room into the corridor, along nearly its whole length, till he stopped before a door.

"Boy," he growled, "do you know whose room this is?"

"My uncle's."

"Were you here last night very late?"

"No, sir."

"You lie! you were. Now, boy"—here he drew me to the door and laid his hand upon the knob—"now, boy, look and see what you've done."

And he threw open the door.

I took one look, gave a scream of horror, and—what happened after that I know not. For the first rough glance had been enough. Vivid as the picture still is in my memory, I have not the heart to reproduce it in all its ghastly details. My poor uncle had been stabbed during the night and lay dead upon his bed.

No wonder I fainted. The sight had conjured up a terrible tale of wickedness.

Into that thrust I saw gathered the hatred of the wronged wife and the revenge for a husband dead of a broken heart.

O my nurse! you to whom I had, in all a child's unstinted love, given the sacred name of mother!

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH I HEAR BAD NEWS, HAVE BRAIN FEVER, AND AFTER THREE VERY GLOOMY YEARS ENTER UPON A NEW LIFE.

WHEN I came to my senses I found myself in my little bed at home. My father was bending over me anxiously.

"O papa!" I cried, "do they think I did it?"

"No, indeed, my dear boy. No one but that wretched Caggett even suspected you. The whole thing seems to be now quite clear. The police have examined into the case. You must know there was a robbery, too. A large sum of money was taken, and that circumstance has helped to clear the matter. It's almost beyond the shadow of a doubt that your nurse—I always distrusted her for her dark, mysterious ways—committed the murder, partly out of hatred to your uncle, partly with the desire to make away with some money which she claimed he had swindled from her husband. Your uncle's cook gave a very clear account of Mrs. Raynor's conversation with my dead brother after he had read the will. Your nurse, after dabbling your night-shirt with blood, so as to lead us to believe you had killed him in your sleep, fled the house. But she'll soon be found. The police all over the country are on the watch for her."

"Papa, how much money was stolen?"

"Well, it seems that the miserable old man had a habit of sleeping with a large sum of money by his side—under his pillow, rather. Caggett, who knew his ways, testifies to his certain knowledge the sum in my brother's keeping on that night was fifty thousand dollars."

Fifty thousand dollars! The very sum Mrs. Raynor had claimed.

. . . . . .

Nevertheless, Mrs. Raynor was not found. For what light could be brought to bear upon her whereabouts, the earth might have swallowed her.

Nor was Mrs. Raynor the only one to disappear.

The cook, housemaid, and coachman could with difficulty be persuaded to remain till the funeral rites had been performed. The two nights they spent in the house after my uncle's death had been nights of terror. Each had a tale of strange groanings and mocking laughs and weird sighs. As for Caggett, he continued to frown and snarl, but said little. Even after the others had taken their departure, Caggett prolonged his stay in the lone house for several days. He had received permission from my father to put the interior in order, and to make out an inventory of the furniture, books, and general state of the house. How Caggett went about this work nobody knows; but the gossips of the country made much of his bravery in remaining alone in a "haunted house."

Haunted house! That was now the title of Tower Hill Mansion. Days passed into months, but from the hour Caggett locked every door and brought the keys to my father no sign of happy human life, no sweet prattle and silvery laughter of childish voices, no light steps of little feet, nor bright faces peering from the open windows softened the gloom of that dismal house. The doors were locked, the blinds closed, and around its gloomy gables the wind sighed and moaned its mysterious requiem for the well-nigh-forgotten dead.

People shuddered as they passed it by day and prayed as they passed it by night. Strange tales concerning it flew from mouth to mouth; and in course of time my uncle's name ceased to be uttered and his dwelling came to be called the "haunted house."

Many of these details were made known to me long afterward, for at the time I was in no condition

to learn them. After the short conversation with my father set down in the beginning of this chapter I suffered a dangerous relapse. Brain fever set in, and for some weeks I struggled blindly in the arms of death. I came off the conqueror—not without loss. My sleep-walking habit, it is true, disappeared with the brain fever; but in its stead I found myself robbed of my strength and enveloped in a nervous gloom which, it would seem, doctors' skill could not dispel.

The three years that ensued were the unhappiest of my life. The memory of Mrs. Raynor—so kind to me, yet so cruel—haunted me; the face of my uncle, now as it quivered in kindness, now as it blanched into the horror of hideous death, came and went in sleepless hours of the night. Life, so gay and hopeful and joyous to most boys, offered me little to look forward to. My father, as the years went on, grew more and more distressed at my condition. He counted on time to cure me, but he was disappointed.

Finally, after much thought and consultation, he concluded that the active, stirring boy-life of boarding-school might prove the best remedy. Accordingly he sent me at the age of thirteen to a college which, as he had been led to believe, combined in happy proportions study, piety, and healthful outdoor exercise.

On the 13th of October I took the train for St. Maure's.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH I FALL OUT WITH A YOUNG RASCAL, FALL IN WITH NEW FRIENDS, ONE OF WHOM FALLS UPON SAID YOUNG RASCAL, AND ENTER THE COLLEGE OF ST. MAURE'S IN THE BEST OF SPIRITS.

"ST. MAURE'S!" shouted a railroad official as the train stopped before a small depot on the outskirts of a village.

Jumping to my feet, I grasped my valise, hurried out of the car, and as the train moved away took a hasty view of my surroundings. I had been told that St. Maure's College was near the village, but was ignorant of the direction. My first glance took in many things, though it failed to discover the college.

I turned toward the west and followed with my eye the fast-receding train: no college building loomed up before me from this point of view, but my attention was aroused for all that by the sight of three boys advancing along the track. Two of them were of about my own age, as I judged; while the third was taller and appeared to be older than his companions. Each of them had a gun upon his shoulder, and the larger carried in addition a game-bag, which seemed to be pretty well filled. I divined at once that they were college students.

While I stood looking at the approaching trio and endeavoring to nerve myself to address them, my valise was suddenly jerked from my hand; and on turning I was confronted by a rather roughly-clad boy of sixteen or seventeen, with as ill-favored a countenance as one would meet with in a year and a day's journey.

"You're a college kid, ain't you?" he remarked. "I always carry their baggage. Come on, youngster: I'll do it for fifty cents."

I was at the time a very timid boy, but this was too much for me.

"Give me that valise!" I cried.

"Yah!" ejaculated the young man, swinging the valise behind his back and facing me, with one eye closed and his tongue sticking out in unmistakable derision.

I stepped forward and endeavored to snatch my valise from his hands, but the disdainful youth dexterously swung it round. I reached after it, and made several circles about my tantalizing acquaintance, only to find that things were in precisely the same situation as when I began; if anything, one of his eyes was closed more tightly, and his tongue stuck out at greater length.

"Give me a quarter, sonny," continued the jocular young gentleman, "and I'll hand over your grip-sack."

I stood still, not knowing what to do. It had seldom fallen to my lot to deal with such rough personages,—Caggett, indeed, was the only one I had ever brushed up against,—and though my outraged sense of justice prevented me from considering for a moment the idea of giving the fellow a quarter, yet I was extremely annoyed.

I again made a dart at my valise.

"Naw, yer don't," observed the amateur highwayman, running aside. "No quarter, no grip-sack, bub."

"I say, hand over that grip!" exclaimed a new voice

I turned, and to my joy I found that the young huntsmen, most opportunely for me, had come upon the scene.

The speaker, a dark-complexioned, somewhat chubby, merry-eyed lad, was the smallest of the three. He gave me a cordial nod, as did his larger companion, while the third surprised me with a salutation bordering closely upon a profound bow.

On hearing these words my victimizer backed away from us with notable signs of haste.

"Do you hear?" continued the jolly-faced boy. "Drop that sack."

"Yah!" answered the baggage-thief, making derisive signals with his fingers, with which expression of his feelings he turned west and started off at a run.

I was about to give chase, when the larger of my sympathizers thrust me aside, letting his gun drop in the act, and exclaiming as he dashed forward:

"Leave him to me, Johnnie; I'll spike his battery."

"That's all right, Johnnie," added the first speaker; "you needn't worry about your valise. John Donnel means to get it, if he has to bring back the fellow's scalp with it."

"Hadn't we better run on after them, Tom?" suggested the other. His voice struck me as he spoke with its wondrous sweetness.

"Come on, then," replied Tom.

Without further ado we ran forward in the wake of pursuer and pursued.

While, on the one hand, Donnel was handicapped by the game-bag, this disadvantage, on the other, was counterbalanced by the valise which encumbered the runaway. As to the issue, it was evident at a glance that Donnel's overtaking his opponent was only a matter of a few minutes. Slowly but surely Donnel was nearing his quarry. The question was not how to catch his hare, but how to cook it. All the difficulty would be in the meeting. This seemed to occur to the smaller of my two companions, for he cried:

"Come on, boys, as fast as you can. Maybe John will need our help."

At the word his companion shot on ahead, and soon left us many yards behind.

"It does me good to see Percy run," continued my companion, talking with as much composure as though he were going at an ordinary walk. "You should have seen him when he first came here last year. You'd have thought he was a girl in disguise; and now there isn't a nicer nor a better boy in Kansas. Hallo! John's taking off the game-sack. He'll run him down in no time, once he's got that off."

John, who was now within a few feet of the runaway, had indeed released his shoulder from the strap which supported the game-bag. But instead of throwing it aside, he suddenly swung it round and brought it with no little vigor about the legs of the fugitive. That bold young gentleman was almost lassoed. He plunged and fell to the ground; and before he could pick himself up John Donnel had clutched my valise, while the rest of us had ranged ourselves by the side of our champion.

"Will you fight?" exclaimed the fallen highwayman, picking himself up and directing a savage look at Donnel.

"How much a side?" asked John.

"Dollar a side," he answered after a pause.

"How much time will you give me for training?" continued Donnel, tranquilly.

"You'd better sneak off," suggested the smallest of my friends. "You're talking to John Donnel."

"Oh!" exclaimed the pugilist, changing countenance, and without more ado he shambled off.

My companions burst into a hearty laugh.

"Excuse us, sir," said Percy, controlling his mirth, "but the village boys are awfully afraid of John Donnel since he thrashed their champion last year—on my account, too. By the way they talk of him, you'd think John was a fire-eater; whereas he's just as nice as can be. And now allow me to introduce you to Tom Playfair."

"Glad to see you," exclaimed my stout little friend, extending his well-browned hand and shaking mine heartily. "That red-haired boy," he continued, "who just made the speech——"

"It isn't red; it's gold," put in Percy.

"Is the awfullest dude in the college; and his name is Percy Wynn—and he's got ten sisters and still lives."

"Don't you mind that Tom," said Percy, taking my hand and bowing again; "he's always poking fun at me."

In the matter of hair, there was no doubt that Tom was poking fun. Percy's hair was indeed of a beautiful gold, a fit setting for a face delicate, refined, and wearing an expression singularly engaging.

John Donnel was a fair-complexioned boy, with a countenance remarkable for its sunniness and frank, open expression. Somehow I felt at once that I

was in the presence of three very remarkable boys; and I may add that the passing of many years has not weakened that impression.

"I'm ever so glad to make your acquaintance," I said. "My name is Harry Dee. I've been unwell for a long time; and my father thought that the bustling, active life in a boarding-college might give tone to my nerves."

Hereupon Tom Playfair, with a smile, caught hold of me, turned me completely around, and then stood off and gazed at me critically with his arms akimbo.

"What you want is an extra layer of fat and lots of laughing. You ought to make it a point to smile before and after meals," he said good-humoredly.

I must admit that Tom's remarks were to the point. At this period of my life I was intensely solemn and very thin. My face was noticeably pale, and my lips and eyelids had a trick of quivering in and out of time, due no doubt to the state of my nerves.

"You'll grow fat on Kansas beef fast enough, Harry," said Donnel. "But suppose we celebrate the occasion. We don't get a new boy every day. Tom, it's your time to treat."

"What shall it be?" asked Tom. "Pies?"

There was an unequivocal murmur of assent from John and Percy.

"All right. You fellows walk on at your ease. I'll run ahead and get them," and away darted Tom.

As we walked smartly through the village we chatted pleasantly, and I could hardly conceal my delight with my new friends. Their natures were as

sunny as the brightest of days in spring; they talked and laughed with an abandon, a freedom from care, that was something new to me. Neither of them said one word smacking of piety, and yet I could not but perceive that I was in an atmosphere of holiness and innocence.

Just as we were passing out of the village Tom rejoined us in a way that was playfully abrupt. He came upon us at a run, and brought himself to a stop by plunging into Percy, who incontinently sat down.

"Here you go," cried Tom, tearing open the package he bore, and offering no apology to his prostrate friend. "Pies for the million. My friends, eat pie while you may, for to-morrow it's cakes."

He referred to the college-dinner dessert; pie-day alternated with cake-day; and, it goes without saying, the boys were sufficiently interested in the matter to know what was forthcoming each day as regards that part of the *menu*.

Not a little to my astonishment, Tom presented me with an entire pie; and on my remonstrating, he in turn was still more astonished.

Each of my friends took a pie without any objections; and I must add (model boys though they were) that they were considerate enough to help me dispatch my own.

"I say," began Tom, as we resumed our road toward the college, "how are you on baseball?"

"Not much," I answered. "You see, I'm too weak for hard batting or throwing or fast running. But I can curve a ball down and in and out, and place it pretty well."

"Couldn't you train him for our nine, Tom?" asked Percy.

"I don't see why not. He's not near as hopeless a case as you were, Percy, when you first came here. Why," he added, addressing himself to me, "you should have seen him. He had girl's hair, and used to walk about taking short steps like a pigeon, and the first time he threw a ball he hit John Donnel on the neck, and then he yelled like a woman when she sees a mouse. But now he's our left-fielder and holds everything—and my! you just ought to see him on the run when he goes after a ball. And as for base-stealing—he'll be a terror if he's not afraid to slide. He can run farther in less time than any fellow in the yard."

Tom, I could see, always became eloquent when speaking of his friend Percy, who on this occasion blushed violently and looked about him as though he were desirous of hiding himself.

John Donnel, who had been watching me intently during Tom's panegyric, now said:

"Percy, I agree with you. Harry has the right sort of build for a baseball player, or I'm much mistaken. All he needs is filling out; he'll get that soon enough. And we need a pitcher for our Blue Clippers, anyhow. Harry Quip's arm is too sore for regular work. Tom, you'd better undertake to train Harry Dee."

Tom and Percy listened with great respect to Donnel. And certainly on this point he had a just title to their regard. Though still in the small yard, John was looked upon as one of the best second-basemen in the college. Close upon John in authority came Tom Playfair, whose training and executive abilities were rated so high that on joining the Blue Clippers at the beginning of the

present school year he had at once, mainly owing to the influence of Donnel and Keenan, been elected captain and manager.

"We'll make you a member if it can be done, Harry," said Tom, "and we'll have you in trim within a month."

I was surprised and delighted at the kindness and cordiality of my new friends. Why they should at once have taken me so fully into their confidence is a question I cannot answer to this day. Boys are marvellously quick in their likes and dislikes; and as far as I have had opportunity of noticing, they seldom judge amiss. By a sort of intuition they form lasting friendships where the older and wiser are wont to pause, weigh, and consider.

He should deem himself fortunate who finds it an easy matter to win the love and confidence of the young; and, looking back, it strikes me that the friendship shown me by Tom, Percy, and John is something of which I may well be proud.

Tom and Percy! How I wish I could paint them to the reader as I saw them on that red-letter day of my life. Tom, stout, brown, ruddy, with his face ever serene, with mischief twinkling ever in his eyes. But if fun proclaimed itself on his open face, decision asserted itself with even greater force. His mouth was of the firmest, his chin of the squarest.

Percy was equally handsome, but in another way. There was a certain delicacy about his person, form, and feature—even his clothes seemed to lend themselves to the expression of this capital point. His skin was very fair and white, save where on either cheek a slight touch of the rose lent an

exquisite beauty to his exquisite complexion. His eyes and brow bespoke intelligence, and his whole face, regular in every feature, was mobile, refined, tender beyond any boy-face that has ever come under my notice. Like Tom, he was dressed in polo shirt and knickerbockers. I lay down my pen to gaze upon them again, and as I gaze my eyes grow dim with gracious memories, and I cry from my heart, "God bless them!"

The conversation on our nearing St. Maure's, by a natural school-boy transition, turned from base-ball to class matters.

"Percy and I are in First Academic," said Tom, "our third year of Latin and second of Greek. I wish you could get in with us; we've a splendid teacher—Mr. Middleton. He's our prefect, too. Do you know any Latin, Harry?"

"A little; I've studied it about two years and a half under a private teacher. In fact, I've studied hardly anything but Latin, Greek, and arithmetic; and I went through everything in the morning hours from nine to twelve and had the afternoon free."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Tom; "what a nice daily order—half-holiday every day."

"How did you go about Latin?" put in Percy. "Did you begin with reading *Historiæ Sacræ?*"

"Yes; for seven months I was kept on nothing but the accidence and *Historiæ Sacræ*. I declined and conjugated till there was no sticking me. Then I began translating Cicero's letters. My first lesson was half a line; but I had to know everything that could be known about it, and I studied syntax in reference to each lesson. What I translated I learned by heart. Then I was made to put

some English sentences into a similar style of Latin —that's what you call theme-work, isn't it?"

"Exactly," said Tom; "you've just been going on the lines Mr. Middleton sets for us. We learn by heart everything that we translate. How far did you go in Latin?"

"About five hundred lines of Cicero—mostly his letters. But I know it all, so that were I to lose my book I could put every word on paper."

"That's the system in St. Maure's, pretty much," observed Tom. "They are getting closer to it every year. But how about the *Copia verborum?*"

"Well, besides learning the inflection and meaning of every word I came across in Cicero, my teacher put four or five new words into each of my daily themes. In that way I got in about five or six hundred extra Latin words."

"It's a great plan," put in Tom. "Percy and I are terribly interested in Latin. You see, it's this way. Next year, when we get into Humanities, we've a chance to compete for an intercollegiate gold medal to be given to the one who writes the best Latin theme; now we want to hold up our end here at St. Maure's against the other six colleges that are in it."

"And besides," added Percy, "we count on Mr. Middleton's teaching us next year; he's very anxious for us to come out well in the contest, and that alone is enough to make us work for it."

"Just so," resumed Tom, "and it's his last year of teaching. After that he will go off and study theology and come back a priest. And if we don't give him a send-off next year it won't be our fault. You'll work for it, won't you, Harry?"

"If I'm able to get into your class," I replied, "I'll do my best."

"Shake hands on that," said Tom, grasping my hand. "We're none of us particular who gets the medal, provided it comes to some one in our class. But if we all work close together we'll help one another and maybe carry off some of the honors."

"There are nine places of honor, and there are seven boys in our class who are going to work from now till next April, one year, to get in their names. There's Percy and myself, and Joe Whyte and Harry Quip, and Will Ruthers and Joe Richards, and yourself."

If I had been pleased with our few words on the subject of baseball, I was both pleased and astonished at the eagerness with which my companions took up the question of Latin. They were real ideal boys; boys who loved work and play—an unusual combination.

On further talk we came to an agreement to help each other in this wise: The "big six," as Tom called the aspirants for the Latin medal, were to coach me in the part of Cæsar and Sallust which they had seen during their two years' study, while I in return was to go over with them the particular letters of Cicero which it had been my lot to review with my tutor.

With the ratification of this compact on our lips we entered the college grounds; and thus, auspiciously surrounded by the truest of friends and already spurred on to emulation in my studies, I made my entrance into St. Maure's.