silence. Yet he was only human—and as the angry remarks of the high and mighty Colonel Harvey reached his ears it must be confessed that between chuckles and grins he was far from silent indeed. And a few minutes later when he was relieved from duty till his next turn, he rushed off with unconcealed excitement to his tent.

There were three seated therein; and Mark greeted them with a burst of long-repressed merriment.

"Hello, fellows!" he cried. "Oh, say, I've got the greatest news of the century!"

"What's up?" they inquired eagerly.

"I thought I'd die laughing," responded Mark. "You know all the tricks we've been playing on the yearlings? Well, I just overheard the superintendent talking

to the commandant of cadets and he's blamed it all on the yearlings."

"What?"

"Yes, I heard it. And he may punish them. You see, it's always the yearlings who have played pranks before. The plebes have never dared. And so the superintendent doesn't think of blaming us. Isn't that fine? And, oh, say! won't the yearlings be mad!"

The Parson arose solemnly to his feet.

"Yea, by Zeus," said he. "Gentlemen, I propose three cheers for the Banded Seven."

They were given with a will—and in a whisper.

"Wow!" roared Texas. "An' to think that the ole man—Colonel Harvey, if you please—went an' blamed the firin' o' them guns on the yearlin's! Whoop! Say, didn't it come out great? It scared the place most blue; an' that coward, Bull Harris, the feller that wanted to lick Mark when he was tied to a tree, had his ole speech busted up in the middle, too. Whoop!"

"I think," laughed Mark, "I shall have to go around and carry this news to Grace Fuller."

That remark started Texas on another speech no less vehement.

"I tell you, sah, she's a treasure!" he vowed. "Jes' think of a girl that had sense enough to think up that air scheme fo' firin' the gun an' nerve enough to offer to do it, too. An' she's jined with us to bust them ole yearlings. Whoop! It's all on account o' Mark, though."

"Yea, by Zeus," put in the Parson, gravely. "As I have said before, our friend is much smitten, and she likewise. I do not blame her, since he saved her life."

A rattle of drums interrupted the conversation just then, summoning the plebes to drill. Mark alone had an hour of leisure, he having been on guard duty, and during that hour having secured a permit, he set out for the hotel in search for the object of all their talk.

Grace Fuller was sitting on the piazza as he approached. She was dressed in white and the color just seemed to set off the brightness and beauty of her complexion. She greeted her friend with one of her pleasant smiles that seemed

to make every one near her feel happy.

"Come up and sit down," she said. "I've been waiting for you all morning. I'm just dying to have some one to talk to about our adventure last night."

Mark ascended the steps with alacrity and took a seat. And for the next half hour the two talked about nothing else but their glorious triumph, and the way they had fooled everybody, and how mad the commandant was, and how puzzled the cadets.

"I suppose you noticed," said the girl, "that George was about two minutes late? Well, it seems there were two people sitting on one of the guns, and he didn't know what to do. He waited and waited, and finally crept up and lit the fuse and ran. The gun went off while those two were sitting on it."

There was a hearty laugh over this rather ludicrous picture.

And then a few moment's silence, during which the girl gazed thoughtfully into space.

"I've got something important to tell you, by the way," she said, suddenly. "Last night the cadets all thought one of themselves had played the joke. Well, it seems that they've found out since."

"They have! How do you know?"

"I was talking to Corporal Jasper this morning. Jasper's a mighty nice boy, only he thinks he's a man. All the yearlings are that way, so pompous and self-conscious! I think plebes are delicious for a change. I told Mr. Jasper that and he didn't like it a bit. Anyhow, they must have inquired among themselves and found out that nobody in their class had anything to do with it. For the 'corporal'—ahem!—was pretty sure you were the guilty one, and he said the class was mad as hops about it."

"That's good," laughed Mark, rubbing his hands gleefully. "Perhaps we'll have some fun now."

"You will. That's just the point. I don't know that I ought to tell you this, but I didn't promise Mr. Jasper I wouldn't, and I suppose my duties as a member of the Seven are paramount to all others."

"Yes," responded Mark, "we'll expel you if you play us false. But don't keep me

in suspense. What's all this about?"

"I like to get you excited," laughed the girl, teasingly. "I think I'll hold off a while so as to be sure you're interested, so as to make you realize the importance of what I have to say. For you must know that this is a really important plot that I've discovered, a plot that will——"

"I think it is going to rain," remarked the cadet, gazing off dreamily into space. "I hope it will not, because it is liable to damage the corn crop, the farmers say that——"

"I'll give up," laughed the girl. "I'll tell you right away. You are to be on sentry duty to-night, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Mark, "I am. I wouldn't be here now if I were not."

"And your post is No. 3, isn't it?"

"Yes! How did you know?"

"All this is what my small boy friend the corporal told me. You see that my information comes right from headquarters. I suppose you know that Post No. 3 runs along Fort Clinton ditch."

"But what's that got to do with the plot?" cried Mark.

"Everything. The plot is to 'dump' you, as the slang has it."

"Dump me?"

"Yes; take away your gun and roll you head over heels into the mud."

"Oh!" responded Mark, thoughtfully, "I see. Take my gun away and roll me head over heels into the mud. Well, well!"

There was a silence for a few moments after that during which Mark tapped the chair reflectively.

"Are you going to let them do it?" inquired Grace at last.

"From what you know of me," inquired he, "do you suppose I will?"

"Hardly."

"And I won't, either. I think the yearlings that try it will have some fun. I only

hope there are enough of them."

"There will be," said the girl. "There'll be three."

"I'm very glad you told me," said Mark, "very. I'm beginning to perceive that our ally will be a very serviceable ally indeed."

"She will be faithful anyway," said the girl. "The Daughters of the Revolution always are. She has a debt of gratitude to pay to the chief rebel which she will not very soon forget; and she hopes he will not, either."

Whereupon Mark bowed and arose to take his leave.

"I must get back to camp," he explained, "to tell the Seven about this new plan. We shall find a way to circumvent it, I think; we always do. And I'll promise you that the yearlings who 'dump' me will have a very lively evening of it. Good-by."

And Mark left.

Now it must be explained that the plebes had lately been given guns.

The instruction in marching, halting, etc., which they had gotten in barracks was supplemented by all sorts of evolutions, and by drill in the manual of arms.

This latter of course necessitated guns; and great was the joy of the ambitious and warlike plebe on the momentous day that "guns" were given out. The guns were regulation army muskets, heavy beyond imagination. So the plebe soon wished he hadn't wished for them. Besides drilling with them, which he found harder work than digging trenches, he had to clean them daily; and cleaning a gun under the watchful eye of a merciless yearling proved to be a matter of weeping and gnashing of teeth. It had to be done; for he had a number on his gun, so that he couldn't steal his neighbor's well-cleaned one; and if his own wasn't clean he got into trouble at the very next inspection.

Besides the three drills a day, there were other duties galore. There was policing twice a day, "policing" meaning the sweeping clean of the acre or two of ground within the limits of Camp McPherson. Then also there was "guard-mounting."

Guard-mounting is the daily ceremony of placing the sentries about the camp; the cadets who go on duty then remain until the following morning. This ceremony has already been described within the pages of this series; it will have much to do with our present story.

The plebes of course were not put on guard until they had been fairly well trained in other duties. They had to know how to march, halt, salute, present arms, etc. Also they had to be accoutered in their dress uniforms, which were issued about this time.

Mark Mallory had been notified to report for guard duty that morning, greatly to the joy of his friends, the Seven, who had rubbed and polished him till he shone. He had "fallen in" at the summons and received a long and appalling list of instructions from his corporal. Then he had been put on Post No. 3 for his first tour of duty.

The sentries about the camp march for two hours, and then have four hours off duty, thus having eight hours "on" in the twenty. During this time they speak to no one, except to challenge parties who cross their beats. This last duty is where the yearlings have all the fun with the new plebe.

"Deviling" sentries is an old, old amusement at West Point. The plebe goes on duty, solemn and anxious, awed to silence and gravity by the sternness of his superiors. He is proud of his important office and thoroughly resolved to do his duty, come what may, and to die in the last ditch. He seizes his gun resolutely; feels of the bayonet point valiantly; puts on his sternest and most forbidding look; strides forth with a step that is bold and unwavering. And the yearlings "don't do a thing" to him.

What they did to Mark and his friends will be described later on.

CHAPTER VII.

MARK'S COUNTERPLOT.

Mark returned to the camp to find his six friends just returned from drill and enjoying a brief respite until the summons came for their next duty. He gathered them together in solemn conclave, and then in whisper imparted to them the information he had just received from the "angel."

The effects of Mark's announcement upon his friends varied considerably with each.

Indian was terrified beyond measure; the possibility of such tricks being tried upon him, too, made his fat eyes bulge. Texas, on the other hand, was wild with excitement and joy, and a little good-natured envy.

"Wow! Mark," he cried. "Why is it you always have all the fun? Them ole cadets always go fo' you; nobody else kin ever do anything. Ef them fellers don't git roun' to me some day I'm goin' off an' raise a rumpus some other way."

"What'll you do?" inquired Mark, laughing.

"I'll go off'n git on a roarin' ole spree!" vowed the other, solemnly. "An' I'll ride into this yere ole camp an' raise such a rumpus as it ain't ever seen afore. Jes' you watch me now! What you fellers a-laughin' at?"

"I'm sorry I can't let you go on in my place," said Mark, smiling. "Or perhaps I'll let you come out and help me 'do' them when they tackle me."

Texas was somewhat mollified by that; and then the Seven settled down to a serious discussion of the situation.

"Fellows," said Mark, "I want to tell you something. You know I'm getting tired of the notion those yearlings have in their heads, that they can haze us without its costing them anything. Now I've been thinking this business over and I've got an

idea. If they try to dump me to-night I'm going to fool them and I'm going to fix it so that they'll be the laughingstock of the corps. After I get through with them then we'll go dump some of their sentries instead. And now, what I want to know is, will you help me?"

"Help you!" gasped the others, excitedly. "Help you! What are we banded for?"

"Oo-oo!" wailed Indian. "I can't. I'll be on duty, too! And suppose they attack me! Bless my soul!"

"You'll have to fight your own battle!" laughed Mark. "They won't try anything very desperate on you. But now let me tell you of my plot."

The six gathered about him to listen to his whispered instructions. From the contortions their faces went through one would have supposed they liked the scheme. And in the end Mark, finding that it met with approval, sat down and wrote a brief note:

"DEAR MISS FULLER: We have a plan to punish those yearlings, and we want you to help us once more. Ask George, the butler, to go down to Highland Falls and buy us a quart of peroxide of hydrogen. The Parson says it must be very strong, a ninety per cent. saturated solution. We'll explain to you afterward what we want the stuff for. Please do not fail us.

"Your friend,
"MARK MALLORY."

They sealed that note and put it together with a coin into the hands of a drum orderly. And after that there was nothing to do but wait in suspense and impatience for the momentous hours of evening, when the yearling class was to make one more effort to subdue "the B. J.-est plebe that ever struck the place."

Night came, as night always does, no matter how anxiously it is waited for. Mark and his friend Indian went on guard that afternoon from two to four; and soon after that came dress parade and the sunset gun, then supper and finally darkness at last. With eight o'clock the two went on once more.

Though Mark did not once relax his vigilance during the time from then till taps he was inclined to think that the attack upon him would not take place until his next watch, which began at two. For now there were numbers of people strolling about and hazing was decidedly unsafe. So sure was he of this that his allies did not even prepare their plot.

Mark's judgment proved to be correct; he marched back and forth along the path that marked his beat and no one offered to disturb him. What "devilish" was being done at that hour was of a milder sort, a sort that was not intended for such B. J. plebes as he.

Among the victims of this, however, was our unfortunate friend Indian. What happened to Indian happens to nearly all plebes at the present day. It is our purpose to describe it in this chapter.

Indian was a gullible, innocent sort of a lad; life was a solemn and serious business with him. Most plebes take their hazing as fun, rather unpleasant, but still nothing dangerous. With Indian on the other hand it was torture; he dreaded the yearlings as his mortal enemies, and to his poor miserable soul everything they did was aimed at his life.

This curious state of affairs the yearlings were not slow to discover, and the result had been that fully half the hazing that was done had fallen on the head of this unfortunate plebe. And one may readily believe that the merry cadets were waiting with indescribable glee for the first night when poor Joseph Smith turned out on sentry duty.

Sentry duty at the camp is of course a mere formality; no enemies are expected to attack West Point, and there is no necessity for an all-night guard. But it was precisely this fact that our friend could not understand, and that was where the fun came in.

To Indian, the sentry was put on guard to ward off some real and terrible danger. Everything that happened confirmed this view in his mind. In the first place the solemnity and businesslike reality he found in the guard tent impressed him. Then the sepulchral tones of the corporal who gave him instructions, and who, it may readily be believed, lost no opportunity to impress the gravity of the situation upon his charge and to frighten him more and more, strengthened his conviction. Then they gave him a gun, a heavy, dangerous-looking gun, with a cold-steel bayonet sharp as a knife, that made him see all sorts of harrowing visions of himself in the act of plunging it, all bloody, into the body of some gasping foe.

After that, with all these uncanny ideas in his head, they marched him solemnly out to his post and left him there alone in the darkness.

Indian's post lay alongside the camp, but in his fright he did not recognize

anything. All he knew was that it ran along a dark deserted path beneath trees that groaned and creaked in the moonlight. And Indian paced tremblingly up and down clutching his cold steel gun nervously, seeing an enemy in every waving shadow and in every tree stump, hearing one in every distant voice and tread, consoling his mind with visions of all sorts of horrors, wishing he had some one to talk to, and wondering if it were not almost ten o'clock and time for that other sentry to relieve him. The very clanking of his own bayonet scabbard made this bold young soldier jump.

This continued as the night wore on. Indian strode back and forth losing heart every moment, and beginning to believe that the relief guard had forgotten him. Tramp, tramp—and then suddenly he halted, his heart leaped up and began to thump in a frenzy. Could that be? Yes, surely it was! Some one was crossing his beat, stealing along in the moonlight!

Half mechanically, Indian obeyed his instructions, brought down his gun to the charge position and gave the challenge:

"Who goes there?"

The voice was so weak that Indian scarcely heard it. He stood trembling, to await the answer. When the answer came he was still more mystified.

"The Prince of Wales!" called the intruder.

The Prince of Wales? What on earth was he doing here? Poor Indian had received no instructions about the Prince of Wales. But he was given no time to find out, for a step way back at the other end of the post took him down there on the run, where in response to his second challenge the ghost of Horace Greeley made itself known. And scarcely had the ghost been warned away before the confused sentry had to rush back to the original place to find that the prince had given place to a band of Potawottamie squaws combined with Julius Caesar and the Second Continental Congress.

Indian of course should have summoned the corporal of the guard. But in the alarm he had forgotten everything except that he must challenge everybody he saw. The result was that the poor lad was kept flying up and down until nearly dead from exhaustion, challenging ghosts and colonels, armed parties, patrols, grand rounds, reliefs, and other things military and otherwise. Occasionally a "friend with the countersign" would hail, and then inform the rattled sentry that the countersign was "butter beans," or "Kalamazoo," or "kangaroo," or "any old

thing you please," as one joker told him. Poor Indian was fast being reduced to a state of nervous prostration.

He was in this condition when the climax came. Hurrying down the path he was suddenly electrified to see a red can lying in the middle of the path. Staring out in great black letters that made the sentry gasp were the letters d-y-n-a-m-i-t-e! Indian started back in alarm. He saw a spark, as if from a fuse; and in an instant more before he had a chance to run, that can—which contained a firecracker—went up into the air with a terrific flash and roar.

That was the last straw for Joseph.

He dropped his gun; gave vent to one shriek of terror and then turned and fled wildly into camp!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ATTACK ON MARK.

There was confusion indescribable in a moment; cadets rushed out of their tents, and every one who chanced to be in the neighborhood started on a run for the scene of the trouble, most of them just in time to see the figure of the frightened plebe flying down a company street to the guard tent. Indian's hair was sailing out behind, his eyes were staring and his cheeks bulging with fright.

In response to the first yell, Lieutenant Allen, the tactical officer in charge, had rushed to the tent door, followed by the corporal of the guard, the officer of the day, and a host of other cadet officials. The figure in blue, however, was the only one the plebe saw. That meant an army officer and safety for him. So to that figure he rushed with a gasp of fright.

"What's the matter?" cried Lieutenant Allen.

"Dynamite, sir, anarchists!"

"What!"

"Yes, sir, oh, please, sir, bless my soul, sir, I saw it, sir—puff—oh!"

It took the amazed officer several moments to take in the situation.

"Anarchists," he repeated. "Dynamite! Why, what on earth?"

And then suddenly the whole thing flashed across him. It was another prank of the yearlings! And, what was worse, a thousand times worse, here was a sentry off his beat, in direct violation of his orders of all military law.

"Didn't you receive a command, sir," he demanded severely, "not to leave your post for any reason whatsoever? Don't you know that in time of war your offense would mean hanging?"

"Bless my soul, sir!" gasped the sorely perplexed plebe, frightful visions of gallows rising up before his bulging eyes. "Yes, sir—er—that is, no, sir—bless my soul! They're going to attack the place!"

The officer gazed at the lad incredulously for a moment; he thought the plebe was trying to fool him. But that look on Indian's face could not possibly be feigned; and the officer when he spoke again was a trifle more consoling.

"Don't you know, my boy," he said, "this is all a joke? It was not real dynamite."

"Not real dynamite!" cried the other in amazement. "Why, I saw it! It——"

"It was the yearlings trying to fool you," said the lieutenant.

"Yearlings trying to fool me!" echoed the other as if unable to grasp the meaning. "Why—er—bless my soul! Yearlings trying to fool me!"

The thought filtered through gradually, but it reached Indian's excited brain at last. The change it produced when it got there was marvelous to behold. The look of terror on his face vanished. So he had been fooled! So he had let the yearlings outwit him! Yearlings—his sworn enemies! And he a member of the Banded Seven at that! It was too awful to be true! It was——

And then suddenly before Lieutenant Allen could raise a hand or say a word the plebe wheeled, sprang forward and tore back down the company street.

There was a look on Indian's face that his friends had seen there just once before. The yearlings had tied him to a stake that day to "burn" him, and they had set fire to his trousers by accident. Indian had broken loose, and it was then that the look was on his face, a look of the wildest fury of convulsive rage. Now it was there again, and Indian was too mad to speak, almost too mad to see.

He rushed down the street, he tore in between two of the tents and burst out upon the path where the sentry beat lay. It was dark and he could see little, but off to one side he made out a group of cadets. He heard a sound of muffled laughter. Here were his tormentors! Here! And with a gasp and gurgle of rage Indian plunged into the midst of them.

After that there was just about as lively a time as those yearlings had ever seen. Indian's arms were windmills and sledge hammers combined, with the added quality of hitting the nail on the head every time they hit. The result ten eyes could not have followed, and as many pens could not describe it. Suffice it to say

that the plebe plowed a path straight through the crowd, then whirled about and started on another tack. And that a few moments later he was in undisturbed possession of his post, the yearlings having fled in every direction.

Then Indian picked up his musket, shouldered it, and strode away down the path.

"I guess they'll leave me alone now," he said.

They did. Indian marched courageously after that, his head high and his step firm, conscious of having done his duty and signally retrieved his honor.

Pacing patiently, he heard tattoo sound and saw the cadets line up in the company street beyond. He heard the roll call and the order to break ranks. He saw the cadets scatter to their tents, his own friends among them. Indian knew that it was half-past nine then and that he had but half an hour more.

As he marched he was thinking about Mark. He was wondering if the yearlings had had the temerity to try their "dumping" so early in the evening. And he wondered, too, if Mark had prevailed, and if he had dared to put into execution the daring act of retribution he had planned.

Mark meantime was also walking his post, over on the other side of the camp. He had marched there in silence and solitude since eight. He, too, had heard tattoo; he had seen his five friends enter their tents which lay very close to his beat, and he had nodded to them and signaled that all was well.

Time passed rapidly. He saw the cadets undressing, saw most of them extinguish their lights and lie down. And then suddenly came a roll upon the drum—ten o'clock—"lights out and all quiet." And at the same moment he heard the clank of a sword, and the tramp of marching feet coming down the path. It was the relief.

They left another sentry there in Mark's stead and marched on around the camp, picking up the others. Among these was the weary fat Indian, who joined them with a sigh that it is no pun to call one of "relief." A few minutes later they were in the guard tent, where Indian learned that the attack had not yet come, at which he sighed again.

Cadets who are members of the guard sleep in the big "guard tent," which is situated at the western end of the camp. Here they can be awakened and can fall in and join the relief when their time comes without disturbing the rest of the corps. Mark and Indian did not go on duty again until two o'clock in the

morning, and so they "turned in," in no time and were soon fast asleep.

When they are awakened again we shall follow Mark to "Post No. 3." Nothing more was done to poor Indian that night.

It was the "corporal of the relief," who touched Mark on the shoulder and brought him out of the land of dreams. He sprang up hastily and began to dress; cadets sleep in their underclothing, so that they may be ready to "fall in" promptly, all dressed in case of an emergency. Mark, gazing about him, saw a big white tent, with sleeping forms scattered about it. A yawning cadet officer sat at a table, a candle by his side. And five other sentries, about to go "on" like himself, were sleepily dressing.

Promptly at the minute of two the six fell in, in response to the low command of the corporal. At the same time the sentry's call of the hour sounded:

"Two o'clock and all's well!"

And then out into the cold night air marched the six and away to their posts of duty. There was a bright moon and the whole camp was light as day as they marched. At number three, in response to the corporal's order, Mallory fell out. And then "Forward, march!" and away down the dim vista of trees swept the rest and around a turn and were gone. Mark Mallory was alone, waiting for the enemy.

He was not afraid. He had made up his mind as to what he should do, and now he was here to do it. He realized that from the very first moment he set foot on this post, the word must be vigilance, vigilance! And he gritted his teeth and set his square, sunburned jaws and seized his rifle with a grip of determination, striding meanwhile on down the path.

He had not gotten halfway down to the end, the tramp of the relief was still in the air, when suddenly came a low, faint whistle. Mark was expecting that, and he faced about, started off the other way. He heard a faint sound of hurrying feet and knew that his friends, the five, had crossed. He saw shadows flitting in the deep grass of the ditch beside him and knew that they were scattering to hide and wait in accordance with the agreement. And he set his teeth with a still more grinding snap and strode on. Vigilance, vigilance!

The moon was high in the heavens by this time; one could almost have seen to read.

"They won't dare to try it," thought Mark. "A snake couldn't creep up on me now. They'll have to come from the camp, too, for they can't cross any sentry beat. But I'll watch, all the same."

His heart was beating fast then, he could almost regulate his step by it. Outside of that all was ghostly and silent, except for the breathing of the sleepers in the nearest tents of Company A. Once, too, he heard the distant roar of a train as it whirled down the river valley, and once the faint chug chug of a steamboat that passed on the water. But for the most part the camp was unbroken in its peacefulness.

Tramp, tramp. Down the path to the sentry box, right about, and back again. His post—number three—extended from the upper end of the colorline on which two and six were marching, down along the north side of the camp skirting the tents of Company A—his own—with the deep ditch of Fort Clinton right to the left, past the tent of Fischer, the first captain, and that of the adjutant, and ending near the water tank. Tramp! tramp!

It was just a few minutes more before the corporal of the relief came around, testing the sentries' knowledge of the orders of the night. Later still came the cadet officer of the guard, with a clank of sword; and he passed on, too. Tramp, tramp. And still no sign of trouble. Mark's challenge, "Who comes there?" had been heard but once, and that by the corporal.

"Will they try it?" he thought. "Now's the time. Will they try it?"

The answer came soon. Peering ahead with the stealthiness of a cat, glancing back over his shoulder every minute, watching every moving shadow, listening for every faintest sound. Tramp, tramp. Eastward toward the river; he reached the water tank, where the shade was the thickest, where stood the only bushes that could conceal a lurking foe. Opposite the tent of the bootblack he halted and started back again, where the path lay clear in the moonlight. Tramp, tramp. He could see number two, far down in the distance, his white trousers glistening as he marched. He saw the shadows of the trees waving, he heard the breathing of the sleepers.

Then suddenly came the attack. There was a quick step behind him, and everything grew dark. A cloth was flung about his mouth, and two pair of hands about his writhing, sinewy body. Down he went to the ground, fighting with every ounce of muscle that was in him. And after that there was fun to spare.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE DISCOMFITED YEARLINGS.

It was Mark's duty to summon the corporal of the guard at the very first sign of danger. But he didn't. He was going to settle this himself, and he meant to punish those yearlings without any official aid.

He wanted to keep them busy, so that his friends could approach unseen, and he set out to do it with all the strength of his powerful frame. There were three of the yearlings, just as Grace had said, and they were big fellows, selected for that reason; the yearling class knew Mark Mallory—knew that he could fight when he wanted to, and he wanted to then. He went down struggling, kicking, hitting right and left; on the ground he was writhing and twisting as no eel had ever done. And then suddenly he heard a muttered exclamation, felt the hands that were gripping him relax; he flung off his enemies and sprang up to find each of them struggling desperately in the grip of the triumphant five.

There were two for each of the yearlings. That was not quite so unfair as the three to one that had prevailed a moment before; but it was enough to make victory certain. The yearlings did not dare cry out; they were more to blame than the plebes and they knew it. The plebes knew it, too, knew that they had only to hold their enemies, not trying to keep them quiet.

The six had the yearlings flat upon their backs in a very brief space of time. To bind them hand and foot was a still easier task. And then the mighty Texas flung one over his shoulder, the rest carrying the other two; they sprang down into the ditch; they climbed the parapet of the fort beyond; and a moment later were safe, out of sight or hearing.

Then Mark Mallory, sentry number three, brushed off his soiled clothing, picked up his soiled gun, shouldered it and marched calmly away down the path. Tramp, tramp.

Sentry number three would have loved dearly to "see the fun," but there is no worse offense known at West Point than deserting a sentry post. He did not dare take the risk, so we shall have to leave him alone and go see for ourselves.

The five rascals with their securely-bound and gagged victims did not go very far. They stopped in the middle of old Fort Clinton and dropped their mummy burdens to the ground. Texas pulled from under his coat a bottle, one quart of peroxide of hydrogen, very strong, "a ninety per cent. saturated solution." And he got right to work, too.

You ask what he did? Any one ought to guess that. As a hair dye, peroxide of hydrogen is pretty well known, we fancy.

Add Texas was a liberal hair dyer, too. He put plenty of it on. He was not careful to apply it evenly, to get it on everywhere. In fact, he was rather careful not to. Texas was not seeking for any beautiful effects, mind you; all he wanted to do was to put some mark on those yearlings that would cure them of their hazing habits, that would make them the laughingstock of the class.

Having finished one, doused him well, Texas went on to the next. And more miserable looking and feeling cadets than the three a human being cannot imagine. They had some vague idea of what their tormentors were doing, and visions arose up before them, visions of themselves dancing in the ballroom, or walking about with their best girls, or marching on parade, with half yellow and half black or brown hair, stamped and labeled before all to their shame as the yearlings who tried to haze Mallory. And the worst of it was they daren't tell the authorities; they were more to blame than anybody!

Texas knew that; and he soaked on the peroxide of hydrogen the more—ninety per cent. saturated solution.

Having finished this they left their victims there for a while, so that their hair might dry and the bleach have a good chance to work. It would never have done in the world to let them run back to camp and wash it all out. Oh, no! And, besides, it might be well to leave them there a while to reflect upon the sin of hazing.

As to this last point a mild bit of sarcasm occurred to the Parson. "The Parson" was just the man to preach a sermon; and he got down upon his knees and whispered very softly into the ears of each of the three:

"Gentlemen," said he, "the epistle for the day is written in the sixth chapter of Galatians, the seventh verse. 'Be not deceived, brethren. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' Here endeth the first lesson. Yea, by Zeus!"

And then the five hair dyers stole away, and likewise the one quart bottle, peroxide of hydrogen, ninety per cent. saturated solution.

They were not through yet. Oh, not by a long shot! They rejoined sentry number three and held a whispered consultation.

"Who's on to-night?" was the question.

"Only one to interest us. Bull Harris!" was the answer.

"Where?"

"Number two."

And then the five figures disappeared once more in the darkness—the moon had kindly hidden for a while. Mark could see number two from his post, and he watched with the utmost eagerness. He saw three horrified yearlings dash across his own beat and vanish in their tents. He let them pass without challenge, even if it was against the orders, for he knew that they were the three unhappy heroes of the peroxide of hydrogen bottle, just released by the plebes.

After that there was a silence of perhaps five minutes. Mark, in disobedience of all orders, was actually standing still, peering across at the sentry on the next beat. He could see that gentleman's white "pants" shining out; and then suddenly he saw several dark figures steal up behind him, saw the sentry shoot up into the air and take a header to the grass. The next moment came rapid footfalls and some quick shadows flying across the path. The shadows disappeared in the tents and Camp McPherson was once more silent as the night.

Sentry number two got up from the ground in a meditative way; his look—though Mark did not see it—was what is often described as an injured one. He made no sound, because for one thing he was too surprised, and for another because he had an idea some of his own class had done that trick—mistaken him for Mallory! For though Bull Harris had watched long and anxiously he hadn't seen Mark "dumped."

Mark meanwhile had faced about and was strolling on down the path, a rather happy and satisfied expression upon his face. Tramp, tramp.

This chapter would not be complete without a word—just a word—about three yearling friends of ours. They woke up—if they slept at all that night—with three startling crops of beautiful golden shining hair, rather piebald in places. One likes to lavish adjectives upon that hair; the piebald is not meant to be a pun. Now, as to how that hair got dyed during the night, not a man of them would tell. But the Seven told Grace, of course; and Grace told the cadets, which amounted to the same thing in the end. The story was all about the post that morning.

By that time the three had been to the barber's and their heads looked like a wheat field, a field of golden grain after the reaping machine had been hauled across. But that didn't save the three. They were guyed unmercifully; one of them had three fights at Fort Clinton before he could convince his classmates that he really didn't want to be called "Peroxide."

CHAPTER X.

"TEXAS" RUNS AMUCK.

"Drunk! Drunk! For Heaven's sake what do you mean?"

Mark had been sitting in the door of a tent in "A" company street, vigorously polishing a musket. At the moment he had dropped the gun and the cleaning kit to the ground and was gazing in amazement at Indian, who had halted, breathless, in front of him.

"Drunk!" the first speaker repeated. "Texas drunk! What on earth are you talking about?"

The other was so red in the face and out of breath from what had evidently been a long run that he could scarcely manage to answer. His eyes were staring, and his face a picture of excitement and alarm.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped. "I tell you—I saw him! He's wild!"

"What do you mean? Where is he?"

"He—he's got a horse! He's ridden off! Oh—bless my soul—he's killing everybody!"

Mark sprang to his feet in excitement. At the same moment another head appeared in the opening, preceded by a hasty "What's that?" It was Parson Stanard, and his learned classical face was a picture of amazement.

"Texas drunk!" he echoed. "Where did he get anything to drink?"

"I don't know!" gasped Indian. "Bless my soul—I only saw him one moment; he dashed down the road. Oh! And had a horse, and his guns—Lord, I was scared nearly to death."

"Which way did he go?" inquired Mark, quickly, a sudden resolution taking possession of his mind.

"Down toward Highland Falls," answered the other.

And before he could say another word, Mark had seized his hat, sprang out of the tent, and bounded away down the company street to the great amazement of the cadets who chanced to see him.

"Texas'll be expelled! Expelled!" he muttered. "And then what on earth will I do?"

The time was morning. The plebe class had just been dismissed a short while ago from an hour of drill, and most of them were over by the cavalry plain, watching the preparations of the rest of the corps for "light artillery drill," which was the programme of the morning.

Scarcely half an hour ago Mark had left Texas and now he was drunk! And he was drunk after the fashion of the cowboys, reckless of everything, shooting and yelling, ready to raid a town if need be. Where he had gotten his whiskey, or his horse, what on earth had led him to such an extraordinary proceeding, were questions that Mark could not solve; but he knew that his friend was in imminent danger, that expulsion stared him in the face. And that was all Mark needed to know.

He did not notice that the plain on his right was crowded with spectators of the drill, and that those same spectators were staring at him curiously as he dashed past. He had eyes for but one thing, and that was a building to one side, down the hill toward the shore of the Hudson. He did not stop for paths; he plunged down the bank, and finally wound up breathless in front of the cavalry stables.

Most of the men were off to one side, at that moment engaged in harnessing the horses for the drill on the plain above. But one was left, and he sat in the doorway, calmly smoking his pipe, and gazing curiously at the figure before him.

"What d'ye want?" he demanded.

"A horse!" gasped Mark.

"Plebe?" inquired the other, with exasperating slowness.

"Yes."

"Where's yer permit?"

"Haven't got any."

"Don't get no horse then!"

Mark gazed at the man in consternation—he hadn't thought of that difficulty. Then a sudden idea occurred to him, and he thrust his hand into the watch pocket of his uniform. There was money there, money which as a cadet Mark had no business to have. But he thanked his stars for it all the same. There was a five-dollar bill, and he handed it to the man.

"For Heaven's sake," he panted, "give me a horse! Quick! Don't lose a moment! I'll see you don't get blamed—say I took it away from you if you want to."

The man fingered the bill for a few moments, lost in thought.

"It'd take more'n you to take a horse away from me," he said at last. "But since you're in such a hurry——"

He stepped inside the building, and a moment later reappeared, leading one of the government cavalry horses.

"Saddle?" he inquired.

By way of answer Mark sprang at the animal's head, and in one bound was on his back.

"Get up!" he cried, digging his heels into the horse's side. "Get up!" and a moment later was dashing down the road as if he had been shot from a catapult.

"Terrible hurry that!" muttered the stableman, shaking his head, as he turned away. "Terrible hurry! Something wrong 'bout that 'ere."

There was; and Mark thought so, too, as he galloped down the road. He feared there would be much more wrong in a very short while. In half an hour or so the plebe class, his class, would be called to quarters once more for drill, and if he and Texas were not on hand then, there would be trouble, indeed. If they were, there was prospect of no less excitement. From what Mark knew of his hot-tempered and excitable comrade when sober, he could form a vague idea of what a terror he might be when he was mad with drink; and being thus he would not be apt to behave as the meek and gentle thing a plebe is supposed to be. Mark had had great trouble in keeping Texas quiet, even under ordinary circumstances.

Mark, it may be mentioned, had met this wild and uncivilized lad down at the hotel at Highland Falls, some weeks before either of them had been admitted to the academy. Texas had then with recklessness helped Mark in outwitting some hazers among the candidates. Mark had been drawn to the other by his frank and open nature, by their mutual love of fun and adventure, and by a certain respect each felt for the other's prowess. The story of the heroic efforts by which Mark had earned his cadetship was known to Texas, as indeed it was to every one on the post.

The two had come up to the Point together, and passed their examinations; and they had been fast friends ever since. Mark had backed Texas in a battle in which Texas had "licked" no less than four of the yearlings. Texas had been Mark's second in a fight with the picked champion of the same class. And since then the two had set out together on a crusade against hazing which had turned West Point customs topsy-turvy and made the yearlings fairly wild with desperation.

Through all this the two had fought side by side, and were stanch friends. And now! The Texan's wild passions had led him to an act that might mean instant expulsion. And Mark felt that West Point was losing half its charm.

All this he was rapidly revolving in his mind as the horse sped down the road. Texas might be found! He might be brought back in time, if indeed he had not already shot some one! Mark felt that the chance was worth the risk, and he leaned forward over the flying horse's neck and urged him on with every trick he could think of.

On, on they sped. Down the road past the riding hall, up the hill, past the mess hall, the hospital and then on southward toward Highland Falls. The passers-by stopped to look at the hurrying figure in astonishment; people rushed to the windows to see what the clatter of hoofs might mean; but before they got there the horse and rider had vanished down the street in a swirling cloud of dust.

As if there were not enough to perplex Mark, a new problem rose up before him just then. The village he had left behind him, and was speeding down the road—when he chanced to think of the fact that he was almost at "Cadet limits." There was a fork in the road just below; to go beyond it meant instant expulsion if discovered! And how could he hope to be undiscovered, he in a cadet uniform and on that public highway?

The risk was desperate, but Mark had almost resolved to take it, when a startling sound broke upon his ears.

"Wow! Whoop!" Bang! Bang! "Wow!"

And a moment later, sweeping around a turn, a cloud of dust appeared to Mark's straining eyes. The cloud drew nearer; the shouts and yells swelled louder, accompanied now and then by a fusillade as from a dozen revolvers; and at last, in the midst of the cloud, as if racing with it, a horse and rider came into view, the rider with a huge revolver in each hand and a dozen in his belt, flinging his arms, shouting and yelling as if forty demons were on his trail.

"Heaven help him!" Mark thought to himself. "Heaven help him, for I can't!"

The rider was Texas.

Mark had scarcely had time to take in the startling situation, before the horse and rider were upon him with a rush and a whirl.

"Wow! Whoop!" roared Texas, with all the power of his mighty throat; and at the same moment Mark heard a bullet whistle past his head.

Texas had not recognized his friend at the pace he was riding; he and his flying steed were past and started up the road in the direction whence Mark had come, when the latter turned and shouted:

"Texas! Oh, Texas! come back here!"

Texas gave a mighty tug upon the reins which brought his horse to his haunches; he swung him around with a whirl that would have flung any ordinary rider from the saddle; and then he dashed back, on his face a broad grin of recognition and delight.

"Hi, Mark!" he roared. "Durnation glad to see you! Whoop!"

Mark's mind was working with desperate swiftness just then. He saw in a moment that there was yet hope. Texas was not staggering; he sat his saddle erect and graceful. His voice, too, was natural, and it was evident that he had drunk only enough to excite him, to make him wild and blind to the consequences. There was room for lots of diplomacy in managing him, Mark thought. The only obstacle was time—or lack of it.

He reached over from his horse and seized the hand which the other held out to him.

"How are you, old man?" he said.

"Bully!" cried Texas. "Ain't felt so jolly, man, fo' weeks! Whoop! 'Ray! Got a horse, Mark, ain't you? Wow! that's great! Come along, thar! Git up! We'll go bust up the hull camp. Wow!"

And Texas had actually turned to gallop ahead. Mark had but a moment to think; he thought quickly, though, in that moment, and resolved on a desperate expedient.

"Texas!" he called, and then as his friend turned, he added: "Texas, get down from that horse!"

The other stared at him in amazement, and Mark returned that stare with a stern and determined look. There was fire in Powers' eye, more so than usually; but there was a quiet, unflinching purpose in Mark's that the other had learned to respect.

That had been a hard lesson. Texas had lost his temper once and struck Mark, and Mark thrashed him then as he had never been thrashed before. Texas knew his master after that, and now as he stared, a glimmering recollection of the time returned to his whirling brain.

"Texas, get down from that horse."

There was a moment more during which the two stared at each other in silence; and then the right one gave way. Texas leaned forward, flung his leg over the saddle, and sprang lightly to the ground. And after that he stood silent and watched his friend, with a worried and puzzled look upon his face.

Mark breathed a sigh of relief as he saw that he had won. He dismounted, led his horse over to the side of the road, and sat down. Texas followed him, though his unwillingness was written on his face.

"Now see here, old man," Mark began, having gotten him quiet, as he thought. "I want to talk to you some."

"Pshaw!" growled Texas. "I don't want to talk. I want to git up an' git, an' have some fun."

"Well, now, see here, Texas," Mark continued. "Don't you know if you are seen carrying on this way you'll get into trouble? How about drill in a few minutes?"

"Ain't goin' to drill!" cried the other, wriggling nervously in his seat, and

twitching his fingers with excitement. "Tired o' drillin'! I'm a-goin' to have some fun!"

"But don't you know, man, that you'll be expelled?" Mark pleaded.

"Expelled! Wow!"

That was the spark that started the conflagration again. Texas leaped to his feet with fury.

"Expelled!" he roared. "Who'll expel me? Whoop! I'd like to see anybody in this place try it naow, by thunder! I'll show 'em! I'll hold up the hull place! Watch me scare 'em! Whoop!"

And almost before Mark could move or say anything, the wild lad sprang forward at a bound and landed upon his horse's back. A moment later he was off like a shot, leaving only a cloud of dust and an echo of yells behind him.

"Wow! Whoop! Who'll expel me? Come out yere, you ole officers, an' try it! Wow!"

Texas was on the warpath again. This time headed straight for West Point.

And riding behind him with desperate speed, scarcely fifty yards in the rear, was Mark, pursuing with all his might, and trembling with alarm as he thought of what that desperate cowboy might do when once he reached the post.

For West Point, and the crowded parade ground, were not a quarter of a mile away.

CHAPTER XI.

TEXAS RAIDS WEST POINT.

The summer season is a gay one at West Point. During the winter cadet life is a serious round of drill and duty, but after that comes a three months' holiday, when cadets put on their best uniforms and welcome mothers and sisters and other fellows' sisters to the post. There are hops then, and full dress parades, and exhibition drills galore.

It was one of these drills that was going on that morning, perhaps of all of them the most showy and interesting to the stranger. And the mothers and sisters and other fellows' sisters were out in full force to see it.

"Light artillery drill" is practice in the handling and firing of field cannon. The cadets learn to handle heavy guns also, practicing with the "siege and seacoast batteries" that front on the southern shore of the Hudson. But the drill with the field pieces is held on the cavalry plain, a broad, turfless field just south of the camp.

The field presented a pretty sight on that morning. It was surrounded with a wall of trees, behind which, to the south, the somber gray stone of barracks stood out, with the academy building, the chapel and the library. To the north the white tents of the camp shone through the trees and a little further to the left, the Battle Monument rose above them and caught on its marble sides the glistening rays of the sun. Beneath the trees all around the plain and crowding the steps of the buildings, were scattered groups of spectators, the gay dresses of the women helping to make a setting of color.

There was a jingling of harness, a rumbling of wheels, and a murmur of excitement among the spectators as the cadet corps put in an appearance, natty and handsome in their uniforms, the officers riding on horseback, and the privates mounted on the cannon or the caissons. Platoon after platoon they swept

out upon the field; then formed in accordance with the sharp commands of the officers; and in a few minutes more "artillery drill" was under way.

It is rather an inspiring sight at times. There are over a dozen of the cannon, with four horses each to draw them, and when the whole squadron gets into motion at once, there is a thundering of hoofs and a cloud of dust behind to mark the path. And then when they wheel, and aim and fire, the roar of the discharge echoes among the hills and makes the post seem very military and warlike indeed.

So thought the spectators as they sat and watched, too much interested to have any eyes for what might happen elsewhere. But those who sat on the southern edge of the plain, where the road from Highland Falls emerged, were destined to witness a far more exciting incident than that, an incident which was not down on the programme, and which the tactical officers and the commandant of cadets, who stood by their horses at one side, had not planned or prepared for.

The last discharge of the morning's drill was yet ringing in the spectators' ears, and the sound barely had time to make its way down the road, before it was answered and flung back by another volley that was all the louder for its unexpectedness.

Bang! Bang!

The people turned and gazed in alarm. The cadet captain out upon the field stopped in the very midst of a command and leaned forward in his saddle to see; a sentry marching up the street forgot his orders and wheeled about in surprise. There was the wildest kind of excitement in a moment.

A horseman was racing up the road, galloping blindly ahead at full tilt. He wore the uniform of a cadet, and his face was red with excitement. He leaned forward over his horse, firing right and left into the air, while from his throat proceeded a series of yells such as no one in that vast crowd had ever heard before.

"Wow! Wow! Whoop!"

There was no time for exclamations from the spectators, no time for questions or anything else. It was scarcely a second more before the wild rider was upon them and he drove straight through the crowd with the speed of an express train, neither he or his horse heeding any one.

The panic-stricken people fled in all directions, some of them barely escaping the flying animal's hoofs. And in a moment more he was out on the open plain,

heading straight for the squadron.

"Wow! Wow!" yelled the rider. "Expel me, will ye? What ye got them guns for, hey? Hold up yer hands! Whoop!"

Shouting thus at the top of his lungs, he was almost upon the cadets when the frightened spectators heard another rattle of hoofs and another rider burst through the open space in full pursuit. It was Mark, and he was desperate then, galloping even more furiously than the cowboy in front, for he knew that no one but he could ever stop Texas now.

The amazement and fright of the spectators cannot be pictured; nor the anger of the officers who saw it all. These latter put spurs to their horses and galloped out to the two; but Texas and Mark behind him had already reached the dumfounded cadets.

Texas had emptied the two revolvers in his hands, and he raced yelling across the plain. With a whoop he flung them at the nearest cadet, and whipping two more from his belt, opened fire point-blank.

"Wow! Whoop!" he howled. "Expel me, will ye? Take that!"

Bang! Bang!

Half the horrified cadets turned to run; some dropped down behind the cannon and the horses, when Texas fired there was not a man in sight.

Mark was almost upon him when the first bullet struck. It hit one of the horses upon the flank, and tore a deep gash. The animal reared and snorted with terror. His companions in harness took the alarm, and almost at that same instant started on a wild dash across the field, the four of them whirling the heavy cannon along as if it had been a toy.

A few yards ahead was the end of the field, and there, crowded in a dense mass, people who had rushed to that side to avoid the Texan's flying speed. And toward that surging, frightened mass the four horses plunged with might and main.

It was a terrible moment. Those who saw the danger gasped, cried out in horror, but those who stood in the path of the flying steeds were too frightened to move. The move had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly. The crowd stood huddled together; the crash came before they had time to realize what was happening.

In the moment's excitement, the two horsemen had remained unnoticed. Texas had seen the runaway, seen the crowd an instant later. Through his confused and excited brain the consequences of his acts seemed to flash with the sharpness of a thunderbolt. He had acted with the quickness of a man who lives, knowing that at any moment he may be called upon to "pull his gun," and defend his life. He had wheeled his horse about, plunged his heels into the horse's sides, and at that moment was sweeping around in a wild race for the leaders of the runaway four.

Quick as Texas was, Mark was a moment ahead of him. As he raced across the plain toward his friend he had seen the horses start and swerve and made for them, approaching from the opposite side to the Texan.

All this had happened in the snapping of a finger—the dash of the four, and two racing from each side to head them off. And it was all over before the imperiled crowd could turn to flee.

Texas was seen to leap out over his horse's head and seize the bridle of one of the leaders as he fell. The crowd saw Mark's horse, dashing in from the other side, barely a foot from the mass of the spectators, crash into the Texan's flying steed. They saw the horse go down; they saw Mark disappear. And then in the crush that followed he was lost to sight beneath the plunging hoofs of the four.

There was a moment of blind confusion after that in which each one in the crowd had time to think and see for himself alone. The spectators were pushing wildly back before the onslaught of the approaching horses. Several of the cadets and officers had sprung forward to seize the horses' heads; Texas was clinging to the bridle with all his strength. And Mark—Mark's was the greatest peril of all. He had fallen over his horse's neck; he had seen the two leaders plunging toward him, stumbling over the body of his own prostrate horse, crushing down upon him—and then before his dazed eyes had swept a flying rein. He saw it, and clutched at it, as a drowning man might do; raised himself upon it with a mighty tug, and then a moment later was hurled far out over the plain, as the horse he clung to, stopped in its rush, went down in a heap with the cannon on top.

It was all over then. The spectators had been saved as by a miracle, the barrier interposed by Mark's horse. And there was left a pale, half-fainting lot of people crowded around a tangled mass of horses and harness, with Texas clinging to one of the bridles, unconscious from a wound in his head.

They loosened his deathlike grip, and laid him on the ground, while Mark, having picked himself up in a more or less dazed condition, burrowed frantically

through the crowd to reach his side.

"Is he hurt? Is he hurt?" he cried.

The surgeon was at that moment bending over the Texan's body, where he had hurried as soon as he saw the accident.

"It is only a scratch," he said, hastily. "He will get well."

And Mark breathed freely again; he turned pale, however, a moment later, as he saw the doctor, catching the odor of the lad's breath, shake his head and look serious.

"He knows! He knows!" Mark muttered to himself, "and it is all up with poor Texas."

They carried the lad over to the hospital; and then West Point set to work to get over its amazement and alarm as best it could.

They cleared up the wreck for one thing. Two of the horses had broken their legs and had to be led off and shot. The rest trotted behind the corps as it marched away—marched, for no amount of excitement could interfere with West Point discipline. And then there was left down at that end of the cavalry plain only a crowd of curious people, with a scattering of army officers and plebes, all discussing excitedly the amazing happenings of scarcely five minutes ago, and wondering what on earth had taken possession of the two reckless cadets that had started all the trouble.

They looked for Mark, but Mark had disappeared while the excitement was at its height. He did not welcome the questions or the stares of the curious. Moreover, he saw the superintendent, Colonel Harvey, excitedly questioning several of the staff about the matter. Mark feared that the superintendent might turn upon him any moment, and he wanted time to think before that happened.

He dodged behind the library building, the Parson with him, and made his way around to the now deserted camp. Once beneath its protection, the two sat down and stared at each other in dismay. There was no need to say anything, for each knew how the other felt. Texas was up the spout; Mark was but little better off; and the universe was coming to an end.

That was all.

"Well," said Mark at last, "we're busted!"

And the Parson assented with a solemn "Yea, by Zeus!" and relapsed into a glum silence again.

Neither of them felt called upon to say anything after that; neither could think of the least thing to say. There wasn't a glimmering of hope—they were simply "busted," and that was all there was to it.

There is a saying that in multitude of council there is safety. The tent door was pushed aside a few minutes later and Indian's lugubrious, tear-stained, horrified face peered in. Indian followed, and seated himself in one corner, and then the tent relapsed into silence and solemnity once more.

Three more disgruntled persons it would be hard to find, excepting possibly the other three of the Banded Seven, who at the moment were wandering disconsolately about the camp. The whole situation was so unutterably amazing, dumfounding. Texas had often talked in his wild Texas way about getting on a "rousing ole spree jest once," and of his intention to "hold up" the cadet battalion some fine day just for a joke; but nobody had ever taken him seriously. And now he had gone to work and done it, and killed two horses, and Heaven only knew how many people besides—for who could say what the crazy cowboy might not have done down at Highland Falls? Why, it made his friends shiver to think of the whole thing! But the situation only grew worse with the thinking; and the three in the tent stared at one another in undiminished consternation and despair.

"Well," muttered Mark a second time. "We're busted!"

And he had two to agree with him.

They would probably have sat there all morning if it had not been for a small drum orderly outside—the drum orderly sounded the "call to quarters," and a few minutes later the plebes were lined up in the company street, muskets in hand, for drill. And it did not take a very sharp eye to notice that every man in the class was staring curiously at Mark Mallory, the plebe who but a few minutes before had been riding across the parade ground in an attempt to put a whole artillery squadron to flight, and that, too, under the superintendent's very nose.

"I wonder if he's crazy?" muttered one.

"Or drunk?" suggested another, laughing. "Oh, say, but I'd hate to be in his place!"

Which last sentiment was held unanimously by the class, and by the rest of the corps, too, as they scattered to their tents. A storm was going to break over Mallory's head in a very, very short while, the cadets predicted.

The prediction proved to be true. One of the cadet officers had barely managed to run over the list of names at roll call before an orderly raced into camp and handed him a message. He read it, and then he read it again, aloud:

"Cadet Mallory will report to the superintendent at once."

And a moment later, while a murmur of excitement ran down the line, Mark stepped out and hurried away down the street.

"The storm breaks now in just about five minutes," thought the corps.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAUSE OF A FRIEND.

Mark was doing a desperate lot of thinking during that brief walk down to the headquarters building. Every one he passed turned to stare at him, but he did not notice that. He knew that in a very short while now the critical moment was coming. Texas could not speak for himself; Mark must tell his story for him, and save him from disgrace and dismissal if the thing could possibly be done.

The headquarters building lies behind the chapel, just beyond the scene of the runaway. There was still a crowd of people standing around, and Mark saw them nod to one another with an "I-told-you-so" look as he turned to enter the superintendent's office.

"Oh, just won't he catch it!" thought they.

Mark thought so, too, as he entered. A man met him at the door, and without an inquiry or a moment's delay led him to Colonel Harvey's door and knocked. He evidently knew just why Mark came.

The door was opened as the man stepped to it. Mark entered and the door shut. He turned, and found himself confronted by the tall and stately officer. Mark gazed at him anxiously and found his worst fears confirmed. There was wrath and indignation upon the superintendents' face, a far different look from the one Mark had seen there the last time he stood in that office.

Colonel Harvey started to speak the instant Mark entered the room.

"Mr. Mallory," said he, "will you please have the goodness to explain to me your extraordinary conduct of this morning?"

Mark looked him squarely in the eye as he answered, for he knew that he had nothing to be ashamed of.

"I can explain my conduct better," he said, "by explaining that of Cadet Powers first."

The colonel frowned impatiently.

"I want to know about it; I do not care how. I want to know whatever induced a cadet of this academy to behave in the disgraceful way that you two did this morning."

"I can explain it very easily, sir. It was simply that Cadet Powers was drunk."

"Drunk!" echoed the superintendent.

He started back and stared at Mark in amazement. Mark returned his look unflinchingly.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Drunk. You will probably receive a report from the hospital to that effect this afternoon."

"And now," thought Mark to himself, "the cat is out of the bag. I wonder what will happen."

The superintendent still continued to gaze at him in consternation.

"And pray," he inquired at last, "were you drunk, too?"

It was a rather bold question, to say the least, and that flashed over the officer's mind a moment later, as he saw the handsome lad in front of him start a trifle and color visibly. He was sorry then that he had said it, and more so when he heard Mark's response.

"I have never touched liquor in my life," said the latter, in a low, quiet tone that was a rebuke unspoken.

Mark saw a vexed look sweep over the colonel's face, caused by that gentleman's recognition of his own rudeness; and Mark's heart bounded at that.

"He'll be extra kind to me now," he thought, "to make up for it. Score one point for our side."

"If you please," Mark continued, after a moment's pause, "I will tell you the story."

"Do," said the colonel, briefly.

"I was in my tent about ten minutes before the accident happened, and a cadet ran in and told me that Texas——"

"Texas?"

"Pardon me. Texas is our name for Cadet Powers. Told me that Powers was drunk. I set out to find him. The horse which I had I—er—ran away with from the stables. I met Powers down the road and I tried to keep him quiet. He broke away from me, and I followed him. You saw the rest."

"I see," said Colonel Harvey, reflectively. "I see. I am very glad, Mr. Mallory, to find that you are not as much to blame as I thought. This is a bad business, sir, very bad. It was almost murder, and to all appearances you were as much to blame as the other. But I have no doubt that I shall find your story true."

Mark bowed, and waited for the other to continue; the crisis was almost at hand now.

"Mr. Powers," the colonel went on, "will of course be dismissed at once. And by the way, Mr. Mallory, you deserve to be congratulated upon your promptness and bravery."

There was a silence after that, and Mark, drawing a long breath, was about to go. The superintendent had one thing more to add, however, and it was a singularly fortunate remark at the moment.

"I wish," he said, "that I could reward you."

"You can!"

It burst from Mark almost involuntarily, and he sprang forward with eagerness that surprised the other.

"If there is anything you wish," he said, quietly, "anything that I can do, I shall be most happy."

"There is something!" Mark cried, speaking rapidly. "There is something. And if you do it I'll never forget it as long as I may live. If you do not—oh!"

Mark stopped, unable to express the thought that was in his mind. The colonel saw his agitation.

"What is your wish?" he inquired.

"Powers!" cried Mark. "He must not be dismissed."

The colonel started then and gazed at him in amazement.

"Not be dismissed!" he echoed. "What on earth is Powers to you?"

"To me? He is everything that one friend can be to another. I have known him but two months, sir, but in those two months I have come to care more for him than for any human being I have ever known—except my mother. He has stood by me in every danger; he has been as true as ever a friend on earth. He would die for me, sir—you saw what he did to-day. I have seen him do braver things than that, and I know that he has the heart of a lion. If he goes—I—I do not see how I can stay!"

"But, my dear sir," cried the colonel, still surprised, "think of the discipline! You do not know what you ask. I cannot have my cadets carry on in that manner."

"What I have told you no one knows but you and I, and two others I can trust. The surgeon knows it, and that is all. He can call it temporary insanity, sunstroke—a thousand things!"

"That is not the point. It is the man himself, his contempt for authority, for law and order, his lacking the instincts of a gentleman, his——"

"You are mistaken," interrupted Mark, forgetting entirely in his excitement that he was talking to the dreaded superintendent. "You were never more mistaken in your life! Texas has all the instincts of a gentleman; he has a true heart, sir. But think where he was brought up. He is a cowboy, and to get drunk is the only amusement he knows at home. He has no more idea right now that it is wrong to drink than to eat. His own father, he told me, got him drunk when he was ten years old."

"But, my boy," expostulated the colonel, "I can't have such a man as that here. Think of an army officer with such a habit."

"It is not a habit," cried Mark. "He did it for fun—he knows no better. And I will guarantee that he does not do it again. If I had only known beforehand he would not have done it this time."

"Do you mean to say," demanded the other, "that you have sufficient influence over him to see that he behaves himself?"

"I mean to say just that," responded Mark, eagerly, "just that! And I will risk my commission on it, too! I offer you my word of honor as a gentleman that Mr. Powers will give you his word never to touch another drop of liquor in his life. And there's no man on earth whose promise you could trust more."

Mark halted, out of breath and eager. He had said all he could say; he had fired his last cartridge, and could only sit and wait for the result.

"You said you would like to reward me!" he cried. "And oh, if you only knew what a favor you could do! If you will only give him one chance, one chance after he has realized his danger. It is in your power to do it—the secret is yours to keep."

Colonel Harvey was pacing the room in his agitation; he continued striding up and down for several minutes in thought, while Mark gazed at him in suspense and dread.

At last he halted suddenly in front of Mark.

"You may go now, Mr. Mallory," said he. "I must have time to think this over."

Mark arose and left the room in silence. He could not tell what might be Texas' fate, and yet as he went he could not help thinking that the colonel's hesitation meant nine points won of the ten—thinking that one more chance was to be granted.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REFORMATION OF TEXAS.

"Well?"

There were five of them—Indian, the Parson, Dewey, Chauncey and Sleepy. They sat in a tent in Company A and at that moment were gazing anxiously at a figure who stood in the doorway.

"Well?"

"There is hope," said Mark. "Hope for poor Texas."

And then he came in and sat down to tell the story of his interview with the colonel. The plebes listened anxiously; and when he finished they set to work to compose themselves as best they could to wait.

"The answer will come to-night," Mark said, "when they read off the reports. And until then—nothing."

Which just expressed the situation.

The day passed somehow; between police duties and drills, the six were kept busy enough to relieve the suspense of waiting. And after supper the battalion lined up, the roll was called, and the orders of the following day were read, while Mark and his friends fretted and gasped with impatience. There were reports, and finally miscellaneous notices, among them the sick list!

"Fourth class," read the officer, then halted a moment. "Powers"—every man in the line was straining eyes and ears, half dead with curiosity—then, "excused indefinitely—temporary mental aberration, caused by heat."

Safe!

And a moment later the line broke ranks, the cadets discussing with added interest the case of that extraordinary plebe. But the six had danced off in joy.

"He's safe! He's safe!" they cried. "Hooray!"

"And now," said Mark, "there's only one thing more. We've got to reform him, make sure he don't do it again!"

"We will," said the others.

It was two days after that, one evening after supper, that the door of the hospital building was opened and Texas came forth, spruce and handsome in a brand new uniform, looking none the worse for his "sunstroke" treatment—*i. e.*, plenty of cold water, inside and out. Texas felt moderately contented, too. He had held up the corps as he had promised—not a man in the crowd had dared to fire a shot at him. He had a vague recollection of having done something heroic, besides. He saw that every one was staring at him in "admiration;" in short, our friend Powers was prepared for a rousing and hearty reception from the rest of the Seven.

He strode up the company street, not failing to notice meanwhile that plebes, and old cadets, too, made way for him in awe and respect. He stopped at Mark's place, pushed the flap aside, and entered with a rush.

"Oh!" he cried. "Whar be you? How's everybody?"

The first person he saw was Master Dewey, and to him Texas rushed and held out his hand. To his indescribable amazement that young gentleman calmly stared at him, and put both his hands behind his back.

"W—w—why!" gasped Texas.

Whereupon Dewey turned upon his heel and walked out of the tent.

Texas was dumfounded. He stared at the others; they were all there except Mark, and they gazed at the intruder in cold indifference. None of them apparently had ever seen him before.

"Look a yere!" demanded Texas at last. "Ain't you fellows a-goin' to speak to me?"

Evidently they were not, for they didn't even answer his question. Texas stood and stared at them for a few moments more, wondering whether he ought not to

sail in and do up the crowd. Finally, as the silence grew even more embarrassing, he decided to go out and find Mark to learn what on earth was the matter. With this intention he turned and hurriedly left the tent, while the five inmates looked at one another and smiled.

Mark was walking up the street; Texas espied him and made a dash for him.

"Hi, Mark!" he roared. "What's the matter with them——"

Texas stopped in alarm; a feather might have laid him flat. Mark, his chum, his tent mate, was staring at him without a sign of recognition! And a moment later Mark turned on his heel and strode away in silence, while Texas gasped, "Great Scott!"

That evening, seated on one of the guns up by Trophy Point, was visible a solitary figure, looking about as lonely and wretched as a human being can. It was "the Texas madman." Everybody kept a safe distance away from him, and so no one had a chance to notice that the madman's eyes were filled with tears.

"Poor Texas," Mark was thinking. "He'll come to terms pretty soon."

He did, for a fact. That same evening, just before tattoo, Mark felt a grip upon his arm that made him wince. He turned and found it was his friend, a look of misery upon his face that went to the other's heart.

"Look a-yere, old man," he pleaded. "Won't you—oh, for Heaven's sake, tell me what's the matter?"

"I don't mind telling you," responded Mark, slowly. "You have behaved yourself as no gentleman should, and as no friend of mine shall!"

"I!" cried Texas, in amazement. "I! What on earth have I done?"

"Done!" echoed Mark. "Didn't you go off and get drunk? For shame, Texas!"

Texas was too dumfounded to say a word. He could only stare and gasp. Here was a state of affairs indeed!

"Yes!" chimed in Dewey, approaching at this moment. "And you nearly killed dozens of people, too. Mark was within an ace of being dismissed; and as for you! why, you'd have been fired long ago if Mark hadn't pleaded for hours with the superintendent!"

Texas turned his wondering eyes upon Dewey then. He was fairly choking with amazement.

"Do you mean to say," he gasped at last, "that you fellows are mad with me because I got drunk?"

"Exactly," responded Mark.

"And do you mean to tell me that you call that disgraceful conduct?"

"I do. And I mean to tell you, moreover, that you can't be a friend of ours while you do it. I don't know how people feel about such things where you come from, Texas, but I do know that if people up here knew you had been in that condition not a soul would speak to you. There's very little room among decent people for the fellow who thinks it smart to make a fool of himself, and he usually finds it out, too, after it is too late. I never spent my time hanging around saloons, and I don't think much of fellows that do, either."

Mark could scarcely repress a smile as he watched the effect this brief sermon produced on the astounded Texan.

"I wonder what dad would say if he heard that!" was the thought in the latter's mind.

Texas was brought back from this thought rather suddenly to his own situation. For Mark and Dewey both turned away to leave him again.

"Look a-yere, Mark," he cried, seizing him by the arm again. "Look a-yere, ole man, won't you forgive me jest this once. Oh, please!"

And there were tears in the Texan's big gray eyes as he said it.

"But you'll do it again," Mark objected.

"'Deed I won't, man! 'Deed I won't. I'll swear I'll never do it again s'long as I live."

"But will you keep your promise?"

"I never broke one yit as I know," responded Texas with an injured look.

And Mark, rejoicing inwardly at his success, but outwardly very grave and solemn, said that he'd go in and ask the other six about it.

Texas sat with his feet against the tent pole and a pen in one hand. He held a letter to his father in the other; he was just through writing it, and he was going to read it for the edification of the Banded Seven.

"Dear Scrap," he began. "You see," added Texas, in an explanatory note, "I call him Scrap sometimes just to make him feel comfortable. All the boys call him that. 'Dear Scrap. This yere is the first letter I've written you since I hit this place. I ain't heard from you, so I don't know whether you got 'lected fo' Congress or not. I been havin' piles o' sport up yere. Took in three quarts 'tother day, an' I held up the hull corps on the strength of it. Busted two horses' legs, though, an' I reckon you'll have to send on the price. Don't think they'll mount to over a thousan' or two. I've still got my guns——"

"Guns is spelt with one 'n,' ain't it?" Texas inquired, interrupting himself. "I put two—makes it seem bigger and more important, sorter.

"They're the queerest folks up this way! They gave me thunder fer gittin' drunk, said twarn't gentlemanly. Reckon after you licked a few they'd call you a gentleman all right 'nough! They made me swear off, else they wouldn't let me stay. What do you reckon the boys'll say to that? Had to do it, though—you needn't git mad over it—I'm havin' so much fun a-doin' of the yearlings that I wanted to stay. They kain't one of 'em lick me.'

"I didn't mention you, Mark," Texas added, laughing. "Cause if I'd told dad that you did lick me, he'd probably want to come up an' try a whack himself, jes' to see ef you really could hit hard. Dad won't ever acknowledge that I kin do him, though I almost licked him twice, when he got riled. Reckon I'll end this yere letter now. I jest wanted to tell him to send 'long some money.

"Now let's go out and hunt up some o' them old yearlin's."

And that was the beginning of Texas' reformation.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLOT OF THE YEARLINGS.

"An invitation! Why, surely, man, you must be mistaken. They never invite plebes to the hops."

The speaker was Mark. He was sitting with a book in his hand beneath the shade trees at one side of the summer encampment of the corps. At that moment he was looking up from the book at Chauncey, who had just approached him.

"An invitation!" he repeated. "I can hardly believe it possible."

"Perhaps if you see it you'll believe it more readily, ye know," remarked the dudish cadet.

"Seeing's believing, they say," laughed Mark, taking it and glancing at the address. "Mr. Chauncey Van Renssalaer Mount-Bonsall," he read. "Yes, I guess that's for you. I don't believe there are two persons on earth with that name, or with one so altogether aristocratic and impressive."

Mark was glancing at the other out of the corner of his eye with a roguish look as he said that. He saw a rather pleased expression sweep over his face and knew that he had touched his friend Chauncey in his weak spot. Mark had been removing the contents of the envelope as he spoke. He found a square card, handsomely engraved; and he read it with a look of amazement upon his face—amazement which the other noticed with evident pleasure.

The card had the words "Camp McPherson" over the top, and below in a monogram, "U. S. C. C."—United States Cadet Corps. At one side was a view of the camp, the Highlands of the Hudson in the distance. And in the center were the words that had caused all the surprise:

"The pleasure of your company is requested at the hops to be given by the Corp

of Cadets every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening during the encampment.

"West Point, N. Y.,
"July 6, 18—."

That was all, except for the list of "hop managers" below. But such as it was, it was enough to cause Mark no end of perplexity.

"A plebe invited to the hop," he muttered. "I can hardly believe it yet. There must be some mistake surely. Why, man, no plebe has ever danced at a hop in all West Point's history. They scarcely know there are such things. Just think of it once—we miserable beasts who hardly dare raise our heads, and who have to obey everyone on earth!"

"We've raised our heads pretty well, bah Jove," drawled the other. "And we've shown ourselves a deuced bit livelier than the yearlings, don't ye know."

"Yes, but we've only done that by force. We've licked them and outwitted them at every turn, something no plebes have ever dared to do before. But simply because we've made them recognize our rights that way is no reason why they should ask one of us to a hop."

"No," responded Chauncey, "it isn't. But I know what is."

"What?"

"I've a cousin in New York by the name of Sturtevant—deuced aristocratic folks are the Sturtevants! Ever hear of the Sturtevants of New York?"

"Er—yes," responded Mark, that same sly look in his eyes again. "I've heard of them very often. They are related to the Smiths, aren't they?"

"Well, not that I know of, bah Jove—but come to think of it, my second cousin was a Sturtevant and she married one of the De Smythes, if that's who you're thinking of."

"I guess that's it," said Mark, solemnly. "Let it go at that, anyway. But what have the Sturtevants, the Sturtevants of New York, got to do with a West Point hop?"

"It's simply that this cousin of mine, ye know, has a friend up here, a first class man, an adjutant or sergeant quartermaster, or some such deuced animal, I forget just what, bah Jove! Anyway, I've an idea he got me the invitation."

Mark let himself down to the ground on his back and lay there for a few moments after his friend's "explanation," while he thought over it and incidentally kicked a tree trunk for exercise. Chauncey waited anxiously, wondering what sort of an effect his announcement of his influential friends would have upon Mark.

"Those yearlings," began the latter at last, in a meditative, half soliloquizing tone, "have never yet lost an opportunity to annoy us."

"What's this got to do with the hop, bah Jove?" interrupted Chauncey.

"Lots. It's simply this. You have been just as fresh as any of us, Chauncey. With all your aristocratic blood, ye know. I saw you nearly whip half a dozen of them one day when they wouldn't stop hazing Indian."

"I didn't whip them, bah Jove," began Chauncey, modestly.

"Well, anyhow, they couldn't whip you, and so it was all the same. The point is that they have never done anything to be revenged for the insult. I have an idea that this may be an attempt."

"This!" echoed the other in surprise. "Pray how?"

"Simply that they'd like to see you come to the hop and have nobody to dance with—for no girl will dance with a plebe, you know, I don't care who he is—and so have to go home feeling pretty cheap. Then you'd be the laughingstock of the corps, as the plebe who wanted to dance at the hop."

It was Chauncey's turn to be thoughtful then. And to his credit be it said that he recognized the truth there was in Mark's explanation of that surprising card. For Chauncey was no fool, even if he was dudish and aristocratic.

"I'm afraid that's it," said he. "I'm deuced glad I thought of asking you, Mark, ye know. I'll not go to-night. And we'll let the matter drop, bah Jove."

"Let it drop!" echoed Mark; and then he added, with emphasis, "Not much!"

"What'll ye do?"

"Do? What's the use of having a secret society for the purpose of avenging insults, if you don't avenge 'em? And don't you call it an insult that the yearlings should suppose us big enough fools to take that bait and go to their old hop?"

"It was rather insulting," admitted Chauncey.

"It was," said Mark. "And what's more, I move that we retaliate this very day. Let's go up and find the rest of the Seven, and by Jingo, perhaps we'll bust up their plaguey old hop!"

With which words Mark slammed his book to and arose to his feet and set out in a hurry for camp.

They entered Camp McPherson and hurried up the A Company "street" to their own tent. They entered without ceremony, and Mark scarcely waited to greet the rest before he plunged right into the subject in hand.

"Fellows," he said, "the yearlings have tried a new trick on us; and Chauncey and I have vowed to get square, right off."

Texas sprang up with a whoop that scared the sentry on the path nearby, and a "Wow!" scarcely less voluble. He demanded to know instantly what was up, and danced about anxiously until he managed to learn; when he did learn he was more excited still.

The Parson forgot his fossils, and even his "Dana" when he heard Mark's news, and he rose up and stretched his long, bony arms, inquiring with almost as much anxiety as Texas. In fact, the only one of the three who was not excited was "Sleepy." His state was that of the tramp, who answered: "Why did you come here?" "To rest." "What made you tired?" "Gittin' here."

The two other members of the Banded Seven popped into the tent just then and Mark sat down and told them all of the yearlings' plan, as soon as he could manage to get the excitable Texas quiet enough. He passed around the invitation which the rest stared at as incredulously as Mark had; and then he offered his explanation, and finding that they all seemed to agree with him, stated his purpose to retaliate, with which they agreed still more.

"Yes!" cried Texas. "Come on, let's do it. Let's bust up their ole hop! Let's raise a rumpus an' scare 'em to death! What d'ye say?"

"I don't think we had better do that," responded Mark, laughing. "Whatever trick we play has got to have something to do with hop, so as to let them know why we did it. But we broke up one entertainment not a week ago. I think it had better be a quiet trick on some of them, for you know they say that a man may play the same trick once too often."

"Let's hold up their ole band," suggested Texas, "an' run 'em into the woods an' hide 'em."

"Or else," laughed Mark, "we might dress up in the band players' uniforms and go in and play hymns for 'em. But I think somebody ought to suggest something that's possible."

"Let's put glue on the floor," hinted Indian.

"Let's dress up as girls and go," laughed Dewey.

"Or make the Parson put in some of his chemicals, ye know, an' smoke 'em all out, bah Jove," put in Chauncey.

"B'gee!" cried Dewey. "That reminds me of another story. You fellows needn't groan," he added, "because this is a good one. And I'm going to tell it whether you like it or not. It's true, too. There was an old professor of chemistry gave a lecture, and there were whole lots of ladies present. We might work this trick some time. A good many of the complexions of those ladies weren't very genuine, b'gee, and not warranted to wear. And some of the chemicals the professor mixed made a gas that turned 'em all blue!"

Dewey breathed a sigh of relief at having been allowed to deliver himself of a whole story without interruption; and the Parson cleared his throat with a solemn "ahem!"

"The chemicals to which you refer," he began, "were probably a mixture of hydrofluosilicic acid with bitartrate of potassium and deflagisticated oxygen, which produces by precipitation and reduction a vaporous oxide of silicate of potassium and combines——"

"We've only half an hour left before drill," interrupted Mark solemnly. "I move that the Parson discontinue his lecture until he'll have time to finish it."

The Parson halted with an aggrieved look upon his face; and after remarking the surprising lack of interest in so fascinating a subject as chemistry, buried himself in silence and "Dana's Geology."

"It seems to me," continued Mark, after a few minutes' pause, "that we haven't gotten very far in our planning. Now I have an idea."

The effect was that of a rainbow bursting through a stormcloud. The Seven were

all smiles in an instant, and the Parson came out of his shell once more and leaned forward with interest.

"What is it?" he cried.

"It won't take long," said Mark, "to tell it. You may not like it. It'll take lots of planning beforehand if we do try it. It seems to me that the yearlings have set a trap for us, and want us to walk into it. Now, I think we might bid them defiance, and show how little we care for them, by going in right boldly and outwitting them in their own country, that's the plan."

The six stared at him in amazement.

"You don't mean," cried Dewey, "that Chauncey ought to go to the hop?"

"That's just exactly what I mean," was the answer. "And I mean, moreover, that we ought every one of us to go with him."

"But nobody'll dance with us, man!"

"They won't? That's just exactly the part we ought to fix. Grace Fuller will, for one, I'm sure. And I'm also sure she can find other girls who will. What do you say?"

They scarcely knew what to say. The proposition was so bizarre, so altogether startling. Plebes go to the hop! Why, the thought was enough to take a man's breath away. No plebe had ever dared to do such a thing in West Point's history. One might almost as well think of a plebe's becoming a captain! And here was Mark seriously proposing it!

They had a perfect right to go. They had an invitation, and no one could ask for more. But the freezing glances they would get from every one! The stares, and perhaps insults from the cadets! Still, as Mark said, suppose Grace Fuller, the belle of West Point, danced with them? Suppose all the girls did? Suppose, swept away by the fun of "jollyng" the yearlings, the girls should even prefer plebes! The more you thought over that scheme the better you liked it. Its possibilities were so boundless, so awe-inspiring! And suddenly Master Dewey leaped up with an excited "b'gee!"

"I'm one!" he cried. "I'll go you!"

"Wow!" roared Texas. "Me too!"

And in a few moments more those seven B. J. plebes had vowed to dance at the hop that night if it was the last thing they ever did on this earth.

"By George!" cried Mark, as they finished, leaping up and seizing his hat, "I'm going over to see Grace Fuller about it now! Just you wait!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLEBES PLOT, TOO.

Mark found the object of his search on the hotel piazza, looking as beautiful and attractive as his mind could imagine. As it proved, she was fully as anxious to see him as he was to see her; she was curious to hear about "Texas."

"So he has promised never to do it again!" she said, when Mark had told her of Powers' "reformation." "I thought he would do anything for you. Poor Texas fairly worships the ground you walk on."

"He has promised never to drink, anyhow," responded Mark. "It was very funny to see how long it took him to get the idea into his head that it was wrong. It's just as I told you, and as I told the superintendent, too; down where he comes from it's the custom when a man wants to have fun he drinks all the whiskey he can to start him. And Texas thought he'd try it up here."

"He certainly did have fun," exclaimed the girl, breaking into one of her merry laughs at the recollection of the scene.

"I had been having a pretty exciting time myself," he said, "trying to keep Texas quiet. And when those huge horses took fright and started to dash into the crowd, I had still more of it."

"I think you were perfectly splendid!" cried the girl, clasping her hands in alarm even as she thought of the occurrence. "When you came dashing down on your horse and sprang in to head them off, my heart fairly stopped beating. But I knew you would do it; I have always said you would never stop at any danger, and father agrees with me, too."

There was a moment's silence after that; and then Mark, who was anxious to get at the important business of the morning, thought it a good time to begin.

"I've something more interesting to discuss, anyway," he added. "And I've only a very few minutes before drill in which to talk it over with you. I've taken the trouble to get a permit from headquarters and all to run over and ask you, so you mustn't delay me by compliments. That's my province, anyway—and duty."

"That was a very neat one," laughed Grace Fuller. "I declare, you are quite a cavalier. But excuse me for wasting the valuable time of the house. What is the matter?"

"I've a scheme," responded Mark.

The girl lost all her bantering manner in a moment; she saw the twinkle in Mark's eyes, and knew that some fun was coming.

"Is this another plan for worrying the unfortunate yearlings?" she inquired.

"It is," said he. "I've no time to think up any other kind of plans just at present. You see they get up so many against me that I am busy all the time holding up my end. If it were not for your aid I am afraid I should have failed before this."

"Have they prepared a new one already?"

By way of answer Mark took out the "invitation."

"Read that," he said, "and see."

Grace took it and glanced at it, a look of surprise spreading over her face.

"Why, I have one just like it!" she cried. "But where on earth did you get this?"

"It was sent to our friend Chauncey," answered the plebe. "You see the yearlings thought he would take the bait and come; being rather weak on the point of his aristocracy, he was supposed to fall right into the trap and consider it a recognition of his social rank. Then when he came he'd have no one to dance with, and would be a laughingstock generally."

"I see," said the girl. "It was a nice tribute to our common sense."

"Ours!" laughed Mark. "The yearlings have small idea that you are sympathizing with the plebes."

"Well, I am," vowed the other. "With you, anyway, and I do not care in the least how soon they know it. I told father, and he said I was quite right. I don't like hazing."

"You may have a chance to let them know it publicly very soon," responded Mark, gazing at her sweet face gratefully. "That's what I came over to see you about. You see we want to accept the invitation."

"Accept it! Why, that would be walking right into the trap!"

"That's just exactly what I mean to do. Only I mean to put a hole in the other side first, so that I can walk out again and run off with traps and trappers and trappings and all."

"How do you mean?"

"You are not as acute as usual," laughed Mark. "I had expected that by this time you would have guessed the secret."

"You don't mean to go and dance?"

"Exactly," said Mark.

Grace Fuller glanced at him in horror for a moment, and then as she saw his merry eyes twinkle a vague idea of what he meant began to occur to her. She began to see the possibilities of the affair, just as Mark had seen them. He might get all the girls to dance with him; he might have the yearlings perfectly furious, raving; he might dump West Point traditions all at once, all in a heap, and with a dull, sickening thud at that.

As she began to realize all this, Mark was gazing into her eyes; he saw them begin to dance and twinkle just as his had. And he laughed softly to himself.

"Our angel has not failed us," he whispered. "I knew she would not. Will you help us?"

And Grace answered simply that she would. But she set her teeth together with a snap that meant much.

It meant that Mark Mallory was to be the first plebe ever to dance at a West Point hop.

CHAPTER XVI.

SETTING THE TRAP.

The dinner hour had passed, likewise the second policing of the day had been attended to by the humble plebes. The afternoon's drill was over; it was time for full dress parade.

Company streets were alive with bustling cadets. Officers were winding themselves into their red sashes, privates were giving the last polishing touches to spotlessly shining guns. And the plebes, lonely and disconsolate, were watching the preparations for the ceremony and wondering if the time really would ever come when they too might be esteemed handsome enough to be put on parade.

There was one plebe, however, to whom no such foolish idea occurred. For indeed, he was quite convinced that he was better looking in his new uniform than most of them, and a great deal more aristocratic than all. He was, at the moment we stole in upon his thoughts, marching with much dignity down the street of Company B.

He carried his hands at his sides, "palms to the front, little fingers on the seams of the trousers," as plebes used to be obliged to do whenever they walked about in public. But even with all that stiff and awkward pose he could not lose the characteristic dudish "Fifth Avenue" gait without which our friend Chauncey would not have been himself.

For it was Chauncey, and he was bound upon an all important duty.

He stopped at one of the tents; there was only one occupant in it, a yearling, red-headed, hot-tempered looking chap, with a turned-up nose and a wealth of freckles, Corporal Spencer, known to his classmates as "Chick."

Master Chauncey Van Rensselaer Mount-Bonsall stood in the doorway and

bowed with his most genteel, perfect and inimitable bow. He would have knocked had he seen anything but canvas to knock on.

"Mr. Spencer?" he inquired.

The yearling stared at the plebe in amazement; but Chauncey's politeness and urbanity were contagious, and Corporal Spencer could not help bowing, too.

"May I have the privilege of a few moments' conversation with you?" the plebe next inquired.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Spencer. "Why—er—I suppose so."

"Corporal Spencer, I have a favor to ask of you, don't cher know, bah Jove!"

Corporal Spencer was silent.

"I do not know why I should look to you for it, except—aw—ye know, you were my drill master, and so I look to you as my superior, my guardian, so to speak."

"That's a little taffy for him," Chauncey added—to himself. "Bah Jove, I think the deuced idiot has taken the bait."

The plebe lost no time in taking advantage of his opportunity; he opened an envelope he held in his hand.

"I received to-day," he began, "a card, ye know, an invitation to the hop. I do not know who sent it, bah Jove, but I'm deuced grateful, for I'm awfully fond of dawncing. I need scarcely tell you that I shall hasten to accept it, don't cher know."

The look of delight which spread over the yearling's face was not lost upon the plebe.

"So the idiot is going to fall into the trap," thought the former.

"So the idiot thinks I'm idiot enough to be fooled," thought Chauncey.

Chauncey continued, delighted with his success, no less than the corporal was with his supposed one.

"Now, I have two friends," he said, "plebes, don't cher know, who are deuced anxious to come with me. And I wanted to awsk you, bah Jove, if you could get me two invitations. I know it is a great deal for one to do for a plebe, but——"

Corporal Spencer was in such a hurry to assent that he could not wait for the plebe to finish.

"Not at all!" he cried. "Not at all. Why, I shall be most happy to do it for you, Mr. Mount-Bonsall. Really, it is a very small favor, for I have plenty of invitations at my disposal. Wait just one moment, and you shall have them. The yearling class will be delighted to—ahem—welcome your two friends."

A minute or two later Master Chauncey's Fifth Avenue gait was carrying him swiftly up the street again, with two more of the much coveted invitations in his hand. And Chick Spencer was rushing into another tent to seize his friend Corporal Jasper wildly by the arm.

"What do you think? What do you think?" he cried. "The plebes are coming to the hop!"

"What! Why!"

"That fool dude has fallen into the trap. He's coming to dance, and bring two more plebes with him. Oh, say, oh say!"

The whole yearling class knew of it a few moments later when the companies fell in for parade. And the wildest hilarity resulted.

"A plebe at the hop! A plebe at the hop!" was the cry. "A plebe without a soul to dance with him. Oh! but won't there be fun."

There was indeed to be fun; the yearlings would have thought so if they could have seen Chauncey and read his thoughts. Oh, yes, there was fun.

But the question was, who was to enjoy it?

Chauncey, when he reached his own tent, found Mark standing in front of it; and Mark was dancing about with excitement, too.

"Did you get them?" he cried.

"Yes, I did, ye know, and—where are you going?"

Mark had started hastily down the street. He stopped long enough to shove a note into his friend's hand and give a warning word as to secrecy; then he turned and was gone.

"Read it! Read it!" was echoing in Chauncey's ears.

He did; and this was what he read:

"DEAR MR. MALLORY: I am writing this in great haste. Come over to see me at once; things are coming out beautifully. Did you get the extra invitations?"

"Your friend,
"GRACE FULLER."

And Chauncey nodded his head in delight, gave vent to an extra "bah Jove," and then dived into his tent to talk it over with the others.

What the others had to say is of little moment; the all important person was Mark, and Mark was hurrying over to the hotel, keeping step to the tune of the band that was just then marching across the parade ground at the head of the battalion.

He found Grace waiting for him.

"You got the invitations?" she inquired.

"Yes, Chauncey did," responded the other, laughing.

"I told you," said the girl, "that Corporal Spencer would do it. I knew his handwriting on the envelope at once, and I was sure that he was in the plot to fool Mr. Chauncey. And I'd just love to outwit him, too."

"You say you were successful?" inquired Mark.

For answer Grace Fuller presented three dance cards, at which Mark glanced with amazement and delight indescribable.

"Why, they're full!" he cried. "You've gotten some one for every dance!"

"Yes," she said, laughing gleefully as she went over the names with him. "I put your names over the top, you and Mr. Dewey and Mr. Chauncey—that last name of his is too long to say. And I could have filled a dozen just as well, only you said that you three were the only ones who cared for dancing. I hope you all dance well. Mr. Dewey looks as if he might; and our Fifth Avenue friend I'm sure is a perfect sylph. I think you do everything gracefully."

"I hope you have a chance to find out," laughed Mark. "I hope you have put yourself down on my card."

"I have put you down for the very first dance," said she, simply. "You told me to fix it all the way I liked."

"But who are the other girls?" inquired Mark. "I haven't met any of them."

"You will in plenty of time. I'll introduce you to them. They're all friends of mine; you see, I know nearly every one about the post. And I've picked all the very prettiest and nicest girls of them all, too."

"And arranged them in order of merit," added Mark, slyly glancing at his own card, whereat the girl shook her fan at him.

"But tell me," he continued, in perplexity, after a few moments' pause, "how did you ever manage to get so many girls into the conspiracy? Why, I had no idea that one-tenth as many cared anything about plebes."

"I used a little diplomacy," laughed Grace. "I made myself as charming as I could. I found two, three in fact, whose brothers are plebes, and one whose brother will be next year. I think most of the girls really sympathize with the plebes, and then, too, I'm sure all of them like to tease. Did you ever know one who did not? And this will make the yearlings fairly wild. But the chief reason I urged I can't tell to you; you wouldn't like it."

"Why not?"

"It would make you conceited, as you say. You must know—you ought to if you don't—that you're a regular hero among West Point girls. In the first place, every one knows how you saved me; and then all of them saw you the other day stop that runaway. You're famous, besides, as the boldest plebe that ever came here; the yearlings are the laughingstock of the place because of you. And that makes you a sort of romantic creature, a Sir Galahad in disguise. To dance with you is a whole fairy tale."

Mark laughed heartily over this description, which he chose to consider exaggerated. But whatever might be the cause of Grace Fuller's success, he was heartily and undisguisedly delighted at the success itself. Here were three dance cards, one for each of the conspirators; and all of them were full, which meant that there were a score or more of girls who had pledged themselves to join in that plot.

It was a triumph indeed, and Mark thanked Grace for it most heartily. And when he left the hotel and hurried over to camp again, his chuckles of delight were audible and numerous.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RESULT AT THE HOP.

Every one goes to hops promptly on time at West Point. In select society it is the thing nowadays to go late everywhere, so Chauncey assured his friends. But at the academy relentless tattoo sounds on hop-nights at half-past nine as usual. The cadets have to be in line at camp five minutes later. And so, anxious to dance all they can, everybody who intends to dance is on hand by the hour of eight.

The dances were held, in Mark's day, in the academy building, in two big rooms on the second floor. Those rooms are used as examination rooms; luckless and frightened candidates were sent there to show what they do not know. This evening, however, it was gay and festive.

The West Point Military Band, in full plumage, occupied a small platform and dispensed an overture previous to the first waltz. The walls were gay with flags and an abundance of decorations in general. And the floor and seats about the room were still more beautifully adorned.

A person who "knew the ropes," who was familiar with hops and hop ways, would not have failed to notice that there was something unusual going on that night, that everybody seemed to be waiting for something. Cadets talking to damsels could not keep their eyes from straying to the doorway, while at the doorway sauntered about, waiting, a considerable group of anxious cadets. There was one thought in the minds of all of them.

"Will they come? Oh, say, will they come?"

And then, suddenly, a ripple of excitement ran around the room; cadets crowded to the doorway, girls strained their necks to get a view, the leader of the band in all his finery nearly let his orchestra run wild in his interest. And across the floor rushed Corporal Spencer, hop manager, and grasped his friend Jasper by the arm.

"They're here! They're here, man!" he gasped. "Oh, say!"

And the next instant the bandmaster waved his baton, the music crashed all at once, and the first dance was begun.

A dance with plebes present!

To say that the three, Mark, Chauncey and "B'gee," were the cynosure of all eyes would not begin to express the situation. Every one's glance was fairly glued upon them. Girls forgot their dance partners, cadets stopped still in their tracks. Not a soul offered to dance. Not a soul did anything but stare at those three idiots.

They did not seem the least bit ill at ease. All of them seemed quite in their element. Their attire was surely immaculate; Chauncey was fairly radiant in an elegantly handled monocle. And they did not seem to notice the stares, intentionally rude, that came from the cadets. They knew just what to do, and they did it, while the whole room watched and gasped.

Grace Fuller, belle of West Point, sat in one corner of the room, a perfect vision of loveliness indescribable. About her were half a dozen cadets. Her stern old father sat nearby, with Mrs. Fuller beside him. And toward that group those idiotic plebes were going!

The yearlings gasped in horror, bit their lips in vexation. For Judge Fuller arose from his seat and welcomed Mark Mallory heartily; his wife did likewise. The three sat down and began to talk to them and to Grace, at which the cadets with that party went off in horror and amazement.

Well, there was no use staring any more, for the three plebes were safe behind that bulwark; and vexed and aggravated, the cadets went their ways and began to dance. They kept their eyes on the three, however. They saw Mrs. Fuller rise suddenly and cross the room, with Chauncey and Dewey at her side. And then what must she do but introduce them to two girls? Oh!

This was terrible! Bull Harris, Mark's old enemy, was in the very act of asking one of the girls, a tall, stately creature clad in pink, if he might have the pleasure, etc.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Harris," said she. "But I'm already engaged for this dance."

And then up stepped Mrs. Fuller.

"Miss Evens," she said, "allow me to present Mr. Dewey, with whom I believe you have promised to dance."

A moment later, to the indescribable horror of the cadets in the place, three plebes set out upon that floor to dance, each of them leading girls with whom to dance was a privilege that came only to the best. And how those plebes did dance! The yearlings had never seen better; they could not but acknowledge that. For the plebes were on their mettle then, and if ever they danced in their lives, they did then, radiant with triumph, swept away by the excitement distributing benignant smiles upon every one.

There is only one heaven that lasts an eternity. All others, that dance included, have their finish. The three plebes returned the delighted girls to their seats, and the cadets, excusing themselves from every one, rushed out into the hall, there to hold an angry and excited consultation. For this was indeed a desperate, a terrible thing! Evidently three girls, relying upon their charms, were going to insult the corps wantonly, dance with some beastly plebes.

"They shall pay for it!" was the cry. "Not a man shall dance with them. Cut them dead!"

But if the yearlings supposed that Mark and his friends proposed to dance with just three girls all that night, they were woefully and badly mistaken. The fever had spread in the interim; introductions had been going on. When the yearlings returned, behold, Mark was making himself charming to another girl, and Chauncey, perfectly in his element at last, was busily engaged in describing the streets of Paris to a group of half a dozen!

"Cut them all!" whispered the yearlings.

Well, they tried it. To be brief, Grace and the other two danced with no one that next dance. But three more girls went down on the blacklist, and the plebes' triumph was yet greater.

"We'll leave 'em no one to dance with," chuckled Mark. "We'll send them all home!"

The next dance was a lancers. Three couples joined the groups upon the floor and lo and behold, from the spot where the plebes stood every cadet fell away with obvious meaning. The rudeness was seen by every one in the room; it was the worst insult of all. The three couples stood lost for a moment; and then,

suddenly, red with indignation, the dignified judge sprang to his feet.

He and his daughter made up that set. And once more the yearlings fairly ground their teeth with rage.

They did not know what to do then. They were fairly baffled. The plebes had entered the trap—and here was the result!

"Oh, if we only hadn't been fools enough to send those invitations!" was their thought.

Meanwhile dance after dance passed, girl after girl was "out of it." There is always a scarcity of girls at a place like West Point. There are always sure to be more cadets at every hop than there are partners, and with those three vile plebes sending three to the wall every dance—and the prettiest and most liked ones, too—things soon began to arrive at a crisis. It looks funny to see the pretty girls sitting and the ugly ones dancing; and every one began to see that the plebes were having decidedly the best of the bargain. They were dancing with whom they pleased; most of the cadets were soon unable to dance at all, finding it necessary to hang about the doorway and discuss the situation.

It was a distinct triumph for the plebes; even the yearlings could not deny that, and that made them all the angrier.

Ten dances had passed; by actual count there were thirty girls "out of it," and something less than twenty still left to the cadets. And then the matter came to a head.

Cadet Lieutenant Wright, a first class man, captain of the football team, and a hop manager for his class, caused the trouble. Urged by all his desperate classmates and urged still more by the spectacle of Mark's dancing with a certain sweet creature who had hitherto devoted all her energies to making herself charming to him, he stepped forward in the middle of the dance and with his badge of manager upon his coat, touched Mark upon the arm.

Mark halted abruptly. The whole room stared.

"Mr. Mallory," said the lieutenant, "the cadets who are giving this hop request you to leave the floor."

Mark's face turned white; he bit his lip savagely to choke down his anger, and when he spoke at last his voice was hard and calm.

"The cadets who are giving this hop," he said, drawing the invitation from under his coat, "invited me by this to come. I shall consider your remark, sir, as a personal insult, for which you will be called upon to answer at Fort Clinton."

"And do you refuse to leave?"

"As an invited guest and a cadet of this academy I most decidedly do."

And the whole room heard him, too.

Wright returned to his classmates; a brief consultation was held, ending in his stepping across the room and speaking to the leader of the band. The music stopped abruptly.

The hop was over for the night.

Three heartily delighted plebes escorted three heartily delighted damsels home that night. And wild indeed was the hilarity of them and of the Banded Seven.

"Victory! Victory!" was the cry. "We danced and we have conquered!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE ANNOUNCEMENT.

"Hey, fellows! What do you think? Mark Mallory's in disgrace."

"In disgrace!"

"Yes, and he's going to be fired. Whoop!"

The first speaker was Bull Harris. At the moment he was red in the face and breathless as the result of a long run across the parade ground. At the end of it he had burst suddenly into the midst of a crowd of his classmates with the excited exclamation above.

The effect upon them of the startling announcement was electrical. To a man they had leaped to their feet, with expressions of delight they made no effort to conceal.

"How do you know it, Bull?" demanded one of the crowd.

"The superintendent has sent for him right in the middle of drill," cried Bull.

"What for?"

"I don't know. It's something he's been doing. One of the orderlies told me he heard the old man say he'd fire him. And that's all I know."

The babel of confusion and excited voices that resulted from this bit of news lasted without interruption for several minutes.

"It's too good to be true," they vowed. "By George, just as we were talking about him, wondering how we could get square with the confounded plebe, for his tricks! And now he's going to be fired."

And then suddenly Bull's voice rose above the excitement again.

"Look! Look!" he cried. "If you don't believe me look and see for yourselves. There he goes now!"

The cadets stared across the parade ground and then shouted aloud for joy.

Down on the road by the cavalry plain a single lone figure was walking, a figure clad in the "plebe" uniform. And the figure was that of Mallory!

Mark as he walked did not observe the group of cadets who were glaring at him so angrily. It would not have worried him if he had, for he had something a good deal more important to occupy his mind just then. He was racking his brains to think of some plausible reason to account for his errand at the moment.

He had been, along with the rest of the plebe company, lined up on one side of the camp for drill. A tactical officer had been rigidly putting them through the manual of arms, with half a dozen yearling corporals and file closers aiding him. And then, breathless with running, an orderly had burst upon the scene.

He had a note in his hand, and he handed it to the "tac." The latter read it, then read it aloud—again.

"Cadet Mallory will report to the superintendent at once."

That was all; the rest of the class stared and wondered, and Mark stepped out of the line, handed his gun to the orderly, and strode away from the scene.

The yearlings, as we have seen, had a good deal clearer notion of why Mark was wanted than he had himself. To Mark it was an absolute mystery. He knew no reason on earth why the superintendent should want him, and he quickened his pace so as to get there and find out the sooner.

Erect and firmly stepping as was the plebe's habit by this time, he marched down the road toward the academy building, between the parade ground and the Cavalry Plain. He passed the chapel, and then the headquarters building, his destination, lay before him. Mark had entered that building just three times before this. He could not help thinking of them then.

The first time, he had felt, was the most momentous moment of all his life. Months of struggling were there crowned with a triumph that had seemed to leave no more worlds to conquer. For he had entered that building then to take the oath of allegiance as a duly certified and admitted "conditional" cadet.

What that had meant to Mark only those who have followed his history can appreciate. Poor and friendless, he had seen West Point as a heaven, the object of all his future hopes, an object far away from his home in Colorado, but one to be struggled for and hoped for none the less. He had earned the money to come by a sudden stroke of cleverness—one step. After that he had striven for the appointment, a step far longer and harder, yet one that must be taken.

The congressman of that Colorado district had held a competitive examination. Mark had tried, and also his deadly enemy, one Benny Bartlett, a rather weak, malicious youth, spoiled by the old squire, his father. Benny had sworn to win, and was desperate when he realized he couldn't; he had bribed a printer's devil, gotten the examination papers, and so passed ahead of Mark, who was made alternate. But Mark had afterward beaten Benny at the West Point examination, where cheating was impossible, and had thus secured the long coveted cadetship.

While we are talking about him he has gone inside. It would be well to stop and follow him, for momentous things were destined to result from that visit, too. It was indeed true, as the yearlings so joyfully learned, Mark Mallory was in deep and serious danger.

An orderly showed him promptly to the office of Colonel Harvey. Mark found that gentleman alone in the room, the same room where he had been received so kindly before. But this time the stern old officer seemed less cordial. There was a chilly air about it all that made the plebe feel rather uncomfortable. Colonel Harvey did not speak; he did not even look up from the paper on which he was writing; and Mark stood by at attention, waiting respectfully.

The first movement did not come from either of them. Mark strove to keep his eyes to the front, which was in accordance with orders. But he could not help glancing about the room a little. And to his surprise he saw a side door open and another figure enter the room.

Mark did not see that just at the moment the colonel's glance was fixed upon him steadfastly; he was too busy staring at the stranger. The stranger was a young fellow with coarse features, evidently a workingman. He twisted his hat in his hand nervously, obviously ill at ease. He stared at Mark and at the officer alternately. Mark, who did not know him from Adam, turned away after the first glance, giving no more thought to the intruder except to wonder what he was doing in that office.

When Mark turned his eyes upon Colonel Harvey again he saw then that the

latter was watching him. And a moment later the colonel laid down his pen and spoke:

"Cadet Mallory," he said sternly, "I wish you to observe this man. Do you know him?"

Mark stared at the stranger in amazement.

"No, sir," he said. "I never saw him before, to my knowledge."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly."

There was a moment's pause after that, and then the superintendent tapped a bell upon his desk. It was answered at once. The same door opened again, and two persons entered suddenly. Mark knew them, and he knew them well. He stared at them incredulously, gasping; and he sprang back in amazement.

"Benny Bartlett!" he cried. "You here! And the squire!"

It was Benny Bartlett sure enough; Mark knew his sallow deceptive look too well to be mistaken. And the squire was the same stout and blustering, self-assertive old man. He banged his cane on the floor as he heard Mark's exclamation and saw his look of surprise.

"Yes, sir," he cried. "It is the squire. And I observe you start with guilt when you see him, too."

Mark stared at the two all the harder then. And there was a brief silence during which every one stared at every one else. Mark thought he saw the stranger twist his cap yet more nervously.

"Mr. Mallory," began the superintendent at last. "Mr. Mallory, do you know why these three are here?"

"No, sir," said Mark, with evident emphasis.

"Is this upon your honor as a gentleman?"

"It is," was the answer.

"Humph!" snorted the squire. "Your word of honor isn't worth much! I——"

"If you please," interrupted Colonel Harvey with dignity, "that question is for me to settle. Mr.—er—what did you say this man's name was?"

"Nick," put in the squire.

"Nick," said the superintendent, turning toward the strange youth, "will you please have the goodness to tell again the story which you told to me."

Nick looked frightened and hesitated.

"Come, come!" cried the squire, impatiently. "Out with it now, and no lies about it!"

Thus enjoined Nick cleared his throat and began.

"I'm a printer's boy," he said, "and I works for the Roberts in Denver. I was a-walking along the street one day, I was and up comes this feller—indicating Mark—and he says, says he to me, 'Your people are printing the examination papers for Congressman Wheeler, ain't they?' 'Yes,' says I, and then after that a little while he says that he wants to win them examinations, 'cause there was a feller trying 'em that he wanted to beat. So he gimme a hundred—that was the next day; he said he'd earned it in a railroad smash up, or something—and then I got them papers and gave 'em to him. And that's all I know."

"Very good," commented the squire, tapping his cane with approval. "Very good! And what did he say about these West Point examinations?"

"He said, says he, 'If I win these here and git the appointment, I ain't a-going to do nothin' but skin through the others with cribs.'"

"That's right!" cried the squire, triumphantly. "There now! What more do you want?"

He glanced at the superintendent inquiringly, and the superintendent gazed at Mark. As for Mark, he was simply too dumfounded to move. He stood as if glued to the spot and stared in blank consternation from one to the other.

"Well," said the colonel at last, "what have you to say for yourself?"

Mark was too amazed to say much.

"So that is their plan!" he gasped. "So they seek to rob me of my cadetship by this—this——"

He stopped then, unable to express his feelings.

"Colonel Harvey," he inquired at last, "may I ask if you believe this story?"

"I do not see, Mr. Mallory," was the response, "what else I am to believe. I do not like to accuse these three gentlemen of a plot to ruin you. And yet—and yet _____"

"May I ask a question or two?" inquired Mark, noticing the puzzled and worried look upon his superior's face.

"Most certainly," was the answer.

"In the first place, if you please, according to this story, if I gave this man a hundred dollars, why did he tell about it afterward?"

"His conscience troubled him," cried the old squire excitedly. "As yours would have if you had any. He knew that he had done wrong, robbed my son, and he came and told me. And I was wild, sir, wild with anger. I have brought this man on all the way from Colorado, and I propose to see my son into his rights, if I die for it!"

"Oh!" said Mark. "So you want Benny made a cadet. But tell me how, if I had the papers, did Benny beat me so badly, anyhow?"

"My son always was brighter than you," sneered the old man.

"And all the examinations weren't from printed papers," chimed in Benny's crowing voice. "There was spelling, and reading and writing—that was where I beat you."

"I see," responded Mark. "It is a clever scheme. And I'm told I passed here because I cheated; how came you to fail?"

"My son was sick at the time," cried Squire Bartlett, "and I can prove it, too."

Mark smiled incredulously at that; Benny Bartlett nodded his head in support of his father's assertion.

"Well?" inquired the squire. "Is there anything more you want to know?"

"No," said Mark. "Nothing."

"Satisfied now, are ye?" sneered the other; and then he turned to Colonel Harvey.

"I think that is all, sir," he said. "What more do you want?"

The colonel stood gazing into space with a troubled look. He did not know what to say; he did not know what to think. He could not call these three men conspirators; and yet the handsome, sturdy lad who had done so much to win his approval, surely he did not look like a thief!

"Mr. Mallory," he inquired at last. "What have you to say to this?"

"Nothing," responded Mark. "Nothing, except to denounce it as an absolute and unmitigated lie from beginning to end."

"But what proof can you bring?"

"None whatever, except my word."

After that there was no more said for some minutes. The silence was broken by the superintendent's rising.

"Mr. Mallory," he said, "you may go now. I must think this matter over."

And Mark went out of the door, his brain fairly reeling. He was lost! lost! West Point, his aim in life, his one and only hope, was going! He was to be dismissed in disgrace, sent home branded as a criminal! And all for a lie! An infamous lie!

A few minutes later Benny and the printer's devil, his accomplice, came out of that same door. But it was with a far different look. Benny was chuckling with triumph.

"It worked!" he cried. "By Heaven, it worked to perfection! Even the old man hasn't caught on!"

"Squire Bartlett's as blind as Mallory," laughed the other. "And Mallory'll be out in a week. Remember, you owe me that hundred to-day."

CHAPTER XIX.

TEXAS TURNS HIGHWAYMAN.

There were six terrified plebes up at Camp McPherson, when Mark rushed in, pale and breathless, to tell them the reason for his summons to headquarters. The Banded Seven had not had such a shock since they organized to resist the yearlings.

"Benny Bartlett!" cried Texas, springing up in rage. "Do you mean that little rascal I licked the day he got sassy during exams?"

"That's he," said Mark, "and he's come back to get his revenge."

"And you don't mean," cried the six, almost in one breath, "Colonel Harvey believes it?"

"Why shouldn't he?" responded Mark, despairingly. "I cannot see any way out of it. The whole thing's a dirty lie from beginning to end, but it makes a straight story when it is told, and I can't disprove it."

"But I thought you said," cried Texas, "that you saw Benny himself cheating, or tryin' to, at the examinations right hyar."

"So I did," said the other. "But I cannot prove that. I know lots of things about him, but I can't prove one of them. They've simply got me and that's all there is of it. There are three of them, and it's almost impossible to make the superintendent think they're lying. Think of a rich old man like the squire's doing a trick like that!"

"Perhaps he ain't," suggested Texas, shrewdly.

"Perhaps not," admitted Mark. "Benny would not hesitate to lie to his own father. But all the same I have no proof. And what in Heaven's name am I to do?"

Mark sat down upon the locker in his tent and buried his face in his hands. His wretchedness is left to the imagination. The whole thing had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly, right in the midst of his triumph! And it was so horrible!

The six could think of no word of comfort; for they were as cast down, as thunderstruck, as he. Their regard for Mark was deep and true, and his ruin they felt was theirs. They sat or stood about the tent in characteristic attitudes, and with dejection written upon every line of their countenances.

First to move was the wild Texas, ever impulsive and excitable. And Texas leaped to his feet, with a muttered whoop!

"I'm a-goin' to prove them air fellers are lyin', by thunder, ef I have to resign to do it!"

By the time that brief resolution was finished Texas was out of the tent and gone. The six glanced up as he left, and then once more resumed their dejected and bewildered discussion.

"I can see no way out of it. No way!" groaned Mark. "I am gone."

And the others could see no other way to look at it.

Texas was rather more bizarre and unconventional, more daring than his companions from the "effete East," and his detective efforts were apt to be more interesting for that reason. He paced up and down the company street, hearing and seeing no one, thinking, thinking for all he was worth.

"Proof! Proof!" he kept muttering to himself over and over again. "Proof! Proof!"

Perhaps it was ten minutes before he did anything else. Texas was like a fisherman waiting for a bite during that time. He was waiting for an inspiration. And then suddenly the inspiration came. He stopped short in his tracks, opened his eyes wide and staring, and his mouth also; his fingers began to twitch with a sudden wave of excitement; his face flushed and he trembled all over. The next moment with a joyful "durnation!" he had turned and was off like a shot down the street.

"I've got it! I've got it! Whoop!"

And then suddenly he halted again.

"I won't tell 'em," he muttered to himself. "I'll keep it for a surprise! But then, I'll want some one to help me. Who'll I—oh, yes!"

Texas had turned and started with no less haste the other way.

"I'll git one o' them ole cadets," he chuckled, "some one the ole man'll believe. I know!"

At the eastern side of the camp, in A Company Street, and facing the sentry post of Number Three, stood a single spacious tent. It belonged to the first cadet captain, Fischer by name. And at that tent, trembling with impatience, the plebe halted and knocked.

"Come in," called a voice, and Texas entered.

There was but one occupant in the tent—the first captain has a tent to himself, if you please. It was Fischer, tall and stately and handsome as usual, with his magnificent uniform and sash and chevrons. He was engaged in writing a letter at the moment; he looked up and then arose to his feet, a look of surprise upon his face as he recognized the plebe.

"Mr. Powers," said he.

Texas bowed; and then he started right in to business.

"Mr. Fischer," he began, "I know it ain't customary for plebes to visit first classmen, and especially B. J. plebes. But I got something to say right naow that's important, more important than ceremonies an' such. Will you listen?"

The officer bowed courteously, though he still looked surprised.

"It's about Mr. Mallory," said Texas. "I reckon you've heard the stories 'bout him?"

"I have heard rumors," said the other. "I shall be glad to hear more."

Texas told him the story then, just as Mark had told it a few minutes ago. And the look of surprise on the captain's face deepened.

"This is a serious business, Mr. Powers," he said.

"It's one lie from beginning to end!" growled the other. "Now look a-yere. You been a pretty good friend o' Mark's, Mr. Fischer. You're the only man I know of in this place that's tried to see fair play. When Mark had to fight them yearlings it

was you saw he had his rights. When they tried to get him dismissed on demerits, you were the one to stop 'em. Now, I don't know why you did it, 'cept perhaps you're an honest, fair an' square man yourself, an' saw he was, too. Anyhow, you've been his friend."

"I have tried to see fair play," responded the other, slowly. "I have not approved of many of his acts, what he did last night at the hop, for instance. But still——"

"If you knew this yere plot was a lie, would you say so?" interrupted Texas.

"I most certainly should."

"An' if you saw a chance to prove it, knowin' that Mark'd be dismissed if you didn't, would you?"

"It would be my duty, I think, as captain of his company. I should do it anyway, for I respect Mr. Mallory."

And Texas seized the surprised Fischer by the hand and gave him a mighty squeeze.

"Wow!" he cried. "I knew you would! Whoop! We'll fool them ole liars yet!"

Then, to the still greater surprise of the cadet captain—who wasn't used to Texas' ways—the plebe dragged him over to the corner of the tent and whispered in a trembling, excited voice.

"Don't you tell a soul, naow, not a soul. S-sh! Do you want to turn highwayman?"

Fischer stared at the other in alarm.

"Turn highwayman!" he echoed.

"Yes," whispered Texas. "Don't you know what a highwayman is? He's a man what robs folks at night?"

Fischer gasped and looked dumfounded. The day that Texas had gone on his "spree" and tried to wreck West Point he had been reported by the surgeon on the sick list for "temporary mental aberration due to the heat."

"This is an awfully hot day," thought Fischer. "I hope to gracious he hasn't got any guns!"

Texas waited a moment longer, and then he went on to whisper. He had lots to say, and one would have been interested to observe its effect upon the officer. His look of consternation faded; one of interest, doubt, and then finally of delight replaced it. And by the time the other was through he had forgotten the lad was a plebe. He seized his hand and slapped him upon the back.

"By George!" he cried. "I'll do it! It's a slim chance, slim as thunder, but if it'll clear Mark Mallory I'll try it if it costs me my chevrons!"

At which Texas gave vent to a whoop that awoke the echoes of the Highlands.

CHAPTER XX.

TWO MIDNIGHT PROWLERS.

On the night of the day we are writing about, there was something unusual happening. It was neither a sentry nor an officer, this stealthy figure that stole out of a tent in the street of Company A. He waited cautiously until the sentry behind his tent had passed on to the other end, and then with the slyness of an Indian he crept down the path. And when he disappeared again, it was the big tent of the first captain that swallowed him up.

Fischer was expecting that visit. He was up and dressing, and ready for the other.

"There are the clothes, Mr. Powers," he whispered. "Leave your uniform here and slip into them quickly."

The captain's voice was trembling with excitement, and some little nervousness, too. This was a desperate errand for him. It might cost him his chevrons, if not worse; for he had desperate deeds to do that night.

"Have you got the guns?" he whispered.

By way of answer Texas slipped two shining revolvers into the other's hands. Fischer gripped the cold steel for a moment to steady his nerves, and then thrust the weapons into the pocket of the rough coat he wore.

"Come on," he said. "I'm ready."

He stepped out of the tent, Texas close at his heels. The two crept around the side, then crouched and waited. Suddenly Fischer put his fingers to his lips and gave a low whistle. The effect was instantaneous. Sentries Number Three and Four promptly faced about and marched off the other way. It was contrary to orders for sentries to face in opposite directions at the same time. But it was handy, for it kept them from "seeing any one cross their beats." Texas and his

companion had sprung up and dashed across the path and disappeared over the earthworks of old Fort Clinton.

"That was neatly done," chuckled Texas. "We're safe now."

"It would be a sad state of affairs, indeed," laughed the other, "if a first captain couldn't 'fix' two sentries of his own class. We're all right if we don't make any noise."

A person who glanced at the two would not have taken them for cadets. They were clad in old dilapidated clothing, with collars turned up to increase the effect. To complete this disguise, they took two black handkerchiefs from their pockets, and in a few minutes more were as desperate-looking burglars as ever roamed the night.

"Burglary's not much worse than conspiracy, anyway," muttered Fischer, as he hurried along. "I wonder what time it is."

"Twelve o'clock and all's we-ell!" rang the voice of the sentry from camp just then—an answer to the question. And the two villainous-looking men crept on in silence, gripping their weapons the tighter as they went.

The hotel lies very near the camp; it was only a short walk for the two, even creeping and dodging as they were, before they were safely hidden close to the porch of the building. The house is in Colonial style, with big, high pillars, painted white. It was a difficult climb, but the two lost not one moment in hesitation. They evidently knew just why they came, and had planned their task beforehand. Texas sprang up on the shoulders of the other, and a short while later was lying breathless upon the tin roof of the piazza.

Fischer had dodged back into the shadow to wait. The other lay where he was for a short while, to glance about him and recover his breath; then he rolled over and crept softly and silently along until he reached one of the windows. Texas had found out which one beforehand; he could afford to waste no time now, for this was a State's prison offense he was at.

He raised himself and glanced over the sill of the open window; he glanced hastily about the room inside, and then dropped down again and crept to the edge of the roof.

"They aren't there," he whispered. "S-sh!"

"Not there!" echoed the other. "Then they haven't come home yet. Drop down."

Texas slid down that pillar with alacrity that would have scared a cat. And the two were hiding in the bushes a moment or two later.

"Gee whiz!" muttered Fischer. "Just think of the risks we took. They might have come in on us."

"Where can they be?" whispered Texas, anxiously. "I hadn't any idea they wouldn't be in by twelve."

"There's nothing they can be doing around here," said Fischer. "I don't know _____"

"Look a here!" muttered Texas, excitedly, as a sudden idea occurred to him. "I saw 'em a-goin' down to Highland Falls this evenin', an——"

Fischer gripped him by the arm.

"Jove!" he cried. "We'll go down and lay for 'em. It's a faint chance, but if we catch 'em there it'll be a thousand times less dangerous for us. And if we miss them we can come back. Let's hurry."

It was a dangerous business, that getting down to Highland Falls. There were the camp sentries and the sentries of the regular army, besides, patrolling most of the paths. And any of them would have stopped those two rough-looking men if they had seen them skulking about the post. But Fischer had been there three years, and he knew most of the "ropes." He dodged from building to building, always keeping the road in view so as to see their victims if they passed—and finally came out upon the road just at the beginning to cadet limits. Here they hid in a thick clump of bushes and lay down to wait amid the silence of that dark, deserted spot.

"I wonder if they'll come," whispered Texas. "I wish I had one of 'em by the neck. The rascals——"

The words were choked in their utterance; for the officer suddenly nudged his companion and pointed down the road.

"Look!"

That was all he said. Texas turned and glanced as he directed. There were two figures, clearly outlined in the moonlight, walking slowly up the road.

"It's they," whispered Fischer. "Shall we try it?"

And Texas gripped the two revolvers in his pocket and muttered, "Yes, we shall!"

The two came nearer and nearer. Out of the black shadows where they lay the cadets stared hard, watching them anxiously, waiting, panting with impatience and excitement. The strangers were slightly built, both of them, and young; Texas recognized one of them plainly. It was Benny Bartlett; that the other was the printer's boy, he took for granted. Then suddenly he noticed one of them stagger.

"That solves it," whispered Fischer. "They've been down to Cranston's getting drunk. The beasts!"

That last word cut Texas like a knife; he had been that way not a week ago himself. Texas was slowly learning the civilized view of drunkenness.

He forgot that in a few moments more, however. There was excitement, plenty of it, to fill his mind. The pair drew nearer still in the bright moonlight, and the time for their desperate deed was almost upon the cadets.

"For Heaven's sake don't let them get away," whispered Fischer. "If they cry out, make a break for camp, and I'll fix it."

That word was the last to be spoken; they lay in silence after that, listening to the others. Benny Bartlett, it appeared, was the more hilarious of the two, as such feeble hilarity goes. The other was trying hard to keep him quiet. The bushes that hid the cadets were right beside the road; and as Benny drew near they made out that he was trying to sing.

"We won't go home till morning; we won't go——"

"Shut up, you fool!" the other muttered, shaking him by no means gently. "You'll wake the old man, and——"

The two watchers rose upon their knees. Two revolvers clicked gently, which made the printer's boy start in alarm, and then came a subdued "Now!"

Before the victims could move or utter a sound two stalwart, roughly dressed, black-masked figures sprang out into the road. And the half-drunken pair found themselves gazing into the muzzles of two glistening revolvers.

"Hold up your hands!"

Half dead with terror the printer obeyed; the other sunk in a heap to the ground, his teeth fairly chattering.

"Not a sound!" was the next gruff order, obeyed equally well; and then the robbers got quickly to work.

It was all done so expeditiously that the victims scarcely realized it. One of the men covered the two with his weapons and the other went swiftly through the pockets of both.

He did not seem to care for watches or money. It was papers he looked for, and he glanced at what he found with feverish impatience. He had a matchbox in his hand, and he turned away from the party as he struck a light and read one after the other, tossing them aside with an angry exclamation. He searched the printer first and seemed to find nothing. Then he went for Benny, tumbling him about the ground and not forgetting to administer sundry vigorous kicks.

He had almost searched Benny, too, without success, when suddenly he gave an exclamation of joy, an exclamation which almost caused the other to drop his revolvers. The searcher had put his hand into a small, out-of-the-way pocket, and found a bit of carefully folded paper.

"This'll do it!" he whispered. "Come on."

Texas' heart began to throb with joy—Texas was the one with the gun.

"Victory! Victory!" he muttered. "Wow!"

Ready to shout with excitement at his success he started to follow the other, who was already making for the dense woods at the side of the road. He backed away slowly, still facing the two horrified lads, still leveling his weapons at them.

"Not a sound!" he muttered gruffly. "Remember!"

He reached the edge of the shadow in safety, and then suddenly a noise caught his sharp ear. It was not from the two, but from up the road. It was the sound of a horse's hoofs, accompanied by a jingling of sword and spur. Texas glanced around quickly; it was a horseman trotting up the road, an officer from the cavalry post! And in an instant more Texas had sprung into the woods and was dashing away with all his speed.

"Run, run!" he whispered to the cadet just in front. "Somebody's coming."

Benny Bartlett had not nerve to give an alarm; but the printer's boy had. The fleeing pair heard his voice shouting:

"Help! help! Murder!"

And an instant later came a clatter and thunder of hoofs as the soldier dashed up.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"Robbers!" shrieked the two. "We've been held up! They ran in there! Help! Help!"

The rescuer wheeled his horse sharply about; he whipped his sword from its scabbard and plunged furiously into the woods. The two heard his horse dashing up, and they knew their danger was great indeed.

Texas was flying on ahead, running for his life; but Fischer, who was a good deal the cooler of the two in the emergency, seized him by the arm and forced him into a clump of bushes on one side.

"Lie there!" he cried. "S-sh! Not a sound!"

The wisdom of the ruse was apparent. Crashing footsteps gave the officer something to follow; without it he might not find them in the black woods. They heard his horse thrashing about in the underbrush; the man was evidently afraid of nothing even in the darkness, for he plunged through it furiously, riding back and forth and beating the bushes. Once he passed so near to them that Texas heard the sword swish and felt for his revolvers instinctively. But that was the best the man could do, and finally he gave it up in disgust and rode out to the road again.

Then the two highwaymen arose and stole softly away in the darkness, congratulating themselves upon that narrow escape and still more upon their success.

When they reached the camp, which they did in a great hurry, for they knew the officer would alarm the post, they passed the sentry in the same way, and separated, Texas hurrying into his own tent. To his amazement he found his tent mates awake and sitting up, for what reason he had no idea.

"What's the matter?" he cried anxiously, for he saw at once that something

horrible had happened.

"Matter enough!" cried Mark in just as much anxiety. "It's not enough for me to get dismissed, but you have to go to work and get yourself in the same scrape."

"I dismissed!" echoed Texas, in amazement. "How?"

"Your absence has been noticed," groaned Mark. "Lieutenant Allen has ordered an inspection of the tent every half hour until you return. They've been here twice now, and you're a goner. And what makes it ten thousand times worse, I know it's on account of me. You've been doing something to clear me."

All this was said in about as lugubrious a tone as one could well imagine. But as for Texas, he merely chuckled as if he didn't care in the least.

"I reckon it'll be all right," he chuckled, as he began to shed his "cits" clothing. "Jes' you fellers go to bed an' be good. I reckon it'll all come out all right. Good-night."

CHAPTER XXI.

BENNY IS EXPOSED.

"Well, sir, I've come to ask what you propose to do about it."

It was the pompous old squire, and he stood once more in the superintendent's office, impatience written in every line of his face.

"Yes, sir," he continued, "I should like to know your decision."

"But, my dear sir," exclaimed Colonel Harvey, "I have not made up my mind entirely. It is only yesterday you stated your case. What is the hurry?"

"Hurry, sir?" returned the squire, "I am in a hurry for my rights. I mean that my son shall have the cadetship he has earned."

"Where is your son?" inquired the other, after a moment's thought.

"He is up at the hotel," answered the squire. "Why?"

"I should like to see him for just a moment. I have one question to ask him, if you please. I'll send an orderly for him."

The old man bowed stiffly; he sat up very straight in his chair and waited with dignity until his young hopeful appeared, wondering meanwhile what more the obdurate officer could want.

Master Benjamin entered the room obviously pale and flushed. He did not feel very well as the result of his last night's "manliness," and he had dim visions of robbers and stolen papers besides. He bowed to his father and the grave superintendent.

"Take a seat," said the latter. "I shall not keep you long. Take this pen and paper. I am anxious to see your handwriting. Please write these words as I dictate

them."

Benny, puzzled and alarmed, prepared to obey; he saw that the army officer was watching him narrowly, which did not increase his ease of manner.

"Write," said Colonel Harvey, "I—promise—to—pay—to—Nick—— What's the matter?"

Benny had begun to write promptly. At the sixth word he had turned pale as death, and his hand was trembling.

"What's the matter?" thundered the colonel again. "Why don't you write?"

"I—I——" stammered Benny. "I'm not very well."

"I should say not!" responded the other, angrily. "Let me see that paper."

He took it from the trembling lad's hand.

"Is that your son's handwriting?" he demanded, turning to the squire.

Old Mr. Bartlett glanced at it quickly, a look of amazement upon his face.

"No," he said, "it isn't. Benny, why don't you write in your usual way? Why don't you do as the gentleman tells you? And what's the meaning of this, anyway?"

Benny took the pen again, this time weakly.

"I'll write it," he said. "Here."

Colonel Harvey dictated it again relentlessly.

"I—promise—to—pay—to—Nick—Flynn—one—hundred—dollars—when M.—M.—is—fired. Benjamin Bartlett. Received—payment—July—13. Nick Flynn."

The officer took the result, laid it on his desk and took another from his pocket to compare.

"That settles it," said he, looking up at last. "Conspiracy."

"What does this mean, sir?" demanded the angry old squire, who had been waxing more and more impatient under the ordeal. "Why should my son be insulted like a common criminal? Why——"

"Because he is one," responded the other, just as warmly. "Look at those two papers, sir! Your son wrote both, and I know it."

"Where did you get that other?"

"The story is briefly told," said Colonel Harvey. "Two cadets of my academy turned highwaymen yesterday and held up your son at the point of a revolver. I presume he has told you."

"So that's who it was!" cried the furious squire. "So that's the kind of cadets you have! I shall have them both in jail."

"You will not," laughed the other, "for several reasons. In the first place, you do not know who they are, and I do not propose to tell you. In the second, if you do, your son is guilty of conspiracy, and I shall see him punished for that."

"This is preposterous!" exclaimed Squire Bartlett. "That paper proves absolutely nothing——"

"His manner when I asked him to write it, and his attempt to disguise his hand, prove a good deal to me. It proves to me, sir, that he is lying, and that you are a very foolish and indulgent father to believe him as you do. He has lied to me and to you, and he lies still when he denies it. Look at him cower now, sir! I knew that this whole thing was an outrageous plot the very moment the cadets showed me that paper this morning. One of them is one of my most trusted officers, and I believe his account. And what is more——"

Here the colonel stopped and glared at Benny.

"I say this for the benefit of your son, who evidently hates Mark Mallory. I believed and was glad to believe, that Mallory, who is the finest lad I had seen for many a day, is as honest as he is brave. And I shall take great pleasure in telling him so, and in apologizing for my doubts. And in conclusion——"

Colonel Harvey arose to his feet and bowed.

"I bid you a good-day, Squire Bartlett. Cadet Mallory will not be expelled from this academy, if I can help it."

And Benny and the squire left West Point that morning, which was the end of Mark's peril in that direction.

CHAPTER XXII.

MARK RECEIVES A COMMITTEE.

"Oh, say, Mark, I wish you'd fight that ole cadet! An' ef you do, jest won't we whoop her up! Gee whiz!"

The speaker was Texas. His quiet gray eyes were glistening as he spoke, and his face was alive with excitement.

The two were resting from the morning's drill, and were lounging about a shady nook in the corner of the siege battery inclosure. Grouped about them, and equally interested in the important discussion were five plebes, the other members of the Banded Seven.

It will be remembered that one of the "hop managers," a first classman and an officer, Cadet Lieutenant Wright, had ventured in behalf of his class to request Mark to leave the floor. Mark, who was in the midst of a dance at the moment, had been justly indignant. He had informed the other that an apology would be demanded; and that as a cadet, having an invitation, he proposed to stay and dance. Whereupon the hop managers had stopped the music and "busted up their ole hop" and gone home in a rage.

That was the end of the matter, except that there was a fight on between Cadet Mallory and Lieutenant Wright. It was to that fight that Texas was alluding.

"An' ef you lick him," he repeated, "won't we whoop her up!"

"There will certainly be a fight," responded Mark, after a moment's thought.

"That is, unless Wright apologizes, which he will not do of course. I do not like to fight; I'd a great deal rather get along without it; for it is a brutal sort of an amusement at best."

"Rats!" growled Texas.

"But it's necessary all the same," continued the other. "I do not see how I can keep my dignity otherwise. The notion that a plebe is a creature without any feelings who may be slammed about at will is altogether too prevalent to suit my taste; and I propose to have the cadets understand once and for all that they may haze me all they want to if they can, but that when they insult me they are going to get hurt."

"Bully, b'gee!" chimed in Dewey, with a chuckle of delight.

"Do you think you can do him?" inquired one.

"I don't know," said Mark. "And what is more I don't want to know. If I knew I could whip him I wouldn't want to fight. I mean to try."

"Wow!" growled Texas, angry at the mere supposition of Mark's not being able to thrash any one on earth. "Didn't he whop Billy Williams? An' ain't he the best man in the yearlin' class?"

"They said he was," said Mark. "And I had a hard time with him. But Wright's been here two years longer and is trained to the top notch. He's stronger than Williams, but I doubt if he's so quick. And still he's captain of the football team, which means a good deal, I'll tell you."

"I wish 'twas my chance to fight him!" exclaimed Texas. "Say, Mark, you always were lucky."

"I don't even know if he'll fight yet," laughed the other.

"B'gee!" chimed in Dewey, "I think it's about time you began to think of getting ready to start to send over and find out. Reminds me of a story I once heard, b'gee——"

"Good Heavens!" groaned Mark, with a look of anguish, "I'll send at once. Everything I do seems to remind you of something. I'll send."

"You will, hey?" laughed Dewey. "B'gee, that reminds me of another. There was a fellow lived in Kalamazoo, and he——"

"You go!" said Mark. "I'll make you my ambassador to keep you quiet. Or at least you can tell your stories to the enemy. Hurry up now!"

Dewey arose from his seat and prepared to start upon his errand. Texas was on his feet in an instant.

"Naow look a yere, Mark!" he cried. "Why kain't I go? I want some fun, too. You wouldn't let me go that time to Billy Williams!"

"I won't let you go now for the same reason," laughed Mark. "You'd be in a free-for-all fight in half a minute yourself. You go ahead, Dewey. Tell Mr. Wright that I demand an apology or else that he name the time and place. Throw in a few 'b'gees' for good measure, tell him a yarn or two, and make yourself charming and agreeable and handsome as usual. Tra, la, la."

Dewey tossed him an effusive kiss by way of thanks for the compliment, and then vaulted over the embankment and set out for camp, marching right merrily to the tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me," hands at the side, chest out, palms to the front, little fingers on the seams of the trousers!

The remainder of the Banded Seven waited in considerable anxiety for the return of the "ambassador." They were one and all of them interested in their leader and hero; his triumph was theirs and theirs his.

"He'll take half an hour, anyway," said Mark. "So there's no use beginning to get impatient yet. Let's take it easy."

"Yea, by Zeus!" said the Parson. "And in the meantime allow me to call your attention to a most interesting and as yet unclassified fossil which I unearthed this very morning."

The Parson cleared his throat with his usual "Ahem!" and Mark cast up his eyes.

"I wish I had found an embassy for the Parson, too," he groaned.

But there was no necessity for Mark's alarm, as it proved. The Parson had barely time to give a few introductory bits of information about "the pteroreptian genera of the Triassic and Jurassic periods," when the "Girl I Left Behind Me" once more made herself audible and Dewey appeared upon the scene, obviously excited.

"What are you back so soon for?" inquired Mark.

"I hadn't anything to do," responded the other, hurriedly. "Wright wouldn't see me."

"What! Why not?"

"He says there's a committee from his class coming to see you about it, b'gee."

"A committee!" echoed Mark. "I've got nothing to do with any committee. It's my business to challenge him."

"I know. But that don't make any difference. He wouldn't talk about it, he just said the committee would see you about it and explain the situation. And to make it more exciting, b'gee, they're coming now."

"How do you know?" inquired Mark.

"I saw 'em," answered Dewey, "and I told 'em where you were and, b'gee, they're on the way in a hurry. Something's up, b'gee, and I'm going to be right here to see it, too."

Dewey dropped into his corner once more, and after that the Seven said nothing, but waited in considerable suspense for the arrival of the distinguished first classmen, wondering meanwhile what on earth they could want and why on earth they found it necessary to interfere in Mark's quarrel with the officer.

They came, three of them, in due time. The Parson immediately arose to his feet.

"*Hoi presbeis tou Basileos!*" he said in his most stately tone, and with his most solemn bow. "That's Greek," he added, condescendingly—to the six; he took it for granted that the learned cadets knew what it was. "It's a quotation from the celebrated comedy, the *Acharnians*, and it——"

They were shockingly rude, that committee. They paid not the least attention to the Parson and his classical salutation, but instead, after a stiff, formal bow, proceeded right to their business with Mark. The Parson felt very much hurt, of course; he even thought of challenging to a duel at once. But a moment later he found himself listening with rapt attention to the amazing information which that committee had to give.

Mark did not know the names of the three cadets who confronted him. Their faces were familiar and he knew that they were first classmen. That was evidently all that the committee considered necessary, for they did not stop for an introduction.

All of the Banded Seven's fun had, up to this point, been manifested against the yearlings, and it had been the yearlings, chiefly, whose wrath they had incurred. But that hop was too much; that had been an insult to every cadet, and Mark knew that he had made new and more powerful enemies. He could see that in the looks of the three stern and forbidding cadets who glared at him in silence, with

folded arms.

"Mr. Mallory," said the spokesman.

Mark arose and bowed politely.

"What is it you wish?" said he.

"We have been sent to say a few words to you from the first class."

Another bow.

"In the first place Mr. Mallory, the class instructs us to say that your conduct at the hop the other night deserves their severest censure. You had no business to go."

"As a cadet of this academy," responded Mark, calmly, "I considered it my right."

"It has not been customary, sir," said the other, "for new cadets to go to the hops."

"Precedent may be changed," was Mark's answer. "It should be when it is bad."

There was a moment's silence after that and then he continued:

"Let us not discuss the point," he said. "I always consider carefully the consequences of my acts beforehand. I am prepared for the consequences of this one."

"That is fortunate for you," returned the "committee," with very mild sarcasm. "To proceed however, Lieutenant Wright, one of our hop managers, acting, please understand, in behalf of the class, requested you to leave."

"To continue the story," said Mark, keeping up the sarcastic tone, "I was naturally insulted by his unwarranted act. And I mean to demand an apology."

"And if you do not get it?" inquired the other.

"Then I mean to demand a fight."

"Which is precisely what we were sent to see you about," responded the cadet.

Mark was a trifle surprised at that.

"I thought," he said, "that my second should arrange the matter with Mr. Wright's. However, I shall be glad to fix it with you."

"You will fix nothing with us," retorted the other. "The class has instructed me to tell you that most emphatically you will not be allowed to fight with the lieutenant."

Mark stared at the three solemn cadets in amazement, and Texas gave vent to a muttered "Wow!"

"Not be allowed to fight!" echoed Mark.

"No, sir, you will not. Mr. Wright was the class' delegate; your quarrel is with the class."

"B'gee!" put in Dewey, wriggling with excitement, "let's lick the class, b'gee!"

Mark was silent for a while, thinking over the strange turn of affairs; and then the committee continued:

"Mr. Wright will not do you the honor of a fight or of an apology."

Mark flushed at that stinging remark. The speaker never turned a hair, but stared at him just as sternly as ever, seeing that his thrust had landed.

Mark had a way of saying nothing when he was angry, of thinking carefully what it would be best to do. And now he gazed into space, his brows knitted, while his six friends leaned forward anxiously, wondering what was coming next.

"Suppose," the plebe inquired at last, "suppose, sir, I were to force a fight with Mr. Wright?"

"If you do," said the other, "the class will take it upon itself to prevent that fight, using brute force if necessary, and punishing you severely for your impertinence. And moreover you will be required to defend your right to resist their authority, to defend it against every member of the class."

"All at once?" inquired Mark, with a tinge of irony.

"No, sir. Separately, and in fair fight."

Mark was thoughtful and silent again.

"The consequences," he said, at last, "are unpleasant. The consequences of swallowing so gross and unmerited an insult as Mr. Wright's, given before hundreds of people, are more unpleasant still. Dewey!"

That young man sprang to his feet with an excited "B'gee!"

"Dewey," said Mark, in slow and measured tones, and never once taking his eyes off the three stern cadets, "Dewey, you will return for me, please, to Mr. Wright's tent. Tell Mr. Wright for me that I demand an apology by this evening—or else that he name a time and place. And tell him finally that if he refuses I shall consider myself unfortunately obliged to knock him down the first time I see him."

"Bully, b'gee!"

"Wow!"

The six plebes had leaped to their feet as one man, with a wild hurrah! Oh, could anything have been better than that? Those three cadets had fairly quailed before Mark's bold and sudden, yet calm defiance.

"I think, gentlemen," said he, "that my purposes are clear to you now. And I bid you good-morning."

Half a minute later Mark was buried in the wild embraces and congratulations of his hilarious friends; Texas was dancing a Spanish fandango about the inclosure, and Dewey, red and excited, was on his way to camp as fast as his delighted legs could carry him.

"B'gee!" he kept chuckling. "B'gee, we'll wipe the spots off of 'em, b'gee. Whoop!" The more excited Dewey got the more b'gees he was accustomed to put in.

He was back again at the Siege Battery ten minutes later, this time even more excited, more red, more breathless than ever.

"B'gee!" he gasped. "I got it. He'll—he'll—b'gee, he'll fight."

"Whoop!" roared Texas.

"Yes," continued Dewey, "and b'gee, you can bet there'll be fun! You see, he wants to fight. He's no coward, I could see that, and he's mad as thunder because the class won't let him. And b'gee, I chucked in a few hints about his being afraid, which made him madder still, so that when I fired out that last part about knocking him down if he didn't, b'gee, he was wild. Oh, say! He hopped about that tent like—like Texas is doing now—and b'gee he wanted to have it out right away."

"Whoop!" roared Texas. "Let's go up now! I'll help! Let's——"

"Sit on him and keep him quiet," laughed Mark, shoving Texas into a corner. "Now go on."

"We couldn't fight at Fort Clinton, b'gee," continued Dewey still gasping for breath, "because the cadets would have learned. And so finally, b'gee, he said we'd get a boat and cross the Hudson. How's that?"

"When?" cried Mark.

"To-morrow morning first thing, b'gee!"

Texas had escaped by this time and was dancing about once more. And the rest of the Seven were about ready to join him. This was the greatest bit of excitement of all. The most B. J. thing they had ever done, defying the whole first class and going out of cadet limits besides. There never were seven lads more full of fun than these boys; and never had they seen a chance for quite so much fun as in this daring venture.

The seven adjourned for dinner soon after that. As they "fell in" on the company street it was evident to Mark that the story of his bold defiance, his desperate stroke, was all about the place even then. It was known to the first class, and to the yearling enemies, and even to the plebes, who stared at him in awe and wondered where on earth he had gotten the "nerve" to dare to do what he had. For Mark Mallory stood pledged by his defiance to fight the whole corps of cadets.

He bore his notoriety easily; he returned the stares of his enemies with cool and merry indifference, and as he cleaned his musket and turned out for drill, or made the dust about the camp fly while on "police duty," there was nothing about him to lead any one to suspect that he was, of all West Point's plebes and even cadets, the most conspicuous, the most talked of.

The story spread so far that it reached the ears of a certain very dear friend of his. An orderly handed him a note late that afternoon; he knew the handwriting well by this time and he opened the letter and read it hastily:

"DEAR MR. MALLORY: Please come over to the hotel as soon as you can. I have some important news for the Seven, and for you particularly.

"Your friend,

"GRACE FULLER."

Mark went, wondering what could be "up," and he found that it was about that same all-important affair that Grace wanted to see him.

"I hear you are going to fight," she began as soon as she saw him; there was a worried smile on her face which made Mark smile involuntarily.

"It's nothing very desperate," he answered. "So you needn't be alarmed. You see it's necessary for me to fight once in a while else you and I couldn't play all our beautiful B. J. tricks."

"I guess you'd better go then," she laughed. "But I don't like it a bit. You'll come home all bruised up and covered with court-plaster, and I shan't have anything to do with you until you get handsome again."

"Thanks for that last word 'again,'" responded he with a laugh. Then, he added, more seriously, "How did you find all this out? I thought none of the cadets were going to speak to you since the hop?"

"Pooh!" said Grace. "You didn't suppose they meant that, did you? Half of them are beginning to capitulate already. I knew they wouldn't hold out."

"I knew it too," thought Mark to himself; he was watching the girl's beautiful face, with its expression of action and life.

"It seems then that all my rivals are back again," he said, aloud.

"None of them are your rivals," answered the girl; and then she added, quickly: "But that wasn't what I sent for you to tell you. I have been finding out some more secrets. I think if I keep on practicing on the cadets I'll be quite a diplomatist and confidence man by and by."

"What have you found out now?"

"Simply that the whole first class proposes to keep you from fighting."

"I knew that before," said Mark.

"Yes," answered Grace. "But you didn't know that they knew you and Wright were going to cross the river to settle it."

"Do they know that, too?" cried Mark.

"They do; and moreover they intend to keep watch on you, and if you leave camp to-night you'll have the whole class to follow you."

Mark looked interested at that.

"I can see," he said, "that I am going to have no small amount of fun out of this business. I wish you could manage to use a little of your diplomacy in helping me escape."

"And I wish," added Grace, gazing at him with the same anxious look he had noticed before, "I wish I could help you do the fighting too. I hate to think of your being hurt."

"It hurts me to have you look so unhappy," said Mark, seriously. "I can stand the other. As a fighter I don't think you would make much of a success. This is a case of 'angels for council; devils for war.'"

"Go ahead," sighed Grace, "if you have to go to hospital I'll come over and nurse you."

Mark took his departure soon after that; he set out for camp, revolving in his mind all sorts of impracticable schemes for outwitting the first classmen that night. His thoughts were interrupted by hearing his name. He looked up; a cadet was addressing him.

"Mr. Mallory," he said, "good-afternoon. My name is Harden. Mr. Wright has asked me to be his second."

Mark bowed.

"Also to say that if you will be outside of your tent, dressed, at two to-morrow morning he will have a boat ready to take us to a quiet place."

Mark bowed again.

"Bring one second with you," the cadet continued, "Mr. Wright will have but one. And keep this very secret; tell no one, for the cadets will surely stop us if they learn. Mr. Wright has great doubts of our success anyway."

"I shall do my best," answered Mark. "I am as anxious to succeed as he. And I'm much obliged to you for your trouble."

Mark turned away and entered his tent.

"There'll be fun to-night," he muttered; "plenty of fun to-night."

There was.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FIGHT, AND OTHER THINGS.

"Are you ready in there? S-sh!"

"Yes, I'll be out in a moment."

"Two o'clock and all's we-ell!"

The first speaker was Harden, the first classman, the second was Mark, and the third the sentry, calling the hour.

The moonlight, clear and white, shone down on the glistening, snowy tents; the camp was almost as bright as day. Two figures who stood crouching in the company street were plainly visible, dressed in old contraband "cit's clothing" for disguise. And presently two more appeared, similarly clad, Mark and his old friend, the learned and pugilistic Parson.

The four said not a word, but stole silently down the street to the park that bounded the camp on the east, the river side, the beat of sentry No. 4. One of them gave a low whistle, a signal to the sentry to face about so that he might not "see any one cross his beat." The four sped across the line and were lost a moment later in the shadow of the woods.

The sound of their whistle had an echo, though they did not know it. It came from another tent and was the signal for a strange scene, one that probably that camp had never before witnessed. In an instant, it seemed, the white ground was alive with dark figures and black hurrying shadows. One-third of the whole cadet corps, all the first class, in fact, were about to engage in the perilous task of dodging camp!

There was no delay, no hesitation; the whole crowd fell in under one leader, stole down the street, signaled the sentry; and then came a dash and a tramp of feet

that almost shook the ground. The class was gone. Gone to stop that fight or die!

One hates to tax a reader's credulity. To say that that sleepy moonlit camp was once more a witness of the same unusual scene not half a minute later seems beyond the possibility of belief. Yet so it was. There was no signal this time; they simply met, five of them, all plebes, two from an A Company and three from a B Company tent just in the rear. They, too, fell in under a leader, a leader who punctuated his orders with a whispered "Wow!" And they, too, crossed the sentry post and vanished in the woods.

There was some one to trail the trailers!

We shall skip forward to those in advance. The four would-be duelists had no idea of their detection. They thought that their early start had done the work. They climbed down the bank of the river, passed the riding hall, and came out on the railroad track below, just at the mouth of the tunnel.

"The boat is down near Highland Falls," said Harden, briefly; and then there was silence again. Wright had not said one word since the start.

They set out down the track. They stole by the little station, with its single light and its half-sleeping telegraph operator. And then—hark! What was that?

Tramp, tramp! The four turned in amazement. Great heavens, they were followed! Clearly visible in the moonlight, their white trousers glittering, the company was marching steadily behind them. They were in line and had a captain. At concealment there was no attempt; they seemed to say, every one of them. "Well, here we are. Now what are you going to do about it?" And the four stared at each other in amazement.

"Shall we resort to flight?" inquired the learned Parson.

"They're too many; they'd catch us," said Harden, emphatically. "I don't know just what to do. I rather think we're outwitted. I—what's that?"

"Ding! dong! Woow-oo!"

"A train!" exclaimed Mark. "That'll scatter 'em. But it'll do us no good."

A moment later there was a glare of light in the tunnel, light that shone upon the figures on the track; and then the heavy train shot out and came rushing down upon them. The cadets scattered of course; and in the temporary confusion Mark

saw a golden chance. It was a slow train; he could see. A freight! And a moment later as the engine rushed past them, he shouted to the other three:

"Catch it! Catch it as it passes!"

It was all done so quickly they had scarcely time to think. They saw the last car whirl past the cadets; they saw the company reforming to march. And a moment later all four of them leaped toward the train and flung themselves aboard the last platform of the way car.

It was going faster than they had thought; the sudden jerk they got nearly tore their arms from their sockets, and the Parson's loose joints cracked ominously. But they hung on, all of them, with a grip like death. And they had the intense satisfaction of hearing a yell of rage from the cadets in the rear, and of seeing, as they clambered up and looked behind them, the whole crowd break into a run and set out in furious, though vain pursuit.

"That settles it," said Mark, joyfully. "We're safe! now then."

But his words were just a trifle premature. The cadets were fast being left behind, running though they were; but there was a new danger hitherto unthought of. The car they were on was the caboose. The door was flung open; a rough figure strode out.

"Hey, there, git off o' that! What the divil are yez doin' there?"

The four stared at each other in consternation. Here was a rub! They looked for all the world like tramps, to be kicked off unceremoniously into the hands of the enemy again. But before the man could move Harden thrust his hand into his pocket.

"Here," he said. "Take that, and shut up."

The man gazed at them dubiously. They might be burglars, robbers—but then it was good money, and nobody the wiser. That was none of his business anyhow. He muttered an apology and slammed the door again, while the four sighed with relief.

"I wonder what next," said Mark.

There was nothing more; the long train rumbled on down the river bank and the party waited in silence until Harden gave the signal. Then they made more or

less ungraceful and uncomfortable leaps from the platform, sprang down the bank into the rushes, and a moment or so later were on their way across the river in a rowboat.

"Which means," whispered the Parson to Mark, "that we'll have our fight after all."

Mark had thought of that. He was already calculating the chances. Wright had a great, powerful frame, with massive, bull shoulders and a face that showed no end of grit. That much Mark could see. He knew, too, that the man was a gymnast of three years' practice under a master as skilled as Uncle Sam could find; that every muscle had been worked and trained, that he was lithe and quick and active, skilled with foil and bayonet and broadsword, a perfect horseman, and the captain of West Point's crack eleven besides. Mark thought of all this; and then he clinched his own broad hands and gritted his teeth and waited.

There was not a word said on the trip; all were too solemn and anxious. Harden rowed—working silently and swiftly. The waves lapped against the boat, and the ripples spread out in long, silvery, moonlit trail behind them. And then the boat sped in under the shadow of the trees on the eastern bank, and a moment later grated on the pebbly beach.

Harden sprang ashore and drew up the boat. The rest landed and he went on into the woods. The three followed him a short ways, and then at a little clearing he stopped.

"Here," said he, "is the spot."

Mark halted and gazed about him. He saw a small turf-covered inclosure surrounded by the deep black shadows of a wall of trees. The moon strayed down through the center furnishing the only light. It was not three o'clock yet, and the sun was far below the horizon. Mark whipped off his coat.

"I am ready," said he. "Let us lose no time."

Wright and his second were just as prompt and businesslike. The lieutenant stripped his brawny frame to the waist and bound his suspenders about him to hold his trousers. Mark was ready then, too.

"It is your choice," said he to the other. "How shall we fight?"

"By rounds," he answered simply. He was a man of few words. "My second has

a watch," he added. "Mr. Stanard may look on if he cares to, though we shall each have to rely upon the other's honor mostly. We have no referee."

"I am willing," said Mark. "Let Mr. Harden manage it. And let us be quick. Will you shake hands?"

They shook. And then the "referee" pronounced the word.

"Go!"

And they went, hammer and tongs.

A man who chanced to be strolling along the river bank in the moonlight at three o'clock that July morning would have met with a startling scene. Just picture it to yourself, a quiet glade in the deep shadows of the trees, and in the center of it two white half-naked figures battling to the death, landing blows that shook the air. And all in silence and mystery. The two seconds, kneeling in the shadows watching anxiously, feverishly, were hidden from view.

Wright had one advantage over Mark. He had seen him fight, and he knew his method. He knew that in skill and agility Mark was his equal; it was agility that had beaten Billy Williams, the yearlings' choice. And so Wright relying on his strength and training pitched right in, for he and his second had agreed that a "slugging match" was the best way to beat Mallory.

Mark was willing to have it so; time was short, and they might be interrupted any moment. The sooner that unpleasant episode were over the better. And he answered the officer's forward spring by another no less sudden and fierce.

A fight such as this one could not last very long, for human bodies cannot stand many blows as crushing as human arms can deal. The two had leaped in, each bent on forcing the other back; and for a moment they swayed, as in a deadlock, landing blow after blow with thuds that woke the stillness of the forest depths. The two seconds sprang forward, staring anxiously. They could scarcely follow the flying white arms, they could not see the effects of the crashes they heard; but they realized that any one of them might end it all, that their man might go down at any moment.

The end came, however, sooner than either had thought. Harden, glancing feverishly at the watch, had counted off the first minute, was counting for the end of the second. He had opened his mouth to call time, when he heard the Parson give a gasp. He looked up just in time to see one of the white figures—

they had been bounding all about the inclosure and he knew not which it was—tottering backward from one mighty blow upon the head.

A moment later the figure was lying gasping upon the ground, and Harden sprang forward to see who it was. But he had hardly moved before he heard a shout, and glancing about him, saw a sight that made him start in alarm. The black woods were fairly alive with flitting white figures. And the figures with one accord were rushing wildly down upon the group.

"Kill 'em! Soak 'em!" was the cry. "Where's that plebe? Hooray!"

It was the baffled first class.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIX TO THE RESCUE.

Be it said in the first place, for the reader's comfort and relief, that the figure who lay upon the ground stunned and gasping was not that of Mark Mallory. Harden saw that as he turned again, and he groaned. The Parson saw it, too, and uttered a geological and classical exclamation of satisfaction, completely forgetful of his peril at the present moment. And as for Mark, he had known it long ago; he had meant that it should be just so.

The first classmen as they poured in upon the scene, furious and out of breath, took in the situation in one glance. They saw their friend and classmate, the mighty Wright, stretched helpless on the turf, and they knew that Mark Mallory, the hated plebe, had defied them successfully, had outwitted them, and stood now in all his impudence, his purposes completely achieved. And their rage rose to bounds beyond the possibility of description.

But they had him now! Though triumphant, he was in their power, alone with no soul to help him in all that lonely forest! And like so many wild animals they leaped upon him.

You have read of the fury of a mob? And you know what a mob may do? It is far more than any single one of them, any half dozen of them, would ever dream of doing. This mob had everything to urge them on, nothing to restrain them. Had not this plebe tormented their very eyes out? Had they not sworn to punish him within an inch of his life if he dared to fight with their lieutenant? And was not the lieutenant lying there now, half dead, calling upon them for vengeance?

One and all they sprang upon him. The leader seized him roughly by the shoulder, flung him backward; the next moment Mark's arm shot out and the man went down like a log. That made the crowd still more furious; a dozen of them reached the bold plebe at once, and then there was the wildest kind of a

time.

Mark could not tell very clearly what happened; he was vaguely conscious of shouts and imprecations; of flying arms and closely pressing bodies; of blows and kicks that blinded him, stifled him. He himself was striking out right and left, and he felt that he was landing, too. He saw another figure beside him doing likewise, and he knew that the gallant old Parson was at his side. And after that his head began to swim; lights danced before his eyes, and his strength began to fail him. He went down, and that was all he knew.

There was no restraining those wild cadets, though fully half among them were manly enough to try. The brute passions of the rest were let loose and there was no stopping them. They still pressed about the two struggling plebes, a crowd roaring for vengeance and satisfaction. And they meant that nothing should prevent their having it, either.

Something did, none the less. And it was something startling and unexpected. The reader will remember that we left the five hot upon the trail. The five were upon the trail still.

They had followed the crowd down the railroad track. The crowd had hired a schooner the day before, having learned that Mallory and Wright were going to attempt to cross the next morning; they had followed in that, and the five under the leadership of Texas had broken the lock on a rowboat they found and had pursued the cadets across. They had landed a few minutes later; they had heard the shouts of the crowd; and now, wild and reckless with rage at what they saw, they were rushing from the woods to the rescue.

To the rescue? It bid fair to be a weak attempt, for there were just five to attempt it, and of the others there may have been fifty. No one could count them; they were a mob, a wild-eyed, furious mob. But of the unevenness of the conflict the gallant five never once thought. They knew that their leader was in peril, and that it was their business to rescue him. And that was all.

Foremost among them was the wild Texan and he was a sight to put a hundred in a panic, a sight to rival Hercules and his club. Texas had snatched an oar from the boat, and as he ran he was brandishing that. His hair was ruffled, his face was red, and his eyes staring and wild. From his mouth came a series of yells and whoops that made the forest echo. And a moment later he struck the crowd of cadets.

How that mighty oar did cut the air! If it had been a broadsword it could not have swept a clearer furrow. And behind it came the other four, all armed with clubs, making a V formation that was simply irresistible.

So long as the cadets were unarmed the fight was very one-sided, indeed, and the five might have rescued Mark in no time. But quick as a wink one of the cadets stooped and seized a stick; his example was followed instantly, and in half a minute the gallant rescuers were confronted with a score of clubs and assailed by a shower of stones that beat them back in confusion—stalled!

No, not quite! There was one rescuer left, a resource that Texas alone had. Texas had received a cut across the face that made him simply crazy. He dropped the oar, slung his hands around to his hip pockets, and a moment later with two huge six-shooters opened fire point-blank at the crowd.

It happened that those revolvers held only "blanks." Mark had insisted upon that beforehand, for he knew his friend's sudden temper. But that made no difference to the cadets. When they saw those weapons flash in the pale moonlight, saw them in the hands of that wild-haired, wild-eyed figure, heard the deafening reports and saw the powder flash blindingly in their faces, they turned as one man and fled in terror to the cover of the woods.

And they left their victims lying on the ground!

Texas was not so mad but that he had some cunning left. He saw his chance, and shouted to his companions. The four seized the half-unconscious, sorely-battered pair in their arms, and whirling suddenly, made a dash for the shore. Texas himself scorned to run. He gazed about him defiantly, balancing his revolvers in his hands; and when he saw that the alarmed cadets did not contemplate a sally, he backed slowly through the woods and rejoined the other plebes.

The cadets had not the nerve to face those revolvers again, at least not at once. They had a moment later when they discovered to their horror what the plebes were going to do.

It was a horrible revenge. Instead of going to their own rowboat, the crowd deliberately marched out upon a little dock where the schooner lay. They put their charges into that, and then while the big Texan coolly faced about with his guns, the others seized the two rowboats and deliberately proceeded to tie them on behind.

They were going to leave the whole class stranded!

A yell of fury, of horror, of fright went up from the crowd! Leave them! Impossible! It lacked then two hours of reveille. And for them to be absent meant disgrace, court-martial, dismissal! Wild with alarm the crowd made a dash for the schooner, leaping into the water, running for the dock, shouting and yelling. And Texas calmly raised his revolvers, and stood thus, firm and terrible in the clear moonlight.

Before that figure they quailed an instant; that instant was enough. The big vessel swung off from the dock, the night breeze filling her sails. And Texas turned like an antelope and made a leap for the boat.

The crowd saw him land on the stern; they saw the white glistening track bubble up as the vessel glided away; then in blank horror they turned and gazed at each other—lost!

Texas meanwhile, soon as he saw the boat clear, had but one thought in his devoted mind. He made a dash for Mark and staring in horror and anguish at his white and bloody face, fell to flinging water upon him. And he gasped with relief when he saw Mark open his eyes.

Mark's body was still stripped, and Texas, even Texas, shuddered as he saw the bruises upon it. There was one that made the victim cry out as his friend touched it, and Texas started back in alarm.

"Good heavens!" he cried; "his shoulder is broken."

Mark smiled feebly; and at the same instant a chorus of cries arose from the despairing cadets on the shore.

"Tell Mallory we'll leave him alone if he'll come back," was one of them.

"B'gee!" cried Dewey, "did you hear that? What do you say?"

And Mark raised himself with a struggle.

"No, no," he gasped. "Don't! I mean to fight them."

"Fight them! How can you fight with a broken shoulder?"

"I—I won't tell them it's broken!" panted Mark.

"Wow!" roared Texas, wildly. "Ef you don't lick 'em I will! Whoop! An' as fo'

them cowards on the shore, let 'em get fired an' bust!"

"Bully, b'gee!" echoed Dewey.

And the battered old Parson chimed in with a feeble and gasping "Yea, by Zeus!" while the schooner sailed on in disdainful triumph.

The first class, as it seemed, did not get fired. They ran all the way to Garrisons, the town opposite the point, and there begged a boat secretly to cross. But the news when it spread next morning made them the laughingstock of all creation. And Mark, in the hospital, was the hero of the whole cadet corps.

CHAPTER XXV.

MARK IN THE HOSPITAL.

"General Miles here? Who told you so?"

"I saw him myself. He just got off the train. And there's going to be a review of the corps and a whole lot of stuff. Don't you hear those guns. That's the salute, b'gee!"

Texas and Dewey paused in their excited conversation to listen to the booming of the cannon to the west of the camp. And scarcely had the sound ceased before the roll of a drum was heard coming from the guard tent at the head of the A Company Street.

"That's the call to quarters, b'gee," continued the bearer of the news excitedly. "I bet we're going to see some fun, Texas."

That "call to quarters" brought cadets from every direction hurrying into camp to "spruce up," and "fall in;" but the two, who were seated on a bench over by Trophy Point, did not even offer to move. For that call to quarters had nothing to do with them; that was for old cadets, the first classmen, and the yearlings.

When the battalion turned out for review in honor of its distinguished guest nobody thought of putting them on exhibition.

The two sat looking at the line forming over by camp, and also at a group of figures way down at the other end of the parade ground, a group of blue-uniformed officers, with the West Point band at the head. It was evidently the superintendent and his staff and the distinguished visitor with him.

"Looks as if there's goin' to be high jinks roun' hyar," observed Texas. "It's a shame Mark ain't hyar to see it."

Dewey assented to that emphatically, and Texas after a few moments of moody

thoughtfulness, continued:

"Hang them ole cadets!" he growled. "It makes me want to git up and slash round some whenever I think of half o' that whole battalion pitchin' in to punch a feller, because not one of 'em was man enough to lick him in a square, stand-up fight. Tell you, it makes my blood boil! An' they broke his shoulder, an' sent him to hospital, an' he too much of a man to tell on 'em at that! The cowards!"

"That's what I say, too, b'gee!" chimed in Dewey. "Mark's the spunkiest man that ever they laid eyes on."

"That's what he is," growled Texas. "Jes' think o' whar we'd be ef twan't for him. We'd be lettin' them cadets haze us, that's what we would."

"Never mind," said Dewey, prophetically. "Just wait till he's well again, b'gee! And we'll stick by him meanwhile."

"Will we?" echoed Texas. "I couldn't tell in a thousands years what that aire feller's done fo' me. An' I know one other besides us that'll stand by him, too."

"Grace Fuller, you mean?"

"That's what I do! Ever since Mark swam out and near killed himself savin' her from drownin' that girl's been the best friend ever he had. You jes' ought to go over to the hospital an' see how she sends him flowers an' fruit an' things. They let her in to sit with him an' talk to him where they won't let us plebes near him."

"B'gee, I don't blame 'em!" laughed Dewey. "They're afraid of you over there, since they had to nurse you after you rode out and 'held up' the artillery squadron at drill. But I tell you, Mark's in luck to have Grace spooney over him. She's the most beautiful girl I ever saw, and she's the belle of this place. I declare I can hardly believe it, that she's joined with us plebes to fool the yearlings."

"She's jes' full o' fun," laughed Texas, "but I reckon the great reason's cause she's so fond o' Mark. I wish I had his luck. I jes' stand off, 'n look at her and wonder s'posin' 'twas me—dog gone it!"

Texas saw an amused smile begin to flit about his companion's merry face; he suspected he was about to "remind" that cheerful recounter of a yarn; so he stopped.

"Tell you what," he continued after some more thinking. "I know 'nother girl

that's dead gone on Mark."

"B'gee!" cried Dewey in surprise. "Who's that?"

"'Moll' Adams."

"Who on earth is she?"

"I reckon she came in afore you met us," mused Texas. "Yes, 'twas 'fore you joined the Banded Seven. You know Bull Harris?"

"B'gee!" laughed Dewey. "Didn't I lick the cuss once?"

"That's so," said Texas. "I forgot. Well, Bull—'twas jes' like him—was botherin' this girl down on the road to Highland Falls one day. He had hold of her arm an' she was fightin' to git away or somethin'. Anyhow Mark knocked him down, which was the beginnin' of all this hazin' business. Bull got all his yearlin' gang after Mark. After that Mark did her 'nother favor, got her brother out of a terrible scrape. An' I think she's been mighty fond of him ever since."

"B'gee!" laughed Dewey. "This is real romantic. What makes you think so?"

"I've seen her hangin' roun' the hospital inquirin' fo' Mark. An' I can tell by the way she looks at him. I don't think she likes to see him so chummy with Grace."

"That's more romantic yet," chuckled Dewey. "Why don't Mark care for her?"

"You see," said Texas, "some o' the cadets, one of 'em a pretty decent feller, a friend o' Mark's, told him that she warent—she warent quite right. She's somethin' of a flirt, you know. I don't like girls that kind much myself an' I'm sure Mark don't. He's kep' pretty shy o' her, an' I kinder think she's noticed it."

"Is she pretty?" inquired the other.

"She's mos' as pretty as Grace," responded Texas. "An' that's sayin' a deal. She's what you call a brunette—black hair an' eyes. There's some girls a feller feels are all right; he feels he's a better feller when he's with them. Grace Fuller's one of 'em. She's jes' the angel we call her. Then there's some that ain't, an' this girl's one of them."

"Quite a character analysis," laughed the other. "But I guess, b'gee, you're right, all the same. And speaking of unpleasant characters, there's that Bull Harris. We haven't heard from him for a long time."

"I reckon," said Texas, "Bull's been wantin' to see what the first class'd do to Mark since he'd failed to haze him. I reckon the durty ole rascal's right well satisfied now."

"You don't love him much," observed the other.

"Why should I? Ain't he tried every mean kid trick he could think of on Mark an' me, too? He's all right to bully girls but when he tried Mark now, he found he'd hit a snag. He's been doin' nothin' ever since but tryin' to get us into scrapes. An' I was thinkin' to-day, 'tain't no lucky sign he's quiet. I jes' reckon he's plottin' some new durnation trick."

"I wish he'd come on with it," laughed Dewey. "Life is getting really monotonous the last two days since Mark's been in hospital. We've been having so many lively and interesting brushes with the cadets, b'gee, that I can't get along without some excitement at least every day."

"I reckon it'll come soon enough," observed Texas. "An' they say when you speak of angels they flap their wings. I wonder how 'bout devils. There's ole Bull Harris now, the third feller from the right in the front rank of A."

"And he's going out to salute the general," observed Dewey. "I wish we had another bloodhound now so's we could put it on his trail the way we did once. B'gee, but he was mad!"

As the two had been talking the battalion had formed on the company ground; roll call had passed quickly, and the cadet adjutant had turned the parade over to the charge of the tactical officer, Lieutenant Allen. The latter's sharp commands had rung out a moment later and the firmly-stepping lines had swung around and were now well on their way down the parade ground, at the other end of which stood the famous general and his staff.

It was an inspiring moment. The air seemed fairly to shake with the gay music of the band. The cadet's uniforms and equipments were glittering in the sunlight, their banners waving on the breeze. They wheeled like so many splendid pieces of mechanism and in a few moments more were standing at "present arms" in one long line that extended the width of the field.

The officers brought their swords up to the salute and the spectators cheered, as a handsome figure rode out from the group of officers and cantered down the line. It was General Miles himself, a fine military figure, striking and imposing. The

cadets would have cheered him, too, if they had dared.

During this interesting ceremony our two friends of the plebe class had gotten up and started on a run for the scene. They had been so much interested in their discussion of "Meg" Adams and Bull Harris that they had forgotten all about watching this. But by the time they got there the review was over, and the cadets had scattered once more. This time to prepare for exhibition drill of the afternoon.

The two wandered about disconsolately after that, Texas growling at Dewey for having talked too much. And then suddenly the former stopped short and stared at his friend.

"I know what I'm going to do!" he declared.

"What?"

"I'm a-goin' to see Mark."

"I thought they wouldn't let you in," laughed Dewey.

"I'm a-goin' all the same," vowed the other. "Ef they won't let me I'll make 'em. Jes' you watch me!"

And with that the impulsive Texan faced about and set out for the hospital in a hurry.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TEXAS HAS AN INTERVIEW.

Texas' promised "fun" in the effort to see Mark did not, as it proved, materialize; because, whereas Texas had expected to be refused admittance and to raise a rumpus about it, he was allowed to enter and was escorted to Mark's room with all politeness.

"Well!" thought Texas, "I reckon he must be gittin' better."

This eventually proved to be the case; and Texas shrewdly guessed the reason for it as he approached the room and heard the sound of voices through the open door.

"With her to talk to," he muttered, "anybody could get well."

Grace Fuller was sitting by the window, dressed in white, an angel of loveliness, as she appeared to Powers. She was reading aloud to Mark, but she stopped suddenly as Texas burst into the room. And a moment later the newcomer had seized his chum by his one well arm and was shaking it vigorously.

"Hello, ole man!" he cried. "I kain't tell you how glad I am to see you."

"Take it easy," said Mark, smiling. "I've got better news still. They found that my shoulder was only dislocated; and I'll be out to-day."

Texas uttered a whoop that brought the attendants in on a run. He subsided after a threat of expulsion and sat down by the bedside and stared at Mark. It was still the same old Mark, handsome and sturdy, but just a little pale.

"Say," growled Texas, "you've got no idee how lonely things are 'thout you. There's nobody to lick the cadets, or anything."

"What's all the fuss I hear?" inquired Mark.

Texas explained to him what was happening; and went into ecstasies when he was told that Mark would be out to see that afternoon's drill. With just the same startling impulsiveness as that which had led him to pay his brief visit, Texas sprang up again and made for the door.

"Wow!" he cried. "I'm a-goin' out to tell the fellers 'bout this. Whoop! See you later, Mark. I reckon you're in pretty good company."

Mark "reckoned" so too, and said so, as he laughed over his friend's hot-headed manner.

Texas in the meantime was bounding down the hall and out of the door of the building; he meant to turn up toward camp on a run, and he had even started up the street. But something happened just then that made him change his mind in a hurry. In the first place he heard some one call his name:

"Mr. Powers! Oh, Mr. Powers!"

It was a sweet girlish voice, and "Mr. Powers" faced about with alacrity, to find himself, to his infinite surprise, face to face with Mary Adams, the girl he had not long ago been discussing.

"Hello!" thought he, "what on earth's up?"

His surprise was the greater because he did not know the girl; he had never been introduced to her, and he wondered how she even knew his name. She was indeed a beautiful girl, with a full round figure, deep black hair and eyes, and a complexion that was warm and red. There was a look of anxiety upon her face that the cadet did not fail to notice.

"Tell me!" she cried. "Mr. Powers, how is he?"

"Why—why——" stammered Texas, adding, "Bless my soul!" after the fashion of his fat friend Indian. "He's all right. He'll be out this afternoon."

"I thought he was nearly killed," said the girl. "I have been so worried."

There was a brief silence after that, during which Texas shifted his feet in embarrassment.

"Tell me," she exclaimed, suddenly. "Do you—do you think he would like to see me?"

"Why, er!" stammered Texas. "To be sure. Why wouldn't he?"

The girl noticed his hesitating tone, and her dark eyes flashed as she spoke again.

"Answer me," she cried. "Is she there?"

"If by 'she,'" answered the other, "you mean Miss Fuller?"

"Yes, yes, I mean her."

"Then she is," said Texas, defiantly.

He said that with a dogged, none-of-your-business sort of an air, though rather sheepishly for all that. The girl stared at him for a moment, and then to Texas' indescribable consternation and bewilderment, she buried her head in her hands and burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"My Lord!" gasped the astounded plebe.

Poor Texas wasn't used to girls; the only things he knew of that cried were babies, and a baby he would have taken in his arms and rocked until it stopped. But he had an instinctive impression that that wouldn't do in this case. Beyond that he was at a loss.

"Bless my soul, Miss Adams!" he cried—no exclamation seemed to do quite so well as Indian's in that case. "Please don't do that! What on earth's the matter?"

Texas had a vague idea that some one might come that way any moment; and he wondered what that person would think to look at them. Texas just then wished himself anywhere on earth but there.

In response to his embarrassed pleading, the girl finally looked through her tears. And her eyes, red with weeping, gave her beautiful face a look of anguish that touched the Texan's big heart.

"Lord bless me!" said he. "Miss Adams, is there anything I can do?"

She looked at him for a moment and then she answered "Yes," and turned slowly down the street.

"Come," she said. "Mr. Powers, I want to talk to you."

If he had wanted to, Texas could not have disobeyed; the fact of the matter was that Texas was too bewildered to have any wants. The true state of affairs had

not dawned upon his unromantic mind.

The two hurried down the road toward Highland Falls, the cadet following meekly. They came almost to "cadet limits," to an old lonely road that turned off to the right. Up that the girl turned, and when she was well out of sight of the main road, turned and faced her companion.

"Now," she said, "I will tell you. Oh, why is it you do not see?"

The look upon her face made Texas fear she was going to burst into tears again, and he shifted about uncomfortably.

And just then came the crash.

"Tell me, Mr. Powers," demanded the girl, with a suddenness that almost took the other's breath away, "Tell me, Mr. Powers, do you think he—he—likes me?"

Texas started; he stared at the girl's anxious face; a sudden light breaking in upon him. And the girl gazed into his deep gray eyes and saw—she knew not what.

"Why—why——" stammered Texas.

"I have thought so much of him," cried Mary Adams, pouring out her feelings, in a passionate flood of words. "I have followed him about, I have watched him all day! Ever since he befriended me so that night when he saved my brother, I have thought of no one but him. He is so splendid and brave and handsome! He—never even looks at me!"

The girl's last words were said in a tone of anguish and despair, and she buried her head in her hands once more.

"It is all that other girl!" she continued, after a moment's pause. "He thinks of no one but her! Oh, how I hate her! He is with her all the time; he asked her to join that society——"

"How—how on earth did you know?" gasped Texas.

"Do you think I am blind?" cried the girl, fiercely. "Do you suppose I cannot see what Mark Mallory is doing? It is all that Grace Fuller—all! And, oh, what shall I do?"

In a perfect convulsion of sobbing the girl flung herself down upon the bank at the side of the road. And Texas stood and gazed at her in consternation and

embarrassment, and vowing if the gods ever got him out of that most incomprehensible fix, he'd never look at a girl again. A dozen Comanches could not have inspired Texas with half the awe that this one passionate and beautiful creature did.

"Miss Adams," he said, at last, "I—I really don't think Mark knows how you regard him."

"I know it," sobbed the girl; "he doesn't! But I cannot tell him!"

A sudden and brilliant idea flashed across Texas' mind.

"I can!" he exclaimed. "I can, an' I will."

The girl sprang to her feet and stared at him.

"No! no!" she cried, in horror. "What would——"

But Texas had already turned and was striding off in excitement.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "That's jes' the thing! I'll tell Mark fo' her, ef she kaint. An' anyhow, I couldn't keep a secret from Mark. Dog gone it, I'd have to ask his advice. This yere's a 'portant matter."

Texas heard Mary Adams crying out to him to come back, imploring him to listen to her. But Texas, once well out of that embarrassing fix and beyond the spell of the beautiful girl had no idea of returning to his uncomfortable position. And to his rough old heart there was no reason on earth why he should not tell Mark. Who else ought to know it but Mark?

"An'," muttered Texas, "ef she ain't got sense 'nough to tell him, I will."

So, deaf to the girl's entreaties, he left her to bemoan her fate alone and set out in hot haste for camp.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PLOT TO BEAT "THE GENERAL."

Now the adventures of Texas were wild and exciting, to him, anyway. But up at camp in the meantime another plebe was having adventures that fairly put Texas into the shade. The plebe was "Indian," and you may listen and judge for yourself of the adventures.

Indian had been rather less credulous of late, but the yearlings were still anxiously watching for another chance to have some fun with him. The chance came that day.

Nelson A. Miles is a hero of a hundred fights, and as major general he commands the United States army. The more they considered the importance of that mighty visitor, the more the yearlings began to think of that plan. There were a dozen of them got together that morning and swore they'd fool Indian or die in the effort.

Indian of course had seen the review and had been mightily impressed in his innocent soul. From the distance he had admired the military figure and imposing features of the great man. And then, filled with resolves to fight loyally under him and perhaps some day to be like him, he had turned away and strolled solemnly back to camp.

He entered his tent, still in that serious, that really heroic mood. There was no one in the tent, and so Indian had it all alone for his meditations philosophical.

"Oh, what a fine thing it must be to be a great hero like that!" he mused. "To gaze upon the world from a large, ethereal standpoint"—an ethereal standpoint would have made unsteady standing even for a hero; but Indian did not think of that. "I can have no higher ambition in life than to imitate that man. As the poet has said:

'Lives of great men all remind us,
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us
Footprints——'

"Bless my soul!"

Indian had stopped his meditations with startling suddenness; and this was the reason thereof.

He had heard mysterious sounds in the Company B tent next door. It was a yearling tent. Two cadets had crept into it silently; and Indian heard one of them mutter a subdued "S-sh!"

Have you seen a pointer dog prick up his ears suddenly? That was the way Indian did.

"A plot?" said one of the yearlings. "A plot did you say? What is it? Tell me? I'll come in!"

"S-sh!" said the other. "Do you swear eternal secrecy, swear it by the bones of the saints?"

"I swear!" growled the other in a low, sepulchral voice. "Out with it!"

"All the fellows know," continued the other. "They'll all help. But not the plebes! Do you hear? Not a word to the plebes! If any plebe should hear he'd surely tell on us, and that would ruin us. He might do it, you know, for he'd get no end of reward. They might even promote him, make him a yearling."

Indian's little fat heart was bounding with delight. A plot! And he knew it! Ye gods! Bless my soul! He crept close to the wall of his tent, straining eyes and ears to listen, not to lose the faintest sound of this most important news.

"It must be something desperate," gasped the other.

"Yes, it is. S-sh! You'll nearly drop I know when I tell you. We're——"

Indian's eyes were like walnuts, half out of his head.

"We're going," continued the yearling, slowly, "we're going to beat the general!"

"Beat the general!" echoed the other. "By George, I'll help! I'm glad of it. I——"

Indian heard no more. Quietly he had arisen from the tent floor, glancing about like a serpent rearing his glittering head from the grass. He arose; he crept to the tent door; and a moment later he was striding down the street as fast as his little legs could carry him.

So that was the plot! Those wicked and reckless cadets who had hazed him so much were now going to beat the general! The general could, of course, mean only one general, the great general. There was no general at West Point but Major General Miles.

Indian never once stopped until he was well out of camp, out of the enemies' hands. A man with so mighty a secret as that could afford to take no risks; he must lurk in the shadows until he saw his chance to reveal the whole daring conspiracy. Visions rose up before his delighted mind, visions of himself a hero like Mark, congratulated by all, even made a yearling as the cadets had hinted. Indian even imagined himself already as hazing the rest of the plebes.

These thoughts in his mind, he was suddenly startled by seeing two yearlings coming near. Were they after him? Indian trembled. Nearer and nearer. No, they had passed him. And then, once more, he heard the words:

"Yes, yes! We're going to beat the general!"

"What! Heavens, suppose some one should find it out."

That settled it. Indian sprang up boldly and strode away, determination in his very waddle. He knew! And he would tell!

At that moment Indian saw Cadet Fischer crossing the parade ground. Surely, thought Indian, so high and responsible an officer as this had nothing to do with the plot! Why not tell him? And so at him Indian made a dash.

"Mr. Fischer! Oh, Captain Fischer!"

The officer turned in surprise. Hailed by a common plebe.

"Mr. Fischer!" gasped Indian. "Bless my soul! I hear they're going to beat the general!"

"Yes," said the other. "In half an hour. But why——"

Good heavens, he knew it too! And like a flash, the frightened plebe wheeled and dashed away. There was only one resource left now. He would tell the general himself.

Across the parade ground dashed Indian, panting, gasping. Down by the headquarters building, he saw a group of horses standing. One charger he recognized instantly. The general was inside the building, and a moment later a group of officers appeared in the doorway. The handsome, commanding figure in front. Indian's heart bounded for joy; and then suddenly the amazed General Miles was greeted by a gasping, excited cadet in plebe fatigue uniform.

"General, oh, general! Bless my soul!"

The officer stared at him.

"A plot!" panted Indian. "Oh, general, please don't go"—puff—"near the camp—bless my soul! A plot!"

"A plot!" echoed the other. "A plot! What do you mean?"

"They're going to hurt you—bless my soul!"

"Hurt me! Who?"

"The cadets, sir! Bless my soul, I—puff—heard them say, they were—puff—oh!—going to b-b-beat the general."

There was a moment of silence, then a perfect roar of laughter came from the staff officers. The general laughed too, for a moment, but when he saw the plebe's alarm and perplexity he stopped and gazed at him with a kindly expression. "My boy," he said, "you've been letting the yearlings fool you."

"Fool me!" echoed Indian in horror. "Bless my soul!—how?"

"Beating the general means," answered the officer, "beating the general assembly, which is a drum call."

The officers shook with laughter again, and as for poor Indian, he was thunderstruck. So he had been fooled again! So he had let those mean cadets haze him once more! And—and——

Poor Indian's eyes began to fill with tears. And he choked down a great big sob. The old officer saw his look of misery.

"Do they fool you often that way, my boy?" he asked, sympathetically.

"Ye—yes!" answered Indian, at the verge of a weeping spell. "Ye—yes, th-they do. And I think it's real mean."

"So do I," said the general, smiling. "I tell you how we'll fix it. Don't you let on they succeeded."

"I can't help it," moaned Indian. "They know! L-look!"

With trembling finger he pointed across the street to where in the shadow of the sally port of the academy stood a group of hilarious yearlings, fully half the class, wild with glee. The general shook his head as he looked, and poor Indian got out his handkerchief as a precaution.

"Too bad!" said the former. "Too bad, I declare! We'll have to turn that joke on them somehow or other. Let me see. Let me see. How would you like it for me to help you get square, as you boys say?"

Indian gazed up at the stalwart and kindly form confidingly; he was all smiles in a moment.

"I'll tell you," said the general at last, "you and I'll take a walk. And when they see you with me, they'll be sorry they sent you. Come on."

He took the arm of the delighted Indian, who was scarcely able to realize the extent of his good fortune.

"You'll excuse me a short while, gentlemen," said General Miles to his military staff. "I'll return shortly. And now," to Indian, "where shall we go? I guess I'll let you show me about camp."

And sure enough, pinching himself to make sure if he really were awake, Indian, on the arm of the mighty guest of West Point, commander of Uncle Sam's whole army, marched away up the road past the parade ground and all through Camp McPherson.

The general was enjoying the joke hugely, but he affected not to notice it, and plied the plebe with questions.

Why did the yearlings haze him so much? Was he B. J.? Oh, it was because he was a friend of Mark Mallory's, was it! General Miles had heard of Mark Mallory. He was the plebe who had saved the life of the general's friend, Judge

Fuller's daughter. A beautiful girl that! And a splendid act! Indian had seen it, had he? Colonel Harvey had described it to the general. The general would like to meet Mark Mallory. No, he was not joking; he really would. Mr. Mallory was in hospital, was he? Too bad! Had been too B. J., had he? The general liked B. J. plebes. He hoped Mark was not badly hurt. And——

Then suddenly the conversation was interrupted by a cry of joy from Indian.

"There's Mark now! He's out of hospital!"

"That handsome lad down the street there?" inquired the general, "let us go down by all means."

A moment later, Mark, to his great amazement, was confronted by the curiously contrasted pair. Indian was beaming like a sunflower.

"Mr. Mallory," he said, with a flourish, "allow me to present my friend, General Miles."

Mark bowed, and the general took the hand he held out.

"Mr. Mallory," he said, "I am proud to meet you. I have heard of what you have done. The service needs such men as you."

And the whole corps heard him say so, too. The general had been very careful to say those words in a loud and clear voice that made the camp ring. Then he turned and spoke to an orderly who was passing.

"Tell my staff to ride up here for me," he said, and added, turning to the two radiant plebes: "Now, my young friends, I must ask you to excuse me. I am very pleased to have met you both. Good-morning, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Mallory."

With which he turned and strode away up the street again, smiling at the recollection of the incident. And Mark stood and stared at his grinning friend Indian.

"Well," said he, "you blessed idiot, you certainly do beat the Dutch!"

And then he turned and went into the tent.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"BULL" FINDS AN ALLY.

"For Heaven's sake, man, you don't mean this for a fact, do you?"

It was Mark who spoke; he sat alone in his tent with Texas late that evening, and Texas was telling him the story of Mary Adams and what she had done during the day.

"And did she tell you to tell me this?" Mark continued, in amazement.

"No," said Texas; "she didn't want me to a bit. I couldn't make her out 't all. She wanted you to know it, but she didn't want me to tell it."

"I'm afraid," laughed the other, "that you haven't a very delicate sense of propriety. I'm afraid you're no ladies' man, Texas."

"That's all right," answered Texas. "I think I managed this yere affair right well. Now, what I want to know is, what you're goin' to do 'bout it?"

"That's just what I want to know," said his friend. "I'm as puzzled as you. Why, I hadn't the least idea the poor girl felt that way about me."

"Don't you care for her?"

"Why, of course, man. I like her well enough, from what I know of her. But I don't want any of that sickly, sentimental business in mine, and especially about a girl like her. I'm afraid of her, and I don't know what on earth to say to her. I wish to gracious, old man, you hadn't said a word to me about it."

Texas gazed at Mark with a grieved expression. That was a nice thing to say to a man who was just priding himself on having managed a delicate affair so nicely. And Texas arose to his feet.

"Well," said he, "I'm sorry you don't like it. An' ef that's all I git, I'll keep out of it."

With which he bounced out of the tent and strode away. Mark also left the tent for a walk a moment later, still thinking.

The girl was sincere, that was certain. And he knew it all, and so did she. The question was, what could Mark do without hurting her feelings. She was wildly jealous of Grace. Now Mark had not the remotest idea of dropping Grace Fuller, his "angel"; he did not like even to think of her in connection with this girl. He knew in his heart it would be best to let Mary Adams alone from this time on. But what would she think then?

Mark was weighing this question as he went. He was not noticing, meanwhile, where he was going. It was within half an hour or so of tattoo he knew, and a dark, cloudy night. He had taken the path down through "Flirtation Walk," heeding no one; he had strolled to the other end, and turned to retrace his steps when suddenly he halted in surprise. A dark figure was hurrying past him, and as he gazed at it and recognized it, he exclaimed aloud:

"Miss Adams!" he cried. "You here!"

The girl turned and faced him, pushing aside the shawl she wore and disclosing her face in all its passionate beauty.

"Mr. Mallory!" she cried, in just as much surprise; and then gazed at him trembling.

"Miss Adams," said Mark, quietly, after a moment's thought. "I want to have a talk with you, if you please. May I?"

"Yes," she cried. "Yes, but not here. I want to see you alone."

She turned, and Mark followed her, almost having to run to keep up with the girl's excited pace. They descended the hill at the end of the path, and then on they went almost to the Hudson's shore. It was a dark, deserted spot, and there the girl halted. Mark stopped too, and she turned about and gazed at him.

"Now, then," said she.

Mark said nothing at first; he was watching her features, admiring them and at the same time wondering at the emotion they showed. Her cheeks became red as

fire under his gaze.

"Mr. Powers has told you all?" she demanded at last. "He has; I can see it!"

Mark started as he noticed the tone of her voice; he had never heard her speak that way before. Usually her voice was soft and melodious, a voice with a hidden, musical charm. Now it was cold and harsh, and Mark knew at once what that meant.

The girl was angry already. She saw that he was about to cast her aside, after all her passionate, humiliating confession. And she was putting a bold, brazen front upon it.

"I can see!" she cried, suddenly. "I can see it all in your face. You do not care for me!"

"Miss Adams," he began, quietly; the girl shook her head impatiently.

"Call me Mary or Moll!" she exclaimed. "Call me Mary and be done with it. They all do."

Mark was puzzled. He did not wish to call her Mary, he did not wish to indicate any familiarity. He saw on the other hand that to refuse would be to cut her to the quick; but he chose the latter course.

"I shall call you Miss Adams," he said, decisively. "And I want to explain to you _____"

The girl stamped her foot upon the ground.

"There is no need for you to explain!" she cried. "I know! I know it all! I have watched you, followed you, dreamed of you, and you have flung me off."

As she spoke, the girl had been striding about the spot. As she finished she bowed her head and broke into a passion of tears.

"But, Miss Adams," expostulated Mark, "you will not let me explain."

"Explain!" The girl raised her head and tossed her dark hair in anger, while her eyes flashed. "I do not want you to explain! Your explanations are simply honeyed words to hide the facts. I know the facts. You want to tell me why. I know why! It is because of her, of her! I hate her, the yellow-haired creature. And I hate you! Yes, I hate you! You have treated me as if I were a puppet, as if I

had no right to live. And I do not want to live. I have no use for life. I wish I were dead!"

The girl had raised her hands to the sky, a weird figure; she gazed about her despairingly as she finished.

"I wish I were dead!" she cried, again.

The wind whistled through the lonely trees as she spoke, and made a strange accompaniment to her impassioned voice. A steamboat, plying the river, was softly churning little waves that lapped against the shore and made a low, gurgling sound upon the rocks. The girl gazed over the steep, dark bank as she cried out in her wretchedness, and the next instant she sprang forward.

The thought had flashed over Mark at the same moment. He saw the girl move, and seized her. She turned upon him with the fury of a tiger, a tiger she was, with all a tiger's passions. For a moment they struggled and wrestled, the girl crying out all the time. And then she tore herself loose with one mighty effort—Mark had only one free hand—and lunged down, down into the darkness.

Mark heard a splash and a gurgle of the black invisible waters. And then all was silent as the grave.

Mark Mallory hesitated, hesitated for the first time in his life. One arm was bound tight in a sling and helpless. He was weak and faint yet from his maltreatment. Still he could not see her die without trying to save her. His hesitation gone, he took a step forward, but he was too late.

There was a quick noise behind him; he heard the word "coward!" hissed in his ear, and a white figure shot past him and dived out into the darkness.

Mark gasped with relief; and quick to act, he turned, and helpless though he was, clambered down around the side to reach the spot. He heard sounds of a struggle out beyond him; he heard some whispered words, and a moment later the figure of the rescuer arose out of the water and confronted him, bearing the girl in his arms.

It was Bull Harris!

Mark started back instinctively; and Bull sneered as he saw it.

"Coward!" he repeated. "Coward! The corps shall know of this!"

Mark knew that expostulation and explanation were useless and unnecessary. He said not a word, but saw the girl safely brought to shore. And then, sad and heavy at heart, he turned and walked back toward the camp.

Bull Harris stayed, to reap the fruit of his labors. He held the half-fainting, half-hysterical girl in his arms and wiped her straying hair from her face and sought to calm her. He seemed to like his task, for when she was better he made no move to stop.

"Did he push you over?" inquired Bull, insinuatingly.

"No," cried the girl, with fierceness. "He did not. But I hate him!"

"You might say he did then!" the yearling whispered softly.

Mary Adams glanced at him with a sharp look.

"I might," she said, "if I chose. And I may. What's that to you?"

"To me!" cried Bull clenching the girl's hand in his until she cried out. "To me! I hate him! I could kill him!"

"You were rude to me once," she muttered.

"Yes," exclaimed Bull. "I was. You liked him, and I hated you for it."

That was a lie, but the girl did not choose, for some reason, to say so.

"Come," she said, striving to arise. "Help me home."

"One moment!" cried Bull, holding her back. "Promise me one thing, one thing before you go."

"What is it?"

"I know the whole story, Mary," he said. "I know how he has treated you, how he has cast you off, made a puppet of you, and all for that Grace Fuller! You say you hate him. So do I. Promise me, promise me to be revenged if you have to die for it."

"I will!" cried she, furiously.

"Will you give me your hand on it?"

"I will."

Bull took her home that night, though he was in no hurry about it. He came in after taps, for he thought it would do him good to hand in his explanation that he had been saving a girl's life, and restoring her to consciousness. A girl; perhaps a girl upon whom murder had been attempted.

He evaded all details, however, and went to his tent chuckling triumphantly at his evil work that night.

He had laid a foundation for trouble, but would success follow?

Only the future could tell.

CHAPTER XXIX.

STRANGE CONDUCT.

"Say, fellows, what do you think?"

"What's the matter?"

"Mallory's given in!"

"Given in! How do you mean?"

"He's going to let himself be hazed."

"What!"

Two more surprised cadets than the two who uttered this last exclamation it would be hard to imagine. They had been sitting on a bench near Trophy Point, and one of them had been carelessly tinkling a mandolin. He had dropped the instrument and leaped to his feet. Now he was staring with open mouth at the new arrival, who bore the extraordinary tidings.

"Mallory given up! Gus Murray, what on earth do you mean?"

The three were yearlings, all of them. The crowd which has usually been designated in these stories as "Bull Harris' gang." There was Gus Murray, the new arrival, a low, brutal-looking chap. There was the sickly and disagreeable "Merry" Vance. And there was the little fellow "Baby" Edwards, the meanest of them all.

"You surely can't mean," cried Vance, "that Mallory has consented to allow the fellows to haze him?"

"Better than that even," chuckled Murray. "Better than that!"

"For Heaven's sake," gasped the other, "sit down and tell us what you do mean.

What is the use of talking riddles?"

Thus enjoined, Gus Murray explained; he was nothing loath to tell the tale.

"I'll tell you how it was," he said. "I was never more astounded in my life. I saw that plebe strolling down the street a while ago, holding his head high as ever and looking as if he owned the place."

"Confound him!" muttered Vance.

"You know," the other continued, "he's never done any work like the rest of the plebes. Usually we yearlings make them fix our tents and guns, and carry water, and so on. Mallory never has, and of course nobody's succeeded in making him. I thought I'd guy him a little just now and see how he'd take it. So I stopped and said, 'See here, plebe. Let me show you how to clean a gun.'"

"And what did he say?" cried Vance.

"Just as B. J. as ever," growled Murray. "'Thank you,' he said, 'I'll go get mine and let you do it.' Of course he knew perfectly well that I wanted to show him on mine and let him do the work. I said to him, 'I've a gun to show you on, if you please.' And by George——"

"You don't mean he cleaned your gun for you!" gasped Baby.

"That's just exactly what I do! You might have knocked me over with a feather. He said, 'Certainly, sir.' Yes, by jiminy, he actually said 'sir.' And when I left him he was working away like a beaver. He had the gun half cleaned. What do you think of that?"

Gus finished and gazed at his two companions triumphantly. He felt that he had accomplished something that no other member of his class ever had.

"I'll bet Mallory was afraid of you," chirruped Baby Edwards. "Don't you suppose that's it, Merry?"

Vance picked up his mandolin and resumed his cynical smile.

"I'll tell you what I think," he said.

"What?" demanded Murray.

"That you're a fool."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply," said Vance, "that Mallory was playing some kind of a joke on you."

"But he wasn't!" cried the other. "I went back after he was through and the gun was perfect. The wood was polished till it shone like a mirror. I actually did not like to touch it, it was so pretty."

"And how about the rest of the tent?" inquired Vance.

"He hadn't disturbed a thing. I looked particularly. I tell you, man, that Mallory has given in."

"It's not much like him," said Merry, dubiously.

"You don't have to look very far for the cause," began Murray. "You remember how the first class gave him a licking the other day?"

Vance admitted that might have something to do with it.

"It's got everything," chuckled Murray. "It's simply broken his spirit. Why look, man! He was black and blue all over. Even now one of his arms is in a sling. I tell you he's made up his mind that it isn't safe to carry on as he's been, and so he's decided to get meek and mild for a change."

"And, oh, say, if it's true!" cried Baby, excitedly. "If it's true! Gee whiz, won't we have some fun!"

"Just won't we!" responded Murray, doubling up his fists and glaring as if the hated plebe were really in front of him. "I just tell you I mean to make him wish he'd never been born. I've been waiting for a chance to get even with that confounded beast, and now I'll have him."

For the next half hour there was joy unbounded among those three young gentlemen. Only those who are familiar with their dispositions can comprehend the amount of satisfaction they felt; and only those who know our friend Mark Mallory's character as they did can appreciate their surprise at his "flunk."

"I wish Bull were here to hear about it," remarked Baby at last.

"Where is Bull anyhow?" inquired Murray, who was chief lieutenant in Bull's gang and an invaluable assistant in all of Bull's schemes for revenge upon Mark.

That question changed the topic of conversation for a few minutes. It was Vance

who answered it.

"There's something mysterious about Bull," he said. "I've been puzzling my head to think what it means. You know Bull was absent from taps last night."

"What!"

"Yes, he was. And you know that's a pretty serious offense. It may mean court-martial, you know."

"Good gracious!" gasped Baby. "What would we do without Bull?"

"I guess we won't have to," laughed Vance. "You needn't begin to worry. I was corporal of the guard last night when Bull came in to report. It was way after eleven."

"Where on earth had he been?"

"He wouldn't tell me. He was very mysterious. It seems that he had been in the water somehow and was soaking wet; all I could get out of him was that the business had something to do with Mary Adams."

"Mary Adams!" cried Gus. "I thought she wouldn't speak to him."

"Well, I don't know," said Vance. "That was what Bull told me. Anyhow he didn't seem a bit alarmed about his absence."

"The superintendent sent for him this afternoon," put in Murray. "I suppose that was to give him a chance to explain the matter."

"Yes, and I saw Bull with Mary a while ago," added the other, shrewdly. "I shouldn't wonder if Bull were getting up some scheme. He hasn't said much about Mallory to-day. He's been very mysterious."

The mystery, whatever it was, was destined to remain unsolved, however, for just then the rattle of a drum echoed across the field, and the three sprang up hastily.

"It's dress parade," said Murray.

"Yes," responded Vance, dryly. "And now you'll have a chance to show off that beautifully cleaned gun of yours. Come on."

CHAPTER XXX.

A SURPRISE FOR MURRAY.

Gus Murray went straight to his tent when the group broke up. He hastily dusted off his clothes and looked at himself in the glass to make sure that nothing was out of place. Then he took up his gun from the rack and hurried out to "fall in."

A moment later the order was given, "'Tention company!" and after roll call the battalion wheeled and marched out upon the parade ground.

The ceremony of dress parade has been described in these pages before. The solemn cadet adjutant formed the parade and then turned it over to his superior. The gayly-dressed band marched down the line and took its station. A few moments later the battalion was in the midst of its evolutions.

It was not very long before they halted again, down toward the southern end of the plain, to go through the manual of arms. It was then that Gus Murray received a shock.

The cadets had been marching with their guns at a "carry." Gus had held his that way ever since he picked it up, and then suddenly the lieutenant in command gave the order:

"Present—arms!"

In a "carry" the soldier holds his gun in the right hand, with thumb and first finger around the trigger guard. In coming to "present" he swings it up in front of him and seizes the stock in the left hand, at the same time letting go with the right and reversing his grip.

The cadet lines work like a perfect machine in that drill. Every gun swings up at the same instant, every hand moves in unison, so that the sound of the many motions is but one. This time, however, there was a break, and the cause of it

was our dear friend Gus.

Gus got through the first part of the motion all right. On the second part he got "stuck"—in more senses than one. When he went to let go with his right hand—he couldn't!

At first he could hardly understand what was happening. He pulled and tugged with all his might. But it did no good; his hand was fast. And in an instant the horrible truth flashed over him—Mallory—he had polished the gun with glue!

Every spectator on the grounds was staring at Gus. As for him, he was still tugging and wrestling, blushing, and gasping with rage. Finally he saw that his efforts were useless, and he gave it up in despair; he stood silent and helpless, gazing into space.

Lieutenant Ross was the name of tac in command, and he was noted for being a crank. He gave no more orders, of course, but stood and stared at the offending cadet in horror and indignation, while the cadets, who did not dare to look, but who knew that something was "up," waited and wondered.

How long this suspense and torture would last no one could tell; the tac broke in at last.

"Mr. Murray!" he demanded. "What is the matter?"

"My gun!" stammered Murray. "I—I—why—that is——"

"Mr. Murray, leave the ranks!"

Blushing scarlet, the yearling obeyed, conscious of the fact that hundreds of eyes were upon him. He strode furiously down the line and once clear, set out on a run for camp, almost ready to cry with vexation. He reached his tent, rushed in, tore off his glove, and hurled his musket into the corner. And then he stood in the middle of his tent and clinched his fists until his nails cut the palms of his hands.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "I'll be revenged on that plebe if I have to kill him to do it!"

He stayed in his tent, nursing his wrath and resentment, until the battalion marched back to camp. And he refused to come out then; his classmates who inquired as to what was the matter received angry replies for their pains. And when the corps marched down to supper Murray still sat where he was. He didn't

want any supper.

He was in just the mood to welcome a visitor who came then. The visitor was Murray's chum and crony, Bull Harris.

"Hello, old man," said he, pushing aside the tent flap. "What's up?"

"Go to blazes!" responded Murray, by way of answer.

"Come, come," said Bull, pleasantly. "You don't want to get mad with me, Gus. Tell me what's wrong."

"It's that confounded plebe!" snapped Murray.

"I thought so," said Bull. "Well, that's what my news is about. I've got a plot."

And the other's sullen glare gave place to a look of delight in an instant. He leaped to his feet with an exclamation of joy.

"By George, I knew it!" he cried. "Quick! quick! Out with it! Nothing's too desperate for me to-night."

"That's good," chuckled Bull. "Very good. Come, let us go and take a walk. This is a long story; and no one must overhear it, either."

Such is the effect of bad motives upon men. Those two precious rascals stooped instinctively as they hurried down the company street and dodged out of camp. Bull led his company down through "Flirtation Walk" and out to the far end of it. Here they scrambled down the hillside until they were in a lonely, deserted glen almost at the river's edge. It was already growing dark with the shadows of the evening. And here Bull stopped and took a seat.

"I hope this is quiet enough for you," said Murray.

"I had an especial reason for bringing you here!" responded Bull. "All I've got to tell you about happened here. Do you know, old man, I jumped into the river off that high bank last night."

"What!" gasped the other. "For Heaven's sake, why?"

"That's in the story," answered Harris. "I'll begin at the beginning. Listen. You remember how I told you a while ago when that plebe Mallory first came here, how Mary Adams and I had a quarrel and that fool came along and knocked me down."

"You never told me what you were doing," said Murray.

"Never mind. I was a fool to try it, that way. Anyhow, she's hated me ever since. And oh, how she has struggled to get that plebe. Murray, I'm smarter than you think. I've been watching this business night and day, waiting for my chance. And now it's come. I found that plebe and Mary on this very spot just before taps last night."

"What doing?" gasped Murray.

Bull told the particulars.

"And, by George, I'll be hanged if she didn't end it by flinging herself head first over that bank!" he concluded.

"What!" gasped Murray.

"Yes, sir. And then I saw my chance. Oh, it was a bonanza for me, Gus! Mallory was lame, you know, and he hesitated. I rushed past him and saved her life. Throwing in some heroic flourishes, so's to have the right effect upon her. I carried her out, and upbraided him as a coward. He was lame, I knew, and couldn't do anything if he wanted to. And it made her hate him all the more."

"How did it turn out?"

"Splendidly. He went back to camp, and I took her all the way home. And you can bet I fixed it all right with her on the way. I made up for what she was mad about before; and I talked about Mallory and that other girl until she was wild. And, Gus, we've got her!"

"Got her for what?"

"Mallory! She's our tool, man; we can do just what we please. She'll do anything on earth for revenge. I almost think she'd kill him."

"You don't mean," gasped Gus, "that she's going to swear he pushed her into the river?"

"She wanted to," said Bull. "Oh, Murray, you can't imagine how simply desperate that girl was! She'd simply thrown herself at Mallory's feet, and he'd kicked her away. At least that was the way it seemed to her, and you can bet I didn't try to change her view. And she was crying with rage all the way home."

Her face was simply scarlet, and she was trembling like a leaf. I was honestly afraid of her. She vowed she'd swear to anything I said if she could only ruin him, and to get that Grace Fuller away from him. She said she'd swear to it and stick to it that he tried to murder her. She was even mad because I wouldn't let her."

"Why didn't you?" cried the other.

"In the first place, I doubt if the superintendent would believe her. There have been several plots like that tried, but he has too much faith in that fool of a plebe. Then, too, I doubt if the girl's rage'll last that long. We must use it while it does. All we want to do is to get that plebe dismissed."

"That's all!" exclaimed Murray. "But in Heaven's name, how?"

"Didn't I tell you I had a plot?"

"Yes, but what? and when?"

"To-night!" cried Bull. "To-night! And I want you to help us."

Murray sprang up in excitement and joy. Bull hushed his exclamations, and after glancing cautiously about him to make sure that no one was near in that now black and shadowy glade, went on in a low, muttering tone:

"It's very simple," he whispered. "It's because it's so simple it's sure to work. It won't leave Mallory the ghost of a chance. I'm just as sure, man, sure as I stand on this spot of ground, that Mallory will be court-martialed in a week."

"What is it?" cried Murray.

"Listen. Mary's going to write him a letter to-night, send it to him about midnight, asking him to come to her. Then——"

"But will he come?"

"Certainly. We can make it strong. She will. She can say she's dying, anything to make sure. He'll go. She lives beyond cadet limits. Some of us'll be there, catch him, tie him—anything, I don't care. And I know the girl don't. I think she'd tear his eyes out. Anyhow, we'll fix him there, beyond limits, and then back to camp we go, make some infernal racket and have the tac out in no time. Then there'll be an inspection, and Mallory'll be 'hived' absent after taps. They'll ask him next morning where he's been, and he'll tell."

"He may lie."

"He won't. He couldn't. I know him too well. And he'll be court-martialed, and there you are!"

And Gus Murray leaped up with a cry of joy. He seized his companion by the hand.

"That's it!" he cried. "That's it! By Heaven, it'll do him. And if there's any blame to bear that fool of a girl shall bear it."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PLOT SUCCEEDS.

That beautiful July evening, while those precious rascals sat whispering and discussing the details of their plan, while first classmen and yearlings were all down in the academy building at the "hop," a certain plebe sat in a tent of Company A, all by himself. A candle flickered beside him, and he held a writing pad in his hand. The plebe was Mark, his clear-cut, handsome features shining in the yellow light.

"Dear Mother," he was writing. "It is hard for one to get time to write a letter here. We plebes have so much to do. But I have promised you to write once a week, and so I have stolen off from my friends to drop you a line.

"This is the fifth letter I have written now, the close of the fifth week. And I like West Point as much as I ever did. You know how much that is. You know how I have worked and striven for this chance I have. West Point has always been the goal of all my hopes, and I am still happy to have reached it. If I should forfeit my chance now, it would be by my own fault, I think; I know that it would break my heart.

"We plebes have to work hard nowadays. They wake us up at five with a big gun, and after that it is drill all day. But I like it, for I am learning lots of things. If you could see me sweeping and dusting I know you would laugh. Texas says if 'the boys' saw him they'd lynch him 'sho'.

"I told you a lot about Texas the last time I wrote. He is the most delightful character I have ever met in my life. He is just fresh from the plains, and his cowboy ways of looking at things keep me laughing all day. But he is just as true as steel, and as fine a friend as I ever knew.

"I believe I told you all about the Banded Seven, the secret society we have gotten up to stop hazing. Well, we are having high jinks with 'the ole ya'rlin's,' as

Texas calls them. We have outwitted them at every point, and I think they are about ready to give up in despair. We plebes even went to the hop the other night. I can hear the music of the hop now as it comes over the parade ground. It is very alluring, so you must appreciate this letter all the more.

"I shan't tell you about the fight I had, for it would worry you. And I haven't time to tell you how I saved the life of a girl last week. I inclose a newspaper clipping about it, but you mustn't believe it was so absurdly heroic. The girl's father is a very rich man here, and, mother, she is very sweet and attractive. She has joined the Seven to help me fool the yearlings.

"I guess I shall have to stop now. I hear some sounds that make me think it is time for tattoo, and besides, I am getting very homesick, writing to you way out in Colorado. You need not be fearing any rival to my affections, mother dear, even if I am fond of Grace Fuller. I wish I could see you just once to-night to tell you how much I miss you. And I am still

"Your devoted son,
"MARK."

Mark laid down his pencil with a sigh. He folded the letter and sealed it, and then arose slowly to his feet. Outside of his tent he heard quick steps and voices, and a moment later the rattle of a drum broke forth.

"Tattoo," he observed. "I thought so."

He turned toward the door as the flap was pushed aside—and a tall, slender lad entered, a lad with bronzed, sun-tanned features and merry gray eyes.

"Hello, Texas!" said Mark.

"Hello," growled Texas. "Look a yere! What do you mean by runnin' off an' hidin' all evenin'? I been a huntin' you everywhere."

"I've been right here," said Mark, "writing a letter home. Did you want me to go to the hop?"

"No, I didn't. But I wanted you to tell me all 'bout that crazy Mary Adams last night an' what you did. You ain't had time to tell me all day."

Mark told him the story then. They were still discussing it when they turned out and lined up for roll call; and that ceremony being over, they scattered again,

Texas still eagerly asking questions about the strange affair.

Taps sounded half an hour later—ten o'clock—"lights out and all quiet." They stopped then.

Sentry No. 3 that night was "Baby" Edwards. His beat lay along the northern edge of the camp, skirting the tents of Company A. And Baby Edwards let quite a number pass his beat that night.

For instance, he was on duty from midnight until two. It was bright moonlight then, and Baby could have seen any one who crossed his post; but he heard a signaling whistle and faced out in order not to see any one. The person who entered was a boy clad in a blue uniform, an "orderly," as they are called.

He ran silently and swiftly in and made straight for one tent. When he got there he hesitated not a moment, but stepped in and crept up to one of the sleepers.

It was Mark who awoke at his touch, and Mark sat up in alarm and stared at him.

"Sh!" said the boy. "Sh! Don't wake any one."

"What do you want?" Mark demanded.

"I've a letter, sir, a letter from her again."

Mark stared at the boy and recognized him at once as a messenger who had given him a note from Mary Adams about a month ago. And he sprang to his feet in surprise.

"She writing again!" he whispered. "Quick, give it to me."

He broke the seal, stepped to the tent door, where, in the white moonlight, he could read every letter plainly. And this was what he saw:

"DEAR MR. MALLORY: Oh, once more I have to write you to call upon you for aid. You cannot imagine the terrible distress I am in. And I have no one to call upon but you. If you respect me as a woman, come to my aid to-night and at once. And come alone, for I could not bear to have any one but you know of my terrible affliction. Oh, please do not fail me! You may imagine my state of mind when I write you like this. And let me call myself

Your friend,
"MARY ADAMS."

Mark finished the reading of that letter in amazement, even alarm.

"Did she give you this?" he demanded of the boy.

"Yes, sir, she did, not five minutes ago," replied the lad. "And she told me to run. She seemed scared to death, sir, and I know she'd been crying."

Mark stared into his earnest face a moment, and then he turned away in thought.

"You may go," he said to the boy. "I know my way to her house alone."

The lad disappeared; and Mark, without a moment's hesitation, went over and woke one of the cadets.

"Wake up, Texas," he whispered. "Wake up and read this."

Texas arose from his couch in surprise and sleepy alarm. He read the letter, gasping; then he stared at Mark.

"Do you think she wrote it?" he inquired.

That problem was puzzling Mark, too. He had received two letters before from the girl, under exactly similar circumstances. One had been a trick of the cadets to lure him out. The other had been genuine, and had resulted in Mark's saving the girl's brother from disgrace and ruin. But which was this?

Mark made up his mind quickly.

"I think she wrote it, old man," he said. "The drum boy who gave me this gave me the other she wrote, too, and he swears she wrote this. He said she was frightened and crying. Texas, she lives way off there with her old mother, who's blind and helpless. And there's no telling what may have happened to her. Just see how urgent that note is. I must go, old man. I'd be a coward if I didn't. She

don't know a soul to call on but me."

And Mark, generous and noble to a fault, had turned and begun to fling on his clothing. Texas was doing likewise.

"I'm a-goin' too," he vowed.

"She says not," whispered Mark.

"I know," was the answer. "She ain't a-goin' to know it. I'm a-goin' in case it's them ole yearlin's. Ef I see it's all right, and she wrote it, I reckon I kin sneak home."

Nothing could deter the faithful and vigilant Texan from his resolution, and when Mark stole out of his tent his friend was at his heels. They passed the sentry, Baby Edwards, with the usual signal, Mark fooled for once, was chuckling at his deception, thinking Baby thought them yearlings. But Baby knew who it was, and laughed.

The two, once clear of camp, set out on a dead run. They dashed across the Cavalry Plain and down the road to Highland Falls. It was nearly a mile to where Mary Adams lived, but Mark never stopped once, not even when he came to the dreaded cadet limits, to be found beyond which meant court-martial and dismissal in disgrace. He took the risk grimly, however, and ran on. When they finally reached the girl's house the Texan was panting and exhausted.

"You stay there," whispered Mark, pointing to a clump of bushes nearby.

Texas crouched behind them, and doubled his fists in determination. Mark just as promptly stepped up to the door and softly rapped.

There was a light in one of the rooms on the ground floor. The curtain was carefully drawn, but Texas, watching closely, saw a shadow swiftly flit across. And just after that the door was flung open, and the girl stood before them.

"I knew you would come!" Texas heard her cry. "Oh, thank fortune!"

Then Mark stepped inside, and the door shut again.

Texas waited in suspense and curiosity. He did not know how long Mark might be in there, but he was resolved to stick it out. Then suddenly, to his surprise, the door was opened again, and Mark and the girl stepped out.

She was leaning upon his arm, and hurrying him forward quickly. She was evidently in great distress, and from what the hidden listener heard, Mark was striving his best to comfort her. The two figures hurried across the clearing and vanished in the woods. Texas arose from his position.

"I reckon it's all right," he muttered. "It's blamed mysterious, but there's nothin' mo' fo' me to do."

And suiting the action to the word the faithful Southerner turned and set out rapidly for camp.

Mark, when he entered Mary Adams' house, found her standing before him, a picture of misery and fright. He demanded to know what was wrong.

"Come, come!" the girl cried. "Quick. I cannot tell you. Oh! Come and see."

She flung a shawl about her shoulders, seized Mark by the arm in a convulsive grip, and together they hurried through the woods.

It was a little footpath they followed. Mark had no idea where they were going in the deep black darkness. He abandoned himself entirely to the girl's guidance, trusting that no slight matter could have taken her there, and he was right.

The girl said not a word during the trip. She kept her face hidden in the shawl, and only a sob told Mark the state of her feelings. He was growing more mystified and curious every moment.

On, on they went. They must have been hurrying continually for at least five minutes, the girl dragging the cadet faster and faster, when suddenly she turned and left the path.

There was a dense thicket before them; she paused not a moment to hesitate, but plunged into the midst of it. The briars tore her clothing and hands, but she forced her way in. And when they were in the very center, without a word, she stopped and faced about.

She pushed aside her veil and hair and stared wildly at Mark. He gazed at her blood-red, burning cheeks and saw her black eyes glitter.

"What is the matter?" he cried.

She made not a sound, but suddenly to Mark's infinite horror flung herself upon him and wrapped her arms about his neck.

"Why, Miss Adams," he gasped. "I——"

His words stuck in his throat. His surprise changed to the wildest dismay and consternation. For he felt a pair of sinewy arms flung about his ankles, binding his feet together as in a vise. He had only one free arm, the other being bound to his chest with the bandages of the surgeon; the free arm was seized by the wrist with a grip that almost crushed it. And to his mouth another pair of hands were pressed, making outcry impossible as it would have been futile anyway.

Mark was as motionless and helpless as if he had been turned to stone!

The swift emotions that surged through his excited brain defy description. He saw the plot in an instant, apprehended it in all its fiendish heartlessness; and he knew that he was ruined. He could not see behind him; he could not identify his assailants; but he was sure they were cadets, Bull and his crowd leagued with this wretched girl to play upon his kind-heartedness.

And that girl! Oh, what a figure she was! She made no attempt to hide herself, however much Bull Harris might. She stood before her helpless victim's eyes a perfect figure of vengeance and triumph.

There is a famous painting by Sichel of the Grecian sorceress, Medea. The woman is standing clad in white that contrasts with her jet black hair. In one hand, half hidden, she clutches a shining dagger; her mouth is set in a firm, determined way, and her eyes are dark and gleaming. Imagine that figure in the moment of victory, every feature convulsed with joy, with hatred gratified, and that is the girl Mary Adams. She was dancing about Mark in fury, flinging her hands in his face, taunting him, jeering at him, threatening him so as to frighten even the desperate cadets.

They, meanwhile, were working quickly; they bound his legs together, his arms to his side. They forced a gag into his mouth, and then lastly shut off his view of the wildly shrieking girl by tying a handkerchief about his eyes. And then they tumbled him to the ground and turned away and left him.

Mary Adams stayed behind them a moment to vent her fury upon the helpless prisoner.

"Satisfied!" she cried. "How do you like it? I told you I would have revenge. I told you I hated you! And now, and now it is mine! You are mine, too! Do you hear me? I can do what I please with you!"

Mark could not see her, but he felt a stinging pain in his cheek and he felt the warm blood flow.

The girl's sharp heel had cut his flesh. And a moment later he heard a low voice mutter:

"Come away, you fool! Come on."

They dragged her reluctantly with them. Mark heard the steps recede into the distance, heard the silence settling down about the place. They had left him alone, deserted and helpless, lost in the midst of the woods, left him to die for all he knew, certainly to be missed, to be expelled, to be ruined.

And the poor fellow groaned within him as he realized the triumph of his enemies.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TRIUMPH—CONCLUSION.

Texas made his way back to camp in silence. Texas felt it was none of his business, and yet he could not help trying to guess the errand upon which those two had gone. It was certainly a mystery. Texas reached the camp without succeeding in forming the least guess.

He raced past the same sentry in the same style as usual. He entered his tent and found the other two sleeping soundly, having not the least suspicion of the night's occurrences.

"I reckon," he mused, reflectively, "there ain't much use o' my sittin' round. I'll go to bed."

With which resolution he undressed and lay down to sleep.

After such an exciting and lively half hour as the one Texas had just spent, one does not usually drop off to sleep very easily. It was fortunate that Texas did not; wide-awake as he was, he had a cooler and steadier head to think when the hour of trial came. For the "hour of trial" was coming very soon now.

Bull Harris and his cowardly allies first took the precaution to calm the angry girl, and then set out on a run for camp. Their hearts were beating high with hope and triumph. Their time had come at last; their enemy was theirs, and theirs without any blame falling on them. It was a great day for the vengeful Bull.

They passed their sentry ally in safety and vanished in their tents. In a minute more they were all safely in bed, as Texas was, and then the time had come.

Texas, lying in his silent tent, was just beginning to doze, when suddenly came a wild yell that shook the air, that made the hills to echo. It rang through the sleeping camp, and it was followed by a series of shouts.

"Help! help! help!"

The place was in an uproar in an instant; and Texas was almost paralyzed with horror. An alarm! The camp awake! Inspection! And Mark, his Mark, his friend and hero, absent!

He sprang to his feet with a hoarse cry; at the same moment the other two plebes sat up and stared about them wildly.

"What's that?" cried one.

"Mark's gone!" fairly shrieked Texas.

"Mark gone! How?"

"He's out of bounds! Great Heavens, he went to see Mary Adams! And he'll be found out!"

The two crowded about him, their faces pale with fright, their eyes staring.

Mark gone! Mark, their leader! What on earth would they do?

The Texan's wild exclamation had been heard in the Company B tent to the rear, and its occupants had rushed in regardless of rules, of discovery, of everything. An alarm! An inspection! And Mark beyond limits!

Things were happening with incredible swiftness outside. The shouts had been echoed by excited inquiries from awakened cadets, by the cries of sentries for the corporal of the guard, and by the quick, sharp commands of officers.

Lieutenant Allen, the "tac" in command, had sprung up from his bed at the very first cry. And in half a minute more, dressed and with lighted lantern in hand, he was rushing down the company street.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

No one knew. He saw cadets gathered in almost every tent door, staring out anxiously. Thus he did not notice the state of affairs in Mark's tent, where six horrified, frightened plebes were huddled, gasping.

Night alarms had been getting too frequent at Camp McPherson that year, and had excited the ire of the authorities. The lieutenant meant to find out the authors of this one, if such a thing were within the realms of possibility.

First he thought of sounding the "long roll," the fire or mutiny signal, summoning the cadets out on the street for roll call. Then it occurred to him that an inspection of the tents might do better. Another "tac," Lieutenant Ross, had joined him at this moment. And without a moment's delay, the two set to work. And Lieutenant Allen started with Company A, the very street in which Mark Mallory's tent stood!

A thousand wild plans had occurred to the six, to Texas in particular. He might "hold up" the tac, prevent the inspection! Or dress up as Mark and have himself reported! Great Heavens! he must do something!

The officer began at the head of the street. It was the work of but one second to glance into each tent. It would take but five seconds more to reach Mark's, to note the fact that there were but three in that tent, and that Cadet Mallory was absent out of camp, out of limits!

Texas turned to his comrades as the officer drew near. There were tears in Texas' eyes, and his voice was choked.

"You fellows," he said, to the three from the B tent, "you—you'd better go back, or you'll get soaked, too."

Nearer still came the officer. One tent more! The three had turned to go—and then suddenly Texas uttered a cry of joy and staggered back against the tent wall! An instant later he leaped forward, seized Dewey, one of the three, by the shoulders and fairly flung him to the ground.

"Lie there! Lie there!" he gasped, hoarsely. "Durnation!"

Dewey, quick as a wink, saw the ruse. The other two, confused and frightened, dashed across to their tent and hid, wondering what was up, what Texas was trying to do. But Dewey slid into the blankets that made Mark's "bed," drew the sheet over him, all but his head, and then lay still, gasping and trembling like a leaf.

Texas and the other two sprang for their places and imitated him. And an instant later the white light of the officer's lantern flashed into the tent.

The four held their breath; their hearts fairly ceased to beat as the tac glanced around. He saw a tent undisturbed; he saw Texas, and the Parson and Sleepy; and he saw the brown curly hair of the fourth occupant, lying upon his stomach, his face turned away from the light.

A second more and he passed on; and the four almost fainted with the reaction of relief.

It was not over yet, though. "Allen" had two more tents to visit up that row, and then he would turn to B Company. Texas peered out and watched him reach the last tent, and then uttered a whispered "Now!"

Quick as a flash, Dewey slid under the wall at the rear, whisked across the open space, and dived into his own tent—safe!

The camp settled down into quietness a few minutes after that. But the six never slept another wink. Mark had escaped that danger, he was safe for a moment. But another alarm might come any moment! And reveille was sure to come in a few hours! And where was Mark?

Texas, ever sly, had become suspicious by that time; ever bold and faithful, he lost not a moment in hesitation. He left camp again! He ran straight to Mary Adams' house, and from it straight out the path he had seen the two take. It was a forlorn hope, but it met with fulfillment. Texas heard a low groan, the only signal Mark could make when he heard the step of a possible rescuer.

And in half an hour more Mark Mallory was back in camp again, safe, telling to his furious friends the tale of his betrayal and hearing from them the tale of his "escape."

"We must get square, b'gee!" cried Dewey.

"Yes, we must get square, by Zeus!" came from the Parson.

"Give me time, boys, give me time," put in Mark. "I will think up a plan."

"Gosh, but it was a night o' nights," was the comment from Texas. "But we fooled them ole yearlin's nicely, didn't we?"

"Oh, they can't down us," chimed in Dewey. "We'll go 'em one better, b'gee, every time, b'gee!"

And the Banded Seven agreed to a man.

THE END.

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Transcriber's Note:

The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

In Chapter II, "sword of the tryant" was changed to "sword of the tyrant", and "meant to spent that half-holiday" was changed to "meant to spend that half-holiday".

In Chapter III, "wondering about everythings" was changed to "wondering about everything".

In Chapter V, a missing period was added after "from two minutes to twenty", and "B. B. J!" was changed to "B. B. J!".

In Chapter VII, "the B. J-est plebe" was changed to "the B. J.-est plebe", "as those yearlings had even seen" was changed to "as those yearlings had ever seen", and "'Will they try it' he thought?" was changed to "'Will they try it?' he thought."

In Chapter X, "his face on a broad grin" was changed to "on his face a broad grin".

In Chapter XI, a missing question mark was added after "Is he hurt".

In Chapter XIV, "a roughish look" was changed to "a roguish look", and a quotation mark was removed before "It'll take lots of planning beforehand".

In Chapter XX, "some little nervousness, to" was changed to "some little nervousness, too".

In Chapter XXII, "the corner of the seige battery inclosure" was changed to "the corner of the siege battery inclosure", "that reminds be of another" was changed to "that reminds me of another", "his mist stately tone" was changed to "his mist stately tone", and a period was changed to a comma after "he added, more seriously".

In Chapter XXIII, "bound his supenders about him" was changed to "bound his suspenders about him".

In Chapter XXIV, a period was changed to a comma after "as his friend touched it".

In Chapter XXVII, a quotation mark was removed after "And—and——".

In Chapter XXVIII, "He knew in his hear it would be best" was changed to "He knew in his heart it would be best".

In Chapter XXX, "Murray still sat where he was was" was changed to "Murray still sat where he was".

In Chapter XXXI, "her mouth it set in a firm, determined way" was changed to "her mouth is set in a firm, determined way".

In the advertisements, "to cutivate a fondness for study" was changed to "to cultivate a fondness for study", and "good, wholsome reading" was changed to "good, wholesome reading".

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