PENROD

by

Booth Tarkington

Part 2

Chapter 17: Retiring from the Show Business

Megaphones were constructed out of heavy wrapping-paper, and Penrod, Sam, and Herman set out in different directions, delivering vocally the inflammatory proclamation of the poster to a large section of the residential quarter, and leaving Roderick Magsworth Bitts, Junior, with Verman in the loft, shielded from all deadhead eyes. Upon the return of the heralds, the Schofield and Williams Military Band played deafeningly, and an awakened public once more thronged to fill the coffers of the firm.

Prosperity smiled again. The very first audience after the acquisition of Roderick was larger than the largest of the morning. Master Bitts–the only exhibit placed upon a box–was a supercurio. All eyes fastened upon him and remained, hungrily feasting, throughout Penrod's luminous oration.

But the glory of one light must ever be the dimming of another. We dwell in a vale of seesaws–and cobwebs spin fastest upon laurel. Verman, the tattooed wild boy, speaking only in his native foreign languages, Verman the gay, Verman the caperer, capered no more; he chuckled no more, he beckoned no more, nor tapped his chest, nor wreathed his idolatrous face in smiles. Gone, all gone, were his little artifices for attracting the general attention to himself; gone was every engaging mannerism which had endeared him to the mercurial public. He squatted against the wall and glowered at the new sensation. It was the old story–the old, old story of too much temperament: Verman was suffering from artistic jealousy.

The second audience contained a cash-paying adult, a spectacled young man whose poignant attention was very flattering. He remained after the lecture, and put a few questions to Roddy, which were answered rather confusedly upon promptings from Penrod. The young man went away without having stated the object of his interrogations, but it became quite plain, later in the day. This same object caused the spectacled young man to make several brief but stimulating calls directly after leaving the Schofield and Williams Big Show, and the consequences thereof loitered not by the wayside.

The Big Show was at high tide. Not only was the auditorium filled and throbbing; there was an indubitable line–by no means wholly juvenile–waiting for admission to the next pufformance. A group

stood in the street examining the poster earnestly as it glowed in the long, slanting rays of the westward sun, and people in automobiles and other vehicles had halted wheel in the street to read the message so piquantly given to the world. These were the conditions when a crested victoria arrived at a gallop, and a large, chastely magnificent and highly flushed woman descended, and progressed across the yard with an air of violence.

At sight of her, the adults of the waiting line hastily disappeared, and most of the pausing vehicles moved instantly on their way. She was followed by a stricken man in livery.

The stairs to the auditorium were narrow and steep; Mrs. Roderick Magsworth Bitts was of a stout favour; and the voice of Penrod was audible during the ascent.

“Re-mem-bur, gentilmun and lay-deeze, each and all are now gazing upon Roderick Magsworth Bitts, Junior, the only living nephew of the great Rena Magsworth. She stuck ars’nic in the milk of eight separate and distinck people to put in their coffee and each and all of ’em died. The great ars’nic murderess, Rena Magsworth, gentilmun and lay-deeze, and Roddy’s her only living nephew. She’s a relation of all the Bitts family, but he’s her one and only living nephew. Re-mem-bur! Next July she’s goin’ to be hung, and, each and all, you now see before you——”

Penrod paused abruptly, seeing something before himself–the

august and awful presence which filled the entryway. And his words (it should be related) froze upon his lips.

Before herself, Mrs. Roderick Magsworth Bitts saw her son–her scion–wearing a moustache and sideburns of blue, and perched upon a box flanked by Sherman and Verman, the Michigan rats, the Indian dog Duke, Herman, and the dog part alligator.

Roddy, also, saw something before himself. It needed no prophet to read the countenance of the dread apparition in the entryway. His mouth opened–remained open–then filled to capacity with a calamitous sound of grief not unmingled with apprehension. Penrod's reason staggered under the crisis. For a horrible moment he saw Mrs. Roderick Magsworth Bitts approaching like some fatal mountain in avalanche. She seemed to grow larger and redder; lightnings played about her head; he had a vague consciousness of the audience spraying out in flight, of the squealings, tramplings and dispersals of a stricken field. The mountain was close upon him—-

He stood by the open mouth of the hay-chute which went through the floor to the manger below. Penrod also went through the floor. He propelled himself into the chute and shot down, but not quite to the manger, for Mr. Samuel Williams had thoughtfully stepped into the chute a moment in advance of his partner. Penrod lit upon Sam.

Catastrophic noises resounded in the loft; volcanoes seemed to romp upon the stairway.

There ensued a period when only a shrill keening marked the passing of Roderick as he was borne to the tumbril. Then all was silence.

. . . Sunset, striking through a western window, rouged the walls of the Schofields' library, where gathered a joint family council and court martial of four–Mrs. Schofield, Mr. Schofield, and Mr. and Mrs. Williams, parents of Samuel of that ilk. Mr. Williams read aloud a conspicuous passage from the last edition of the evening paper:

"Prominent people here believed close relations of woman sentenced to hang. Angry denial by Mrs. R. Magsworth Bitts. Relationship admitted by younger member of family. His statement confirmed by boy-friends—-"

"Don't!" said Mrs. Williams, addressing her husband vehemently. "We've all read it a dozen times. We've got plenty of trouble on our hands without hearing that again!"

Singularly enough, Mrs. Williams did not look troubled; she looked as if she were trying to look troubled. Mrs. Schofield wore a similar expression. So did Mr. Schofield. So did Mr. Williams.

“What did she say when she called you up?” Mrs. Schofield inquired breathlessly of Mrs. Williams.

“She could hardly speak at first, and then when she did talk, she talked so fast I couldn’t understand most of it, and—-”

“It was just the same when she tried to talk to me,” said Mrs. Schofield, nodding.

“I never did hear any one in such a state before,” continued Mrs. Williams. “So furious—-”

“Quite justly, of course,” said Mrs. Schofield.

“Of course. And she said Penrod and Sam had enticed Roderick away from home–usually he’s not allowed to go outside the yard except with his tutor or a servant–and had told him to say that horrible creature was his aunt—-”

“How in the world do you suppose Sam and Penrod ever thought of such a thing as that!” exclaimed Mrs. Schofield. “It must have been made up just for their ‘show.’ Della says there were just streams going in and out all day. Of course it wouldn’t have happened, but this was the day Margaret and I spend every month in the country with Aunt Sarah, and I didn’t dream—-”

“She said one thing I thought rather tactless,” interrupted Mrs.

Williams. “Of course we must allow for her being dreadfully excited and wrought up, but I do think it wasn’t quite delicate in her, and she’s usually the very soul of delicacy. She said that Roderick had never been allowed to associate with–common boys——”

“Meaning Sam and Penrod,” said Mrs. Schofield. “Yes, she said that to me, too.”

“She said that the most awful thing about it,” Mrs. Williams went on, “was that, though she’s going to prosecute the newspapers, many people would always believe the story, and——”

“Yes, I imagine they will,” said Mrs. Schofield musingly. “Of course you and I and everybody who really knows the Bitts and Magsworth families understand the perfect absurdity of it; but I suppose there are ever so many who’ll believe it, no matter what the Bittses and Magsworths say.”

“Hundreds and hundreds!” said Mrs. Williams. “I’m afraid it will be a great come-down for them.”

“I’m afraid so,” said Mrs. Schofield gently. “A very great one–yes, a very, very great one.”

“Well,” observed Mrs. Williams, after a thoughtful pause, “there’s only one thing to be done, and I suppose it had better be

done right away."

She glanced toward the two gentlemen.

"Certainly," Mr. Schofield agreed. "But where are they?"

"Have you looked in the stable?" asked his wife.

"I searched it. They've probably started for the far West."

"Did you look in the sawdust-box?"

"No, I didn't."

"Then that's where they are."

Thus, in the early twilight, the now historic stable was approached by two fathers charged to do the only thing to be done. They entered the storeroom.

"Penrod!" said Mr. Schofield.

"Sam!" said Mr. Williams.

Nothing disturbed the twilight hush.

But by means of a ladder, brought from the carriage-house, Mr.

Schofield mounted to the top of the sawdust-box. He looked within, and discerned the dim outlines of three quiet figures, the third being that of a small dog.

The two boys rose, upon command, descended the ladder after Mr. Schofield, bringing Duke with them, and stood before the authors of their being, who bent upon them sinister and threatening brows. With hanging heads and despondent countenances, each still ornamented with a moustache and an imperial, Penrod and Sam awaited sentence.

This is a boy's lot: anything he does, anything whatever, may afterward turn out to have been a crime–he never knows. And punishment and clemency are alike inexplicable.

Mr. Williams took his son by the ear.

"You march home!" he commanded.

Sam marched, not looking back, and his father followed the small figure implacably.

"You goin' to whip me?" quavered Penrod, alone with Justice.

"Wash your face at that hydrant," said his father sternly.

About fifteen minutes later, Penrod, hurriedly entering the corner

drug store, two blocks distant, was astonished to perceive a familiar form at the soda counter.

“Yay, Penrod,” said Sam Williams. “Want some sody? Come on. He didn’t lick me. He didn’t do anything to me at all. He gave me a quarter.”

“So’d mine,” said Penrod.

Chapter 18: Music

Boyhood is the longest time in life for a boy. The last term of the school-year is made of decades, not of weeks, and living through them is like waiting for the millennium. But they do pass, somehow, and at last there came a day when Penrod was one of a group that capered out from the gravelled yard of "Ward School, Nomber Seventh," carolling a leave-taking of the institution, of their instructress, and not even forgetting Mr. Capps, the janitor.

"Good-bye, teacher! Good-bye, school!

Good-bye, Cappsie, dern ole fool!"

Penrod sang the loudest. For every boy, there is an age when he "finds his voice." Penrod's had not "changed," but he had found it. Inevitably that thing had come upon his family and the neighbours; and his father, a somewhat dyspeptic man, quoted frequently the expressive words of the "Lady of Shalott," but there were others whose sufferings were as poignant.

Vacation-time warmed the young of the world to pleasant languor; and a morning came that was like a brightly coloured

picture in a child's fairy story. Miss Margaret Schofield, reclining in a hammock upon the front porch, was beautiful in the eyes of a newly made senior, well favoured and in fair raiment, beside her. A guitar rested lightly upon his knee, and he was trying to play–a matter of some difficulty, as the floor of the porch also seemed inclined to be musical. From directly under his feet came a voice of song, shrill, loud, incredibly piercing and incredibly flat, dwelling upon each syllable with incomprehensible reluctance to leave it.

"I have lands and earthly pow-wur. I'd give all for a now-wur, Whi-ilst setting at my-y-y dear old mother's knee-ee, So-o-o rem-mem-bur whilst you're young—-"

Miss Schofield stamped heartily upon the musical floor.

"It's Penrod," she explained. "The lattice at the end of the porch is loose, and he crawls under and comes out all bugs. He's been having a dreadful singing fit lately–running away to picture shows and vaudeville, I suppose."

Mr. Robert Williams looked upon her yearningly. He touched a thrilling chord on his guitar and leaned nearer. "But you said you have missed me," he began. I—-"

The voice of Penrod drowned all other sounds.

“So-o-o rem-mem-bur, whi-i-ilst you’re young, That the day-a-ys to you will come, When you’re o-o-old and only in the way, Do not scoff at them bee-cause—-”

“Penrod!” Miss Schofield stamped again.

“You did say you’d missed me,” said Mr. Robert Williams, seizing hurriedly upon the silence. “Didn’t you say—-”

A livelier tune rose upward.

“Oh, you talk about your fascinating beauties, Of your dem-O-zells, your belles, But the littil dame I met, while in the city, She’s par excellaws the queen of all the swells. She’s sweeter far—-” Margaret rose and jumped up and down repeatedly in a well-calculated area, whereupon the voice of Penrod cried chokedly, “Quit that!” and there were subterranean coughings and sneezings.

“You want to choke a person to death?” he inquired severely, appearing at the end of the porch, a cobweb upon his brow. And, continuing, he put into practice a newly acquired phrase, “You better learn to be more considerick of other people’s comfort.” Slowly and grievedly he withdrew, passed to the sunny side of the house, reclined in the warm grass beside his wistful Duke, and presently sang again.

“She’s sweeter far than the flower I named her after, And the memery of her smile it haunts me yet! When in after years the moon is soffly beamun’ And at eve I smell the smell of mignonette I will re-call that—-”

“Pen-rod!”

Mr. Schofield appeared at an open window upstairs, a book in his hand.

“Stop it!” he commanded. “Can’t I stay home with a headache one morning from the office without having to listen to–I never did hear such squawking!” He retired from the window, having too impulsively called upon his Maker. Penrod, shocked and injured, entered the house, but presently his voice was again audible as far as the front porch. He was holding converse with his mother, somewhere in the interior.

“Well, what of it? Sam Williams told me his mother said if Bob ever did think of getting married to Margaret, his mother said she’d like to know what in the name o’ goodness they expect to—-”

Bang! Margaret thought it better to close the front door.
The next minute Penrod opened it. “I suppose you want the whole family to get a sunstroke,” he said reprovingly. “Keepin’ every breath of air out o’ the house on a day like this!”

And he sat down implacably in the doorway.

The serious poetry of all languages has omitted the little brother; and yet he is one of the great trials of love–the immemorial burden of courtship. Tragedy should have found place for him, but he has been left to the haphazard vignettist of Grub Street. He is the grave and real menace of lovers; his head is sacred and terrible, his power illimitable. There is one way–only one–to deal with him; but Robert Williams, having a brother of Penrod's age, understood that way.

Robert had one dollar in the world. He gave it to Penrod immediately.

Enslaved forever, the new Rockefeller rose and went forth upon the highway, an overflowing heart bursting the floodgates of song.

"In her eyes the light of love was soffly gleamun', So sweetlay, So neatlay. On the banks the moon's soff light was brightly streamun', Words of love I then spoke to her. She was purest of the pew-er: 'Littil sweetheart, do not sigh, Do not weep and do not cry. I will build a littil cottige just for yew-ew-ew and I.'"

In fairness, it must be called to mind that boys older than Penrod have these wellings of pent melody; a wife can never tell when she is to undergo a musical morning, and even the golden

wedding brings her no security, a man of ninety is liable to bust-loose in song, any time.

Invalids murmured pitifully as Penrod came within hearing; and people trying to think cursed the day that they were born, when he went shrilling by. His hands in his pockets, his shining face uplifted to the sky of June, he passed down the street, singing his way into the heart's deepest hatred of all who heard him.

"One evuning I was sturow-ling Midst the city of the dead, I viewed where all a-round me Their peace-full graves was spread. But that which touched me mostlay——"

He had reached his journey's end, a junk-dealer's shop wherein lay the long-desired treasure of his soul—an accordion which might have possessed a high quality of interest for an antiquarian, being unquestionably a ruin, beautiful in decay, and quite beyond the sacrilegious reach of the restorer. But it was still able to disgorge sounds—loud, strange, compelling sounds, which could be heard for a remarkable distance in all directions; and it had one rich calf-like tone that had gone to Penrod's heart. He obtained the instrument for twenty-two cents, a price long since agreed upon with the junk-dealer, who falsely claimed a loss of profit, Shylock that he was! He had found the wreck in an alley.

With this purchase suspended from his shoulder by a faded green cord, Penrod set out in a somewhat homeward direction, but not

by the route he had just travelled, though his motive for the change was not humanitarian. It was his desire to display himself thus troubadouring to the gaze of Marjorie Jones. Heralding his advance by continuous experiments in the music of the future, he pranced upon his blithesome way, the faithful Duke at his heels.

(It was easier for Duke than it would have been for a younger dog, because, with advancing age, he had begun to grow a little deaf.) Turning the corner nearest to the glamoured mansion of the Joneses, the boy jongleur came suddenly face to face with Marjorie, and, in the delicious surprise of the encounter, ceased to play, his hands, in agitation, falling from the instrument.

Bareheaded, the sunshine glorious upon her amber curls, Marjorie was strolling hand-in-hand with her baby brother, Mitchell, four years old. She wore pink that day–unforgettable pink, with a broad, black patent-leather belt, shimmering reflections dancing upon its surface. How beautiful she was! How sacred the sweet little baby brother, whose privilege it was to cling to that small hand, delicately powdered with freckles.

“Hello, Marjorie,” said Penrod, affecting carelessness.

“Hello!” said Marjorie, with unexpected cordiality. She bent over her baby brother with motherly affectations. “Say ‘howdy’ to the gentymuns, Mitchy-Mitch,” she urged sweetly, turning him to face Penrod.

“Won’t!” said Mitchy-Mitch, and, to emphasize his refusal, kicked the gentymuns upon the shin.

Penrod’s feelings underwent instant change, and in the sole occupation of disliking Mitchy-Mitch, he wasted precious seconds which might have been better employed in philosophic consideration of the startling example, just afforded, of how a given law operates throughout the universe in precisely the same manner perpetually. Mr. Robert Williams would have understood this, easily.

“Oh, oh!” Marjorie cried, and put Mitchy-Mitch behind her with too much sweetness. “Maurice Levy’s gone to Atlantic City with his mamma,” she remarked conversationally, as if the kicking incident were quite closed.

“That’s nothin’,” returned Penrod, keeping his eye uneasily upon Mitchy-Mitch. “I know plenty people been better places than that–Chicago and everywhere.”

There was unconscious ingratitude in his low rating of Atlantic City, for it was largely to the attractions of that resort he owed Miss Jones’ present attitude of friendliness.

Of course, too, she was curious about the accordion. It would be dastardly to hint that she had noticed a paper bag which bulged the pocket of Penrod’s coat, and yet this bag was undeniably

conspicuous–"and children are very like grown people sometimes!"

Penrod brought forth the bag, purchased on the way at a drug store, and till this moment unopened, which expresses in a word the depth of his sentiment for Marjorie. It contained an abundant fifteen-cents' worth of lemon drops, jaw-breakers, licorice sticks, cinnamon drops, and shopworn choclate creams.

"Take all you want," he said, with off-hand generosity.

"Why, Penrod Schofield," exclaimed the wholly thawed damsel, "you nice boy!"

"Oh, that's nothin'," he returned airily. "I got a good deal of money, nowadays."

"Where from?"

"Oh–just around." With a cautious gesture he offered a jaw-breaker to Mitchy-Mitch, who snatched it indignantly and set about its absorption without delay.

"Can you play on that?" asked Marjorie, with some difficulty, her cheeks being rather too hilly for conversation.

"Want to hear me?"

She nodded, her eyes sweet with anticipation.

This was what he had come for. He threw back his head, lifted his eyes dreamily, as he had seen real musicians lift theirs, and distended the accordion preparing to produce the wonderful calf-like noise which was the instrument's great charm.

But the distention evoked a long wail which was at once drowned in another one.

"Ow! Owowaoh! Wowohah! Waowwow!" shrieked Mitchy-Mitch and the accordion together.

Mitchy-Mitch, to emphasize his disapproval of the accordion, opening his mouth still wider, lost therefrom the jaw-breaker, which rolled in the dust. Weeping, he stooped to retrieve it, and Marjorie, to prevent him, hastily set her foot upon it. Penrod offered another jaw-breaker; but Mitchy-Mitch struck it from his hand, desiring the former, which had convinced him of its sweetness.

Marjorie moved inadvertently; whereupon Mitchy-Mitch pounced upon the remains of his jaw-breaker and restored them, with accretions, to his mouth. His sister, uttering a cry of horror, sprang to the rescue, assisted by Penrod, whom she prevailed upon to hold Mitchy-Mitch's mouth open while she excavated. This operation being completed, and Penrod's right thumb

severely bitten, Mitchy-Mitch closed his eyes tightly, stamped, squealed, bellowed, wrung his hands, and then, unexpectedly, kicked Penrod again.

Penrod put a hand in his pocket and drew forth a copper two-cent piece, large, round, and fairly bright.

He gave it to Mitchy-Mitch.

Mitchy-Mitch immediately stopped crying and gazed upon his benefactor with the eyes of a dog.

This world!

Thereafter did Penrod—with complete approval from Mitchy-Mitch—play the accordion for his lady to his heart's content, and

hers. Never had he so won upon her; never had she let him feel so close to her before. They strolled up and down upon the sidewalk, eating, one thought between them, and soon she had learned to

play the accordion almost as well as he. So passed a happy hour, which the Good King Rene of Anjou would have

envied them, while Mitchy-Mitch made friends with Duke, romped about his sister and her swain, and clung to the hand of the latter, at intervals, with fondest affection and trust.

The noon whistles failed to disturb this little Arcady; only the sound of Mrs. Jones' voice for the third time summoning Marjorie and Mitchy-Mitch to lunch–sent Penrod on his way.

"I could come back this afternoon, I guess," he said, in parting. "I'm not goin' to be here. I'm goin' to Baby Rennsdale's party." Penrod looked blank, as she intended he should. Having thus satisfied herself, she added:

"There aren't goin' to be any boys there."
He was instantly radiant again.

"Marjorie——"

"Hum?"

"Do you wish I was goin' to be there?"

She looked shy, and turned away her head.

"Marjorie Jones!" (This was a voice from home.) "How many more times shall I have to call you?"

Marjorie moved away, her face still hidden from Penrod.

“Do you?” he urged.

At the gate, she turned quickly toward him, and said over her shoulder, all in a breath: “Yes! Come again to-morrow morning and I’ll be on the corner. Bring your ‘cordion!”

And she ran into the house, Mitchy-Mitch waving a loving hand to the boy on the sidewalk until the front door closed.

Chapter 19:. The Inner Boy

Penrod went home in splendour, pretending that he and Duke were a long procession; and he made enough noise to render the auricular part of the illusion perfect. His own family were already at the lunch-table when he arrived, and the parade halted only at the door of the dining-room.

“Oh something!” shouted Mr. Schofield, clasping his bilious brow with both hands. “Stop that noise! Isn’t it awful enough for you to sing? Sit down! Not with that thing on! Take that green rope off your shoulder! Now take that thing out of the dining-room and throw it in the ash-can! Where did you get it?”

“Where did I get what, papa?” asked Penrod meekly, depositing the accordion in the hall just outside the dining-room door.

“That da–that third-hand concertina.”

“It’s a ‘cordian,” said Penrod, taking his place at the table, and noticing that both Margaret and Mr. Robert Williams (who happened to be a guest) were growing red.

“I don’t care what you call it,” said Mr. Schofield irritably. “I want to know where you got it.”

Penrod’s eyes met Margaret’s: hers had a strained expression. She very slightly shook her head. Penrod sent Mr. Williams a grateful look, and might have been startled if he could have seen himself in a mirror at that moment; for he regarded Mitchy-Mitch with concealed but vigorous aversion and the resemblance would have horrified him.

“A man gave it to me,” he answered gently, and was rewarded by the visibly regained ease of his patron’s manner, while Margaret leaned back in her chair and looked at her brother with real devotion.

“I should think he’d have been glad to,” said Mr. Schofield. “Who was he?”

“Sir?” In spite of the candy which he had consumed in company with Marjorie and Mitchy-Mitch, Penrod had begun to eat lobster croquettes earnestly.

“Who was he?”

“Who do you mean, papa?”

“The man that gave you that ghastly Thing!”

“Yessir. A man gave it to me.”

“I say, Who was he?” shouted Mr. Schofield.

“Well, I was just walking along, and the man came up to me–it was right down in front of Colgate’s, where most of the paint’s rubbed off the fence—-”

“Penrod!” The father used his most dangerous tone.

“Sir?”

“Who was the man that gave you the concertina?”

“I don’t know. I was walking along—-”

“You never saw him before?”

“No, sir. I was just walk—-”

“That will do,” said Mr. Schofield, rising. “I suppose every family has its secret enemies and this was one of ours. I must ask to be excused!”

With that, he went out crossly, stopping in the hall a moment before passing beyond hearing. And, after lunch, Penrod sought in vain for his accordion; he even searched the library where his father sat reading, though, upon inquiry, Penrod explained that he was looking for a misplaced schoolbook. He thought he ought to study a little every day, he said, even during vacation-time. Much pleased, Mr. Schofield rose and joined the search, finding the missing work on mathematics with singular ease—which cost him precisely the price of the book the following September.

Penrod departed to study in the backyard. There, after a cautious survey of the neighbourhood, he managed to dislodge the iron cover of the cistern, and dropped the arithmetic within. A fine splash rewarded his listening ear. Thus assured that when he looked for that book again no one would find it for him, he replaced the cover, and betook himself pensively to the highway, discouraging Duke from following by repeated volleys of stones, some imaginary and others all too real.

Distant strains of brazen horns and the throbbing of drums were borne to him upon the kind breeze, reminding him that the world was made for joy, and that the Barzee and Potter Dog and Pony Show was exhibiting in a banlieue not far away. So, thither he bent his steps—the plentiful funds in his pocket burning hot holes all the way. He had paid twenty-two cents for the accordion, and fifteen for candy; he had bought the mercenary heart of Mitchy-Mitch for two: it certainly follows that there remained to him of

his dollar, sixty-one cents—a fair fortune, and most unusual. Arrived upon the populous and festive scene of the Dog and Pony Show, he first turned his attention to the brightly decorated booths which surrounded the tent. The cries of the peanut vendors, of the popcorn men, of the toy-balloon sellers, the stirring music of the band, playing before the performance to attract a crowd, the shouting of excited children and the barking of the dogs within the tent, all sounded exhilaratingly in Penrod's ears and set his blood a-tingle. Nevertheless, he did not squander his money or fling it to the winds in one grand splurge. Instead, he began cautiously with the purchase of an extraordinarily large pickle, which he obtained from an aged negress for his odd cent, too obvious a bargain to be missed. At an adjacent stand he bought a glass of raspberry lemonade (so alleged) and sipped it as he ate the pickle. He left nothing of either.

Next, he entered a small restaurant-tent and for a modest nickel was supplied with a fork and a box of sardines, previously opened, it is true, but more than half full. He consumed the sardines utterly, but left the tin box and the fork, after which he indulged in an inexpensive half-pint of lukewarm cider, at one of the open booths. Mug in hand, a gentle glow radiating toward his surface from various centres of activity deep inside him, he paused for breath—and the cool, sweet cadences of the watermelon man fell delectably upon his ear:

“Ice-cole water-melon; ice-cole water-melon; the biggest slice of ice-cole, ripe, red, ice-cole, rich an’ rare; the biggest slice of ice-cole watermelon ever cut by the hand of man! Buy our ice-cole water-melon?”

Penrod, having drained the last drop of cider, complied with the watermelon man’s luscious entreaty, and received a round slice of the fruit, magnificent in circumference and something over an inch in thickness. Leaving only the really dangerous part of the rind behind him, he wandered away from the vicinity of the watermelon man and supplied himself with a bag of peanuts, which, with the expenditure of a dime for admission, left a quarter still warm in his pocket. However, he managed to “break” the coin at a stand inside the tent, where a large, oblong paper box of popcorn was handed him, with twenty cents change. The box was too large to go into his pocket, but, having seated himself among some wistful Polack children, he placed it in his lap and devoured the contents at leisure during the performance. The popcorn was heavily larded with partially boiled molasses, and Penrod sandwiched mouthfuls of peanuts with gobs of this mass until the peanuts were all gone. After that, he ate with less avidity; a sense almost of satiety beginning to manifest itself to him, and it was not until the close of the performance that he disposed of the last morsel.

He descended a little heavily to the outflowing crowd in the arena, and bought a caterwauling toy balloon, but showed no great

enthusiasm in manipulating it. Near the exit, as he came out, was a hot-waffle stand which he had overlooked, and a sense of duty obliged him to consume the three waffles, thickly powdered with sugar, which the waffle man cooked for him upon command. They left a hottish taste in his mouth; they had not been quite up to his anticipation, indeed, and it was with a sense of relief that he turned to the "hokey-pokey" cart which stood close at hand, laden with square slabs of "Neapolitan ice-cream" wrapped in paper. He thought the ice-cream would be cooling, but somehow it fell short of the desired effect, and left a peculiar savour in his throat.

He walked away, too languid to blow his balloon, and passed a fresh-taffy booth with strange indifference. A bare-armed man was manipulating the taffy over a hook, pulling a great white mass to the desired stage of "candying," but Penrod did not pause to watch the operation; in fact, he averted his eyes (which were slightly glazed) in passing. He did not analyze his motives: simply, he was conscious that he preferred not to look at the mass of taffy.

For some reason, he put a considerable distance between himself and the taffy-stand, but before long halted in the presence of a red-faced man who flourished a long fork over a small cooking apparatus and shouted jovially: "Winnies! Here's your hot winnies! Hot winny-wurst! Food for the over-worked brain, nourishing for the weak stummick, entertaining for the tired

business man! Here's your hot winnies, three for a nickel, a half-a-dime, the twentieth-pot-of- a-dollah!"

This, above all nectar and ambrosia, was the favourite dish of Penrod Schofield. Nothing inside him now craved it—on the contrary! But memory is the great hypnotist; his mind argued against his inwards that opportunity knocked at his door: "winny-wurst" was rigidly forbidden by the home authorities. Besides, there was a last nickel in his pocket; and nature protested against its survival. Also, the redfaced man had himself proclaimed his wares nourishing for the weak stummick.

Penrod placed the nickel in the red hand of the red-faced man. He ate two of the three greasy, cigarlike shapes cordially pressed upon him in return. The first bite convinced him that he had made a mistake; these winnies seemed of a very inferior flavour, almost unpleasant, in fact. But he felt obliged to conceal his poor opinion of them, for fear of offending the red-faced man. He ate without haste or eagerness—so slowly, indeed, that he began to think the redfaced man might dislike him, as a deterrent of trade. Perhaps Penrod's mind was not

working well, for he failed to remember that no law compelled him to remain under the eye of the red-faced man, but the virulent repulsion excited by his attempt to take a bite of the third sausage inspired him with at least an excuse for postponement.

"Mighty good," he murmured feebly, placing the sausage in the pocket of his jacket with a shaking hand. "Guess I'll save this one to eat at home, after–after dinner."

He moved sluggishly away, wishing he had not thought of dinner. A side-show, undiscovered until now, failed to arouse his interest, not even exciting a wish that he had known of its existence when he had money. For a time he stared without attraction; the weather-worn colours conveying no meaning to comprehension at a huge canvas poster depicting the chief his torpid eye. Then, little by little, the poster became more vivid to his consciousness. There was a greenish-tinted person in the tent, it seemed, who thrived upon a reptilian diet.

Suddenly, Penrod decided that it was time to go home.

Chapter 20: Brothers of Angels

“Indeed, doctor,” said Mrs. Schofield, with agitation and profound conviction, just after eight o’clock that evening, “I shall always believe in mustard plasters–mustard plasters and hot–water bags. If it hadn’t been for them I don’t believed he’d have lived till you got here–I do not!”

“Margaret,” called Mr. Schofield from the open door of a bedroom, “Margaret, where did you put that aromatic ammonia? Where’s Margaret?”

But he had to find the aromatic spirits of ammonia himself, for Margaret was not in the house. She stood in the shadow beneath a maple tree near the street corner, a guitar-case in her hand; and she scanned with anxiety a briskly approaching figure. The arc light, swinging above, revealed this figure as that of him she

awaited. He was passing toward the gate without seeing her, when she arrested him with a fateful whisper.

“Bob!”

Mr. Robert Williams swung about hastily. “Why, Margaret!”

“Here, take your guitar,” she whispered hurriedly. “I was afraid if father happened to find it he’d break it all to pieces!”

“What for?” asked the startled Robert.

“Because I’m sure he knows it’s yours.”

“But what—-”

“Oh, Bob,” she moaned, “I was waiting here to tell you. I was so afraid you’d try to come in—-”

“Try!” exclaimed the unfortunate young man, quite dumfounded. “Try to come—-”

“Yes, before I warned you. I’ve been waiting here to tell you, Bob, you mustn’t come near the house if I were you I’d stay away from even this neighbourhood–far away! For a while I don’t think it would be actually safe for—-”

“Margaret, will you please—-”

“It’s all on account of that dollar you gave Penrod this morning,” she walled. “First, he bought that horrible concertina that made papa so furious “But Penrod didn’t tell that I—-”

“Oh, wait!” she cried lamentably. “Listen! He didn’t tell at lunch, but he got home about dinner-time in the most–well! I’ve seen pale people before, but nothing like Penrod. Nobody could imagine it–not unless they’d seen him! And he looked, so strange, and kept making such unnatural faces, and at first all he would say was that he’d eaten a little piece of apple and thought it must have some microbes on it. But he got sicker and sicker, and we put him to bed–and then we all thought he was going to die–and, of course, no little piece of apple would have–well, and he kept getting worse and then he said he’d had a dollar. He said he’d spent it for the concertina, and watermelon, and chocolate-creams, and licorice sticks, and lemon-drops, and peanuts, and jaw-breakers, and sardines, and raspberry lemonade, and pickles, and popcorn, and ice-cream, and cider, and sausage–there was sausage in his pocket, and mamma says his jacket is ruined–and cinnamon drops–and waffles–and he ate four or five lobster croquettes at lunch–and papa said, ‘Who gave you that dollar?’ Only he didn’t say ‘who’–he said something horrible, Bob! And Penrod thought he was going to die, and he said you gave it to him, and oh! it was just pitiful to hear the poor child, Bob, because he thought he was dying, you see, and he blamed you for

the whole thing. He said if you'd only let him alone and not given it to him, he'd have grown up to be a good man–and now he couldn't! I never heard anything so heart-rending–he was so weak he could hardly whisper, but he kept trying to talk, telling us over and over it was all your fault."

In the darkness Mr. Williams' facial expression could not be seen, but his voice sounded hopeful.

"Is he–is he still in a great deal of pain?"

"They say the crisis is past," said Margaret, "but the doctor's still up there. He said it was the acutest case of indigestion he had ever treated in the whole course of his professional practice."

"Of course I didn't know what he'd do with the dollar," said Robert.

She did not reply.

He began plaintively, "Margaret, you don't—-"

"I've never seen papa and mamma so upset about anything," she said, rather primly.

"You mean they're upset about me?"

“We are all very much upset,” returned Margaret, more starch in her tone as she remembered not only Penrod’s sufferings but a duty she had vowed herself to perform.

“Margaret! You don’t——”

“Robert,” she said firmly and, also, with a rhetorical complexity which breeds a suspicion of pre-rehearsal–“Robert, for the present I can only look at it in one way: when you gave that money to Penrod you put into the hands of an unthinking little child a weapon which might be, and, indeed was, the means of his undoing. Boys are not respon——”

“But you saw me give him the dollar, and you didn’t——”

“Robert!” she checked him with increasing severity. “I am only a woman and not accustomed to thinking everything out on the spur of the moment; but I cannot change my mind. Not now, at least.”

“And you think I’d better not come in to-night?”

“To-night!” she gasped. “Not for weeks! Papa would——”

“But Margaret,” he urged plaintively, “how can you blame me for——”

“I have not used the word ‘blame,'” she interrupted. “But I must insist that for your carelessness to–to wreak such havoc–cannot fail to–to lessen my confidence in your powers of judgment. I cannot change my convictions in this matter–not to-night–and I cannot remain here another instant. The poor child may need me. Robert, good-night.”

With chill dignity she withdrew, entered the house, and returned to the sick-room, leaving the young man in outer darkness to brood upon his crime–and upon Penrod.

That sincere invalid became convalescent upon the third day; and a week elapsed, then, before he found an opportunity to leave the house unaccompanied–save by Duke. But at last he set forth and approached the Jones neighbourhood in high spirits, pleasantly conscious of his pallor, hollow cheeks, and other perquisites of illness provocative of interest.

One thought troubled him a little because it gave him a sense of inferiority to a rival. He believed, against his will, that Maurice Levy could have successfully eaten chocolate-creams, licorice sticks, lemon-drops, jaw-breakers, peanuts, waffles, lobster croquettes, sardines, cinnamon-drops, watermelon, pickles, popcorn, ice-cream and sausage with raspberry lemonade and cider. Penrod had admitted to himself that Maurice could do it and afterward attend to business, or pleasure, without the slightest discomfort; and this was probably no more than a fair

estimate of one of the great constitutions of all time. As a digester, Maurice Levy would have disappointed a Borgia. Fortunately, Maurice was still at Atlantic City–and now the convalescent's heart leaped. In the distance he saw Marjorie coming–in pink again, with a ravishing little parasol over her head. And alone! No Mitchy-Mitch was to mar this meeting. Penrod increased the feebleness of his steps, now and then leaning upon the fence as if for support.

"How do you do, Marjorie?" he said, in his best sick-room voice, as she came near.

To his pained amazement, she proceeded on her way, her nose at a celebrated elevation–an icy nose.

She cut him dead.

He threw his invalid's airs to the winds, and hastened after her.

"Marjorie," he pleaded, "what's the matter? Are you mad?

Honest, that day you said to come back next morning, and you'd be on the corner, I was sick. Honest, I was awful sick, Marjorie! I had to have the doctor—-"

"Doctor!" She whirled upon him, her lovely eyes blazing.

“I guess we’ve had to have the doctor enough at our house, thanks to you, Mister Penrod Schofield. Papa says you haven’t got near sense enough to come in out of the rain, after what you did to poor little Mitchy-Mitch—-”

“What?”

“Yes, and he’s sick in bed yet!” Marjorie went on, with unabated fury. “And papa says if he ever catches you in this part of town—-”

“What’d I do to Mitchy-Mitch?” gasped Penrod.

“You know well enough what you did to Mitchy-Mitch!” she cried. “You gave him that great, big, nasty two-cent piece!”

“Well, what of it?”

“Mitchy-Mitch swallowed it!”

“What!”

“And papa says if he ever just lays eyes on you, once, in this neighbourhood—-”

But Penrod had started for home.

In his embittered heart there was increasing a critical disapproval of the Creator's methods. When He made pretty girls, thought Penrod, why couldn't He have left out their little brothers!

Chapter 21: Rupe Collins

For several days after this, Penrod thought of growing up to be a monk, and engaged in good works so far as to carry some kittens (that otherwise would have been drowned) and a pair of Margaret's outworn dancing-slippers to a poor, ungrateful old man sojourning in a shed up the alley. And although Mr. Robert Williams, after a very short interval, began to leave his guitar on the front porch again, exactly as if he thought nothing had happened, Penrod, with his younger vision of a father's mood, remained coldly distant from the Jones neighbourhood. With his own family his manner was gentle, proud and sad, but not for long enough to frighten them. The change came with mystifying abruptness at the end of the week. It was Duke who brought it about.

Duke could chase a much bigger dog out of the Schofields' yard and far down the street. This might be thought to indicate unusual valour on the part of Duke and cowardice on that of the bigger dogs whom he undoubtedly put to rout. On the contrary, all such flights were founded in mere superstition, for dogs are even more superstitious than boys and coloured people; and the most firmly established of all dog superstitions is that any dog–be he

the smallest and feeblest in the world–can whip any trespasser whatsoever.

A rat-terrier believes that on his home grounds he can whip an elephant. It follows, of course, that a big dog, away from his own home, will run from a little dog in the little dog's neighbourhood. Otherwise, the big dog must face a charge of inconsistency, and dogs are as consistent as they are superstitious. A dog believes in war, but he is convinced that there are times when it is moral to run; and the thoughtful physiognomist, seeing a big dog fleeing out of a little dog's yard, must observe that the expression of the big dog's face is more conscientious than alarmed: it is the expression of a person performing a duty to himself.

Penrod understood these matters perfectly; he knew that the gaunt brown hound Duke chased up the alley had fled only out of deference to a custom, yet Penrod could not refrain from bragging of Duke to the hound's owner, a fat-faced stranger of twelve or thirteen, who had wandered into the neighbourhood.

"You better keep that ole yellow dog o' yours back," said Penrod ominously, as he climbed the fence. "You better catch him and hold him till I get mine inside the yard again. Duke's chewed up some pretty bad bulldogs around here."

The fat-faced boy gave Penrod a fishy stare. "You'd oughta learn him not to do that," he said. "It'll make him sick."

“What will?”

The stranger laughed raspingly and gazed up the alley, where the hound, having come to a halt, now coolly sat down, and, with an expression of roguish benevolence, patronizingly watched the tempered fury of Duke, whose assaults and barkings were becoming perfunctory.

“What’ll make Duke sick?” Penrod demanded.

“Eatin’ dead bulldogs people leave around here.”

This was not improvisation but formula, adapted from other occasions to the present encounter; nevertheless, it was new to Penrod, and he was so taken with it that resentment lost itself in admiration. Hastily committing the gem to memory for use upon a dog-owning friend, he inquired in a sociable tone:

“What’s your dog’s name?”

“Dan. You better call your ole pup, ’cause Dan eats live dogs.” Dan’s actions poorly supported his master’s assertion, for, upon Duke’s ceasing to bark, Dan rose and showed the most courteous interest in making the little, old dog’s acquaintance. Dan had a great deal of manner, and it became plain that Duke was impressed favourably in spite of former prejudice, so that presently the two trotted amicably back to their masters and sat

down with the harmonious but indifferent air of having known each other intimately for years.

They were received without comment, though both boys looked at them reflectively for a time. It was Penrod who spoke first. "What number you go to?" (In an "oral lesson in English," Penrod had been instructed to put this question in another form: "May I ask which of our public schools you attend?")

"Me? What number do I go to?" said the stranger, contemptuously. "I don't go to no number in vacation!"

"I mean when it ain't."

"Third," returned the fat-faced boy. "I got 'em all scared in that school."

"What of?" innocently asked Penrod, to whom "the Third"–in a distant part of town–was undiscovered country.

"What of? I guess you'd soon see what of, if you ever was in that school about one day. You'd be lucky if you got out alive!"

"Are the teachers mean?"

The other boy frowned with bitter scorn. “Teachers! Teachers don’t order me around, I can tell you! They’re mighty careful how they try to run over Rupe Collins.”

“Who’s Rupe Collins?”

“Who is he?” echoed the fat-faced boy incredulously. “Say, ain’t you got any sense?”

“What?”

“Say, wouldn’t you be just as happy if you had some sense?”

“Ye-es.” Penrod’s answer, like the look he lifted to the impressive stranger, was meek and placative. “Rupe Collins is the principal at your school, guess.”

The other yelled with jeering laughter, and mocked Penrod’s manner and voice. “Rupe Collins is the principal at your school, I guess!” He laughed harshly again, then suddenly showed truculence. “Say, ‘bo, whyn’t you learn enough to go in the house when it rains? What’s the matter of you, anyhow?”

“Well,” urged Penrod timidly, “nobody ever told me who Rupe Collins is: I got a right to think he’s the principal, haven’t I?”
The fat-faced boy shook his head disgustedly. “Honest, you make me sick!”

Penrod's expression became one of despair. "Well, who is he?" he cried.

"'Who is he?'" mocked the other, with a scorn that withered. "'Who is he?' Me!"

"Oh!" Penrod was humiliated but relieved: he felt that he had proved himself criminally ignorant, yet a peril seemed to have passed. "Rupe Collins is your name, then, I guess. I kind of thought it was, all the time."

The fat-faced boy still appeared embittered, burlesquing this speech in a hateful falsetto. "'Rupe Collins is your name, then, I guess!' Oh, you 'kind of thought it was, all the time,' did you?" Suddenly concentrating his brow into a histrionic scowl he thrust his face within an inch of Penrod's. "Yes, sonny, Rupe Collins is my name, and you better look out what you say when he's around or you'll get in big trouble! You understand that, 'Bo?"

Penrod was cowed but fascinated: he felt that there was something dangerous and dashing about this newcomer.

"Yes," he said, feebly, drawing back. "My name's Penrod Schofield."

"Then I reckon your father and mother ain't got good sense," said Mr. Collins promptly, this also being formula.

“Why?”

“Cause if they had they’d of give you a good name!” And the agreeable youth instantly rewarded himself for the wit with another yell of rasping laughter, after which he pointed suddenly at Penrod’s right hand.

“Where’d you get that wart on your finger?” he demanded severely.

“Which finger?” asked the mystified Penrod, extending his hand. “The middle one.”

“Where?”

“There!” exclaimed Rupe Collins, seizing and vigorously twisting the wartless finger naively offered for his inspection.

“Quit!” shouted Penrod in agony. “Quee-yut!”

“Say your prayers!” commanded Rupe, and continued to twist the luckless finger until Penrod writhed to his knees.

“Ow!” The victim, released, looked grievously upon the still painful finger.

At this Rupe’s scornful expression altered to one of contrition.

“Well, I declare!” he exclaimed remorsefully. “I didn’t s’pose it would hurt. Turn about’s fair play; so now you do that to me.”

He extended the middle finger of his left hand and Penrod promptly seized it, but did not twist it, for he was instantly swung round with his back to his amiable new acquaintance: Rupe’s right hand operated upon the back of Penrod’s slender neck; Rupe’s knee tortured the small of Penrod’s back.

“Ow!” Penrod bent far forward involuntarily and went to his knees again.

“Lick dirt,” commanded Rupe, forcing the captive’s face to the sidewalk; and the suffering Penrod completed this ceremony.

Mr. Collins evinced satisfaction by means of his horse laugh. “You’d last jest about one day up at the Third!” he said. “You’d come runnin’ home, yellin’ ‘Mom-muh, Mom-muh,’ before recess was over!”

“No, I wouldn’t,” Penrod protested rather weakly, dusting his knees.

“You would, too!”

“No, I w—-

“Looky here,” said the fat-faced boy, darkly, “what you mean, counterdicking me?”

He advanced a step and Penrod hastily qualified his contradiction. “I mean, I don’t think I would. I—-”

“You better look out!” Rupe moved closer, and unexpectedly grasped the back of Penrod’s neck again. “Say, ‘I would run home yellin’ “Mom-muh!”

“Ow! I would run home yellin’ ‘Mom-muh.'”

“There!” said Rupe, giving the helpless nape a final squeeze. “That’s the way we do up at the Third.”

Penrod rubbed his neck and asked meekly:
“Can you do that to any boy up at the Third?”

“See here now,” said Rupe, in the tone of one goaded beyond all endurance, “You say if I can! You better say it quick, or—-”

“I knew you could,” Penrod interposed hastily, with the pathetic semblance of a laugh. “I only said that in fun.”

“In ‘fun’!” repeated Rupe stormily. “You better look out how you—-”

“Well, I said I wasn’t in earnest!” Penrod retreated a few steps. “I knew you could, all the time. I expect I could do it to some of the boys up at the Third, myself. Couldn’t I?”

“No, you couldn’t.”

“Well, there must be some boy up there that I could——”

“No, they ain’t! You better——”

“I expect not, then,” said Penrod, quickly.

“You better ‘expect not.’ Didn’t I tell you once you’d never get back alive if you ever tried to come up around the Third? You want me to show you how we do up there, ‘bo?”

He began a slow and deadly advance, whereupon Penrod timidly offered a diversion:
“Say, Rupe, I got a box of rats in our stable under a glass cover, so you can watch ’em jump around when you hammer on the box. Come on and look at ’em.”

“All right,” said the fat-faced boy, slightly mollified. “We’ll let Dan kill ’em.”

“No, sir! I’m goin’ to keep ’em. They’re kind of pets; I’ve had ’em all summer–I got names for em, and——”

“Looky here, ‘bo. Did you hear me say we’ll let ‘Dan kill ’em?”

“Yes, but I won’t——”

“What won’t you?” Rupe became sinister immediately. “It seems to me you’re gettin’ pretty fresh around here.”

“Well, I don’t want——”

Mr. Collins once more brought into play the dreadful eye-to- eye scowl as practised “up at the Third,” and, sometimes, also by young leading men upon the stage. Frowning appallingly, and thrusting forward his underlip, he placed his nose almost in contact with the nose of Penrod, whose eyes naturally became crossed.

“Dan kills the rats. See?” hissed the fat-faced boy, maintaining the horrible juxtaposition.

“Well, all right,” said Penrod, swallowing. “I don’t want ’em much.” And when the pose had been relaxed, he stared at his new friend for a moment, almost with reverence. Then he brightened. “Come on, Rupe!” he cried enthusiastically, as he climbed the fence. “We’ll give our dogs a little live meat–‘bo!”

Chapter 22: The Imitator

At the dinner-table, that evening, Penrod Surprised his family by remarking, in a voice they had never heard him attempt–a law-giving voice of intentional gruffness:

“Any man that’s makin’ a hunderd dollars a month is makin’ good money.”

“What?” asked Mr. Schofield, staring, for the previous conversation had concerned the illness of an infant relative in Council Bluffs.

“Any man that’s makin’ a hunderd dollars a month is makin’ good money.”

“What is he talking about!” Margaret appealed to the invisible.

“Well,” said Penrod, frowning, “that’s what foremen at the ladder works get.”

“How in the world do you know?” asked his mother.

“Well, I know it! A hunderd dollars a month is good money, I tell you!”

“Well, what of it?” said the father, impatiently.

“Nothin’. I only said it was good money.”

Mr. Schofield shook his head, dismissing the subject; and here he made a mistake: he should have followed up his son’s singular contribution to the conversation. That would have revealed the fact that there was a certain Rupe Collins whose father was a foreman at the ladder works. All clues are important when a boy makes his first remark in a new key.

“‘Good money’?” repeated Margaret, curiously. “What is ‘good’ money?”

Penrod turned upon her a stern glance. “Say, wouldn’t you be just as happy if you had some sense?”

“Penrod!” shouted his father. But Penrod’s mother gazed with dismay at her son: he had never before spoken like that to his sister.

Mrs. Schofield might have been more dismayed than she was, if she had realized that it was the beginning of an epoch. After dinner, Penrod was slightly scalded in the back as the result of telling Della, the cook, that there was a wart on the middle finger of her right hand. Della thus proving poor material for his new manner to work upon, he approached Duke, in the backyard, and, bending double, seized the lowly animal by the forepaws.

“I let you know my name’s Penrod Schofield,” hissed the boy. He protruded his underlip ferociously, scowled, and thrust forward his head until his nose touched the dog’s. “And you better look out when Penrod Schofield’s around, or you’ll get in big trouble! You understan’ that, ‘Bo?”

The next day, and the next, the increasing change in Penrod puzzled and distressed his family, who had no idea of its source. How might they guess that hero-worship takes such forms? They were vaguely conscious that a rather shabby boy, not of the neighbourhood, came to “play” with Penrod several times; but they failed to connect this circumstance with the peculiar behaviour of the son of the house, whose ideals (his father remarked) seemed to have suddenly become identical with those of Gyp the Blood.

Meanwhile, for Penrod himself, “life had taken on new meaning, new richness.” He had become a fighting man–in conversation at least. “Do you want to know how I do when they try to slip up on me from behind?” he asked Della. And he enacted for her unappreciative eye a scene of fistic manoeuvres wherein he held an imaginary antagonist helpless in a net of stratagems.

Frequently, when he was alone, he would outwit, and pummel this same enemy, and, after a cunning feint, land a dolorous stroke full upon a face of air. “There! I guess you’ll know better next time. That’s the way we do up at the Third!”

Sometimes, in solitary pantomime, he encountered more than one opponent at a time, for numbers were apt to come upon him treacherously, especially at a little after his rising hour, when he might be caught at a disadvantage–perhaps standing on one leg to encase the other in his knickerbockers. Like lightning, he would hurl the trapping garment from him, and, ducking and pivoting, deal great sweeping blows among the circle of sneaking devils. (That was how he broke the clock in his bedroom.) And while these battles were occupying his attention, it was a waste of voice to call him to breakfast, though if his mother, losing patience, came to his room, she would find him seated on the bed pulling at a stocking. “Well, ain’t I coming fast as I can?”

At the table and about the house generally he was bumptious, loud with fatuous misinformation, and assumed a domineering

tone, which neither satire nor reproof seemed able to reduce: but it was among his own intimates that his new superiority was most outrageous. He twisted the fingers and squeezed the necks of all the boys of the neighbourhood, meeting their indignation with a hoarse and rasping laugh he had acquired after short practice in the stable, where he jeered and taunted the lawn-mower, the garden-scythe and the wheelbarrow quite out of countenance.

Likewise he bragged to the other boys by the hour, Rupe Collins being the chief subject of encomium—next to Penrod himself.

"That's the way we do up at the Third," became staple explanation of violence, for Penrod, like Tartarin, was plastic in the hands of his own imagination, and at times convinced himself that he really was one of those dark and murderous spirits exclusively of whom "the Third" was composed—according to Rupe Collins.

Then, when Penrod had exhausted himself repeating to nausea accounts of the prowess of himself and his great friend, he would turn to two other subjects for vainglory. These were his father and Duke.

Mothers must accept the fact that between babyhood and manhood their sons do not boast of them. The boy, with boys, is a Choctaw; and either the influence or the protection of women is

shameful. “Your mother won’t let you,” is an insult. But, “My father won’t let me,” is a dignified explanation and cannot be hooted. A boy is ruined among his fellows if he talks much of his mother or sisters; and he must recognize it as his duty to offer at least the appearance of persecution to all things ranked as female, such as cats and every species of fowl. But he must champion his father and his dog, and, ever, ready to pit either against any challenger, must picture both as ravening for battle and absolutely unconquerable.

Penrod, of course, had always talked by the code, but, under the new stimulus, Duke was represented virtually as a cross between Bob, Son of Battle, and a South American vampire; and this in spite of the fact that Duke himself often sat close by, a living lie, with the hope of peace in his heart. As for Penrod’s father, that gladiator was painted as of sentiments and dimensions suitable to a super-demon composed of equal parts of Goliath, Jack Johnson and the Emperor Nero.

Even Penrod’s walk was affected; he adopted a gait which was a kind of taunting swagger; and, when he passed other children on the street, he practised the habit of feinting a blow; then, as the victim dodged, he rasped the triumphant horse laugh which he gradually mastered to horrible perfection. He did this to Marjorie Jones—ay! this was their next meeting, and such is Eros, young! What was even worse, in Marjorie’s opinion, he went on his way

without explanation, and left her standing on the corner talking about it, long after he was out of hearing.

Within five days from his first encounter with Rupe Collins, Penrod had become unbearable. He even almost alienated Sam Williams, who for a time submitted to finger twisting and neck squeezing and the new style of conversation, but finally declared that Penrod made him "sick." He made the statement with fervour, one sultry afternoon, in Mr. Schofield's stable, in the presence of Herman and Verman.

"You better look out, 'bo," said Penrod, threateningly. "I'll show you a little how we do up at the Third."

"Up at the Third!" Sam repeated with scorn. "You haven't ever been up there."

"I haven't?" cried Penrod. "I haven't?"

"No, you haven't!"

"Looky here!" Penrod, darkly argumentative, prepared to perform the eye-to-eye business. "When haven't I been up there?"

"You haven't never been up there!" In spite of Penrod's closely approaching nose Sam maintained his ground, and appealed for confirmation. "Has he, Herman?"

“I don’ reckon so,” said Herman, laughing.

“What!” Penrod transferred his nose to the immediate vicinity of Herman’s nose. “You don’t reckon so, ‘bo, don’t you? You better look out how you reckon around here! You understan’ that, ‘Bo?”

Herman bore the eye-to-eye very well; indeed, it seemed to please him, for he continued to laugh while Verman chuckled delightedly. The brothers had been in the country picking berries for a week, and it happened that this was their first experience of the new manifestation of Penrod.

“Haven’t I been up at the Third?” the sinister Penrod demanded.

“I don’ reckon so. How come you ast me?”

“Didn’t you just hear me say I been up there?”

“Well,” said Herman mischievously, “hearin’ ain’t believin’!” Penrod clutched him by the back of the neck, but Herman, laughing loudly, ducked and released himself at once, retreating to the wall.

“You take that back!” Penrod shouted, striking out wildly. “Don’ git mad,” begged the small darky, while a number of blows falling upon his warding arms failed to abate his amusement, and a sound one upon the cheek only made him laugh the more

unrestrainedly. He behaved exactly as if Penrod were tickling him, and his brother, Verman, rolled with joy in a wheelbarrow. Penrod pummelled till he was tired, and produced no greater effect.

"There!" he panted, desisting finally. "Now I reckon you know whether I been up there or not!"

Herman rubbed his smitten cheek. "Pow!" he exclaimed. "Pow-ee! You cert'ny did lan' me good one nat time! Oo-ee! she hurt!"
"You'll get hurt worse'n that," Penrod assured him, "if you stay around here much. Rupe Collins is comin' this afternoon, he said. We're goin' to make some policemen's billies out of the rake handle."

"You go' spoil new rake you' pa bought?"

"What do we care? I and Rupe got to have billies, haven't we?"

"How you make 'em?"

"Melt lead and pour in a hole we're goin' to make in the end of 'em. Then we're goin' to carry 'em in our pockets, and if anybody says anything to us–oh, oh! look out! They won't get a crack on the head–oh, no!"

"When's Rupe Collins coming?" Sam Williams inquired rather uneasily. He had heard a great deal too much of this personage,

but as yet the pleasure of actual acquaintance had been denied him.

“He’s liable to be here any time,” answered Penrod. “You better look out. You’ll be lucky if you get home alive, if you stay till he comes.”

“I ain’t afraid of him,” Sam returned, conventionally.

“You are, too!” (There was some truth in the retort.) “There ain’t any boy in this part of town but me that wouldn’t be afraid of him. You’d be afraid to talk to him. You wouldn’t get a word out of your mouth before old Rupie’d have you where you’d wished you never come around him, lettin’ on like you was so much! You wouldn’t run home yellin’ ‘Mom-muh’ or nothin’! Oh, no!”
“Who Rupe Collins?” asked Herman.

“‘Who Rupe Collins?'” Penrod mocked, and used his rasping laugh, but, instead of showing fright, Herman appeared to think he was meant to laugh, too; and so he did, echoed by Verman.
“You just hang around here a little while longer,” Penrod added, grimly, “and you’ll find out who Rupe Collins is, and I pity you when you do!”

“What he go’ do?”

“You’ll see; that’s all! You just wait and——”

At this moment a brown hound ran into the stable through the alley door, wagged a greeting to Penrod, and fraternized with Duke. The fat-faced boy appeared upon the threshold and gazed coldly about the little company in the carriage-house, whereupon the coloured brethren, ceasing from merriment, were instantly impassive, and Sam Williams moved a little nearer the door leading into the yard.

Obviously, Sam regarded the newcomer as a redoubtable if not ominous figure. He was a head taller than either Sam or Penrod; head and shoulders taller than Herman, who was short for his age; and Verman could hardly be used for purposes of comparison at all, being a mere squat brown spot, not yet quite nine years on this planet. And to Sam's mind, the aspect of Mr. Collins realized Penrod's portentous foreshadowings. Upon the fat face there was an expression of truculent intolerance which had been cultivated by careful habit to such perfection that Sam's heart sank at sight of it. A somewhat enfeebled twin to this expression had of late often decorated the visage of Penrod, and appeared upon that ingenuous surface now, as he advanced to welcome the eminent visitor.

The host swaggered toward the door with a great deal of shoulder movement, carelessly feinting a slap at Verman in passing, and creating by various means the atmosphere of a man who has contemptuously amused himself with underlings while awaiting an equal.

“Hello, ‘bo!” Penrod said in the deepest voice possible to him.

“Who you callin’ ‘bo?” was the ungracious response, accompanied by immediate action of a similar nature. Rupe held Penrod’s head in the crook of an elbow and massaged his temples with a hard-pressing knuckle.

“I was only in fun, Rupie,” pleaded the sufferer, and then, being set free, “Come here, Sam,” he said.

“What for?”

Penrod laughed pityingly. “Pshaw, I ain’t goin’ to hurt you. Come on.” Sam, maintaining his position near the other door, Penrod went to him and caught him round the neck.

“Watch me, Rupie!” Penrod called, and performed upon Sam the knuckle operation which he had himself just undergone, Sam submitting mechanically, his eyes fixed with increasing uneasiness upon Rupe Collins. Sam had a premonition that something even more painful than Penrod’s knuckle was going to be inflicted upon him.

“That don’ hurt,” said Penrod, pushing him away.

“Yes, it does, too!” Sam rubbed his temple.

“Puh! It didn’t hurt me, did it, Rupie? Come on in, Rupe: show this baby where he’s got a wart on his finger.”

“You showed me that trick,” Sam objected. “You already did that to me. You tried it twice this afternoon and I don’t know how many times before, only you weren’t strong enough after the first time. Anyway, I know what it is, and I don’t——”

“Come on, Rupe,” said Penrod. “Make the baby lick dirt.”

At this bidding, Rupe approached, while Sam, still protesting, moved to the threshold of the outer door; but Penrod seized him by the shoulders and swung him indoors with a shout.

“Little baby wants to run home to its Mom-muh! Here he is, Rupie.”

Thereupon was Penrod’s treachery to an old comrade properly rewarded, for as the two struggled, Rupe caught each by the back of the neck, simultaneously, and, with creditable impartiality, forced both boys to their knees.

“Lick dirt!” he commanded, forcing them still forward, until their faces were close to the stable floor.

At this moment he received a real surprise. With a loud whack

something struck the back of his head, and, turning, he beheld Verman in the act of lifting a piece of lath to strike again.

“Em moys ome!” said Verman, the Giant Killer.

“He tongue-tie’,” Herman explained. “He say, let ’em boys alone.”

Rupe addressed his host briefly:

“Chase them nigs out o’ here!”

“Don’ call me nig,” said Herman. “I mine my own biznuss. You let ’em boys alone.”

Rupe strode across the still prostrate Sam, stepped upon Penrod, and, equipping his countenance with the terrifying scowl and protruded jaw, lowered his head to the level of Herman’s.

“Nig, you’ll be lucky if you leave here alive!” And he leaned forward till his nose was within less than an inch of Herman’s nose.

It could be felt that something awful was about to happen, and Penrod, as he rose from the floor, suffered an unexpected twinge of apprehension and remorse: he hoped that Rupe wouldn’t really hurt Herman. A sudden dislike of Rupe and Rupe’s ways rose

within him, as he looked at the big boy overwhelming the little darky with that ferocious scowl. Penrod, all at once, felt sorry about something indefinable; and, with equal vagueness, he felt foolish. "Come on, Rupe," he suggested, feebly, "let Herman go, and let's us make our billies out of the rake handle."

The rake handle, however, was not available, if Rupe had inclined to favour the suggestion. Verman had discarded his lath for the rake, which he was at this moment lifting in the air.

"You ole black nigger," the fat-faced boy said venomously to Herman, "I'm agoin' to——"

But he had allowed his nose to remain too long near Herman's. Penrod's familiar nose had been as close with only a ticklish spinal effect upon the not very remote descendant of Congo man-eaters. The result produced by the glare of Rupe's unfamiliar eyes, and by the dreadfully suggestive proximity of Rupe's unfamiliar nose, was altogether different. Herman's and Verman's Bangala great-grandfathers never considered people of their own jungle neighbourhood proper material for a meal, but they looked upon strangers especially truculent strangers–as distinctly edible.
Penrod and Sam heard Rupe suddenly squawk and bellow; saw him writhe and twist and fling out his arms like flails, though without removing his face from its juxtaposition; indeed, for a moment, the two heads seemed even closer.
Then they separated–and battle was on!

Chapter 23: Coloured Troops in Action

How neat and pure is the task of the chronicler who has the tale to tell of a “good rousing fight” between boys or men who fight in the “good old English way,” according to a model set for fights in books long before Tom Brown went to Rugby. There are seconds and rounds and rules of fair-play, and always there is great good feeling in the end–though sometimes, to vary the model, “the Butcher” defeats the hero–and the chronicler who stencils this fine old pattern on his page is certain of applause as the stirrer of “red blood.” There is no surer recipe.

But when Herman and Verman set to ‘t the record must be no more than a few fragments left by the expurgator. It has been perhaps sufficiently suggested that the altercation in Mr. Schofield’s stable opened with mayhem in respect to the aggressor’s nose. Expressing vocally his indignation and the extremity of his pained surprise, Mr. Collins stepped backward,

holding his left hand over his nose, and striking at Herman with his right. Then Verman hit him with the rake.

Verman struck from behind. He struck as hard as he could. And he struck with the tines down–For, in his simple, direct African way he wished to kill his enemy, and he wished to kill him as soon as possible. That was his single, earnest purpose.

On this account, Rupe Collins was peculiarly unfortunate. He was plucky and he enjoyed conflict, but neither his ambitions nor his anticipations had ever included murder. He had not learned that an habitually aggressive person runs the danger of colliding with beings in one of those lower stages of evolution wherein theories about "hitting below the belt" have not yet made their appearance.

The rake glanced from the back of Rupe's head to his shoulder, but it felled him. Both darkies jumped full upon him instantly, and the three rolled and twisted upon the stable-floor, unloosing upon the air sincere maledictions closely connected with complaints of cruel and unusual treatment; while certain expressions of feeling presently emanating from Herman and Verman indicated that Rupe Collins, in this extremity, was proving himself not too slavishly addicted to fighting by rule. Dan and Duke, mistaking all for mirth, barked gayly.

From the panting, pounding, yelling heap issued words and phrases hitherto quite unknown to Penrod and Sam; also, a hoarse repetition in the voice of Rupe concerning his ear left it not to be doubted that additional mayhem was taking place. Appalled, the two spectators retreated to the doorway nearest the yard, where they stood dumbly watching the cataclysm.

The struggle increased in primitive simplicity: time and again the howling Rupe got to his knees only to go down again as the earnest brothers, in their own way, assisted him to a more reclining position. Primal forces operated here, and the two blanched, slightly higher products of evolution, Sam and Penrod, no more thought of interfering than they would have thought of interfering with an earthquake.

At last, out of the ruck rose Verman, disfigured and maniacal. With a wild eye he looked about him for his trusty rake; but Penrod, in horror, had long since thrown the rake out into the yard. Naturally, it had not seemed necessary to remove the lawn-mower.

The frantic eye of Verman fell upon the lawn-mower, and instantly he leaped to its handle. Shrilling a wordless war-cry, he charged, propelling the whirling, deafening knives straight upon the prone legs of Rupe Collins. The lawn-mower was sincerely intended to pass longitudinally over the body of Mr. Collins from

heel to head; and it was the time for a death-song. Black Valkyrie hovered in the shrieking air.

“Cut his gizzud out!” shrieked Herman, urging on the whirling knives.

They touched and lacerated the shin of Rupe, as, with the supreme agony of effort a creature in mortal peril puts forth before succumbing, he tore himself free of Herman and got upon his feet.

Herman was up as quickly. He leaped to the wall and seized the garden-scythe that hung there.

“I’m go to cut you’ gizzud out,” he announced definitely, “an’ eat it!”

Rupe Collins had never run from anybody (except his father) in his life; he was not a coward; but the present situation was very, very unusual. He was already in a badly dismantled condition, and yet Herman and Verman seemed discontented with their work: Verman was swinging the grass-cutter about for a new charge, apparently still wishing to mow him, and Herman had made a quite plausible statement about what he intended to do with the scythe.

Rupe paused but for an extremely condensed survey of the horrible advance of the brothers, and then, uttering a blood-curdled scream of fear, ran out of the stable and up the alley at a speed he had never before attained, so that even Dan had hard work to keep within barking distance. And a 'cross-shoulder glance, at the corner, revealing Verman and Herman in pursuit, the latter waving his scythe overhead, Mr. Collins slackened not his gait, but, rather, out of great anguish, increased it; the while a rapidly developing purpose became firm in his mind–and ever after so remained–not only to refrain from visiting that neighbourhood again, but never by any chance to come within a mile of it.

From the alley door, Penrod and Sam watched the flight, and were without words. When the pursuit rounded the corner, the two looked wanly at each other, but neither spoke until the return of the brothers from the chase.

Herman and Verman came back, laughing and chuckling.

"Hiyi!" cackled Herman to Verman, as they came, "See 'at ole boy run!"

"Who-ee!" Verman shouted in ecstasy.

"Nev' did see boy run so fas'!" Herman continued, tossing the scythe into the wheelbarrow. "I bet he home in bed by viss time!"

Verman roared with delight, appearing to be wholly unconscious that the lids of his right eye were swollen shut and that his attire, not too finical before the struggle, now entitled him to unquestioned rank as a sansculotte. Herman was a similar ruin, and gave as little heed to his condition.

Penrod looked dazedly from Herman to Verman and back again. So did Sam Williams.

"Herman," said Penrod, in a weak voice, "you wouldn't honest of cut his gizzard out, would you?"

"Who? Me? I don' know. He mighty mean ole boy!" Herman shook his head gravely, and then, observing that Verman was again convulsed with unctuous merriment, joined laughter with his brother. "Sho'! I guess I uz dess talkin' whens I said 'at! Reckon he thought I meant it, f'm de way he tuck an' run. Hiyi! Reckon he thought ole Herman bad man! No, suh! I uz dess talkin', 'cause I nev' would cut nobody! I ain' tryin' git in no jail–no, suh!"

Penrod looked at the scythe: he looked at Herman. He looked at the lawn-mower, and he looked at Verman. Then he looked out in the yard at the rake. So did Sam Williams.

"Come on, Verman," said Herman. "We ain' go' 'at stove-wood f' supper yit."

Giggling reminiscently, the brothers disappeared leaving silence behind them in the carriage-house. Penrod and Sam retired slowly into the shadowy interior, each glancing, now and then, with a preoccupied air, at the open, empty doorway where the late afternoon sunshine was growing ruddy. At intervals one or the other scraped the floor reflectively with the side of his shoe. Finally, still without either having made any effort at conversation, they went out into the yard and stood, continuing their silence.

"Well," said Sam, at last, "I guess it's time I better be gettin' home. So long, Penrod!"

"So long, Sam," said Penrod, feebly.

With a solemn gaze he watched his friend out of sight. Then he went slowly into the house, and after an interval occupied in a unique manner, appeared in the library, holding a pair of brilliantly gleaming shoes in his hand.

Mr. Schofield, reading the evening paper, glanced frowningly over it at his offspring.

"Look, papa," said Penrod. "I found your shoes where you'd taken 'em off in your room, to put on your slippers, and they were all dusty. So I took 'em out on the back porch and gave 'em a good blacking. They shine up fine, don't they?"

“Well, I’ll be d-dud-dummed!” said the startled Mr. Schofield. Penrod was zigzagging back to normal.

Chapter 24: “Little Gentleman”

The midsummer sun was stinging hot outside the little barber-shop next to the corner drug store and Penrod, undergoing a toilette preliminary to his very slowly approaching twelfth birthday, was adhesive enough to retain upon his face much hair as it fell from the shears. There is a mystery here: the tonsorial processes are not unagreeable to manhood; in truth, they are soothing; but the hairs detached from a boy’s head get into his eyes, his ears, his nose, his mouth, and down his neck, and he does everywhere itch excruciatingly. Wherefore he blinks, winks, weeps, twitches, condenses his countenance, and squirms; and perchance the barber’s scissors clip more than intended–belike an outlying flange of ear.

“Um–muh–ow!” said Penrod, this thing having happened.
“D’ I touch y’ up a little?” inquired the barber, smiling falsely.

“Ooh–uh!” The boy in the chair offered inarticulate protest, as the wound was rubbed with alum.

“That don’t hurt!” said the barber. “You will get it, though, if you don’t sit stiller,” he continued, nipping in the bud any attempt on the part of his patient to think that he already had “it.”

“Pfuff!” said Penrod, meaning no disrespect, but endeavoring to dislodge a temporary moustache from his lip.

“You ought to see how still that little Georgie Bassett sits,” the barber went on, reprovingly. “I hear everybody says he’s the best boy in town.”

“Pfuff! Phirr!” There was a touch of intentional contempt in this.

“I haven’t heard nobody around the neighbourhood makin’ no such remarks,” added the barber, “about nobody of the name of Penrod Schofield.”

“Well,” said Penrod, clearing his mouth after a struggle, “who wants ’em to? Ouch!”

“I hear they call Georgie Bassett the ‘little gentleman,'” ventured the barber, provocatively, meeting with instant success.

“They better not call me that,” returned Penrod truculently. “I’d

like to hear anybody try. Just once, that's all! I bet they'd never try it ag—-ouch!"

"Why? What'd you do to 'em?"

"It's all right what I'd do! I bet they wouldn't want to call me that again long as they lived!"

"What'd you do if it was a little girl? You wouldn't hit her, would you?"

"Well, I'd—- Ouch!"

"You wouldn't hit a little girl, would you?" the barber persisted, gathering into his powerful fingers a mop of hair from the top of Penrod's head and pulling that suffering head into an unnatural position. "Doesn't the Bible say it ain't never right to hit the weak sex?"

"Ow! Say, look out!"

"So you'd go and punch a pore, weak, little girl, would you?" said the barber, reprovingly.

"Well, who said I'd hit her?" demanded the chivalrous Penrod. "I bet I'd fix her though, all right. She'd see!"

“You wouldn’t call her names, would you?”

“No, I wouldn’t! What hurt is it to call anybody names?”

“Is that so!” exclaimed the barber. “Then you was intending what I heard you hollering at Fisher’s grocery delivery wagon driver fer a favour, the other day when I was goin’ by your house, was you? I reckon I better tell him, because he says to me after-werds if he ever lays eyes on you when you ain’t in your own yard, he’s goin’ to do a whole lot o’ things you ain’t goin’ to like! Yessir, that’s what he says to me!”

“He better catch me first, I guess, before he talks so much.”

“Well,” resumed the barber, “that ain’t sayin’ what you’d do if a young lady ever walked up and called you a little gentleman. I want to hear what you’d do to her. I guess I know, though–come to think of it.”

“What?” demanded Penrod.

“You’d sick that pore ole dog of yours on her cat, if she had one, I expect,” guessed the barber derisively.

“No, I would not!”

“Well, what would you do?”

“I’d do enough. Don’t worry about that!”

“Well, suppose it was a boy, then: what’d you do if a boy come up to you and says, ‘Hello, little gentleman’?”

“He’d be lucky,” said Penrod, with a sinister frown, “if he got home alive.”

“Suppose it was a boy twice your size?”

“Just let him try,” said Penrod ominously. “You just let him try. He’d never see daylight again; that’s all!”

The barber dug ten active fingers into the helpless scalp before him and did his best to displace it, while the anguished Penrod, becoming instantly a seething crucible of emotion, misdirected his natural resentment into maddened brooding upon what he would do to a boy “twice his size” who should dare to call him “little gentleman.” The barber shook him as his father had never shaken him; the barber buffeted him, rocked him frantically to and fro; the barber seemed to be trying to wring his neck; and Penrod saw himself in staggering zigzag pictures, destroying large, screaming, fragmentary boys who had insulted him.
The torture stopped suddenly; and clenched, weeping eyes began to see again, while the barber applied cooling lotions which made Penrod smell like a coloured housemaid’s ideal.

“Now what,” asked the barber, combing the reeking locks gently, “what would it make you so mad fer, to have somebody call you a little gentleman? It’s a kind of compliment, as it were, you might say. What would you want to hit anybody fer that fer?”

To the mind of Penrod, this question was without meaning or reasonableness. It was within neither his power nor his desire to analyze the process by which the phrase had become offensive to him, and was now rapidly assuming the proportions of an outrage. He knew only that his gorge rose at the thought of it. “You just let ’em try it!” he said threateningly, as he slid down from the chair. And as he went out of the door, after further conversation on the same subject, he called back those warning words once more: “Just let ’em try it! Just once– that’s all I ask ’em to. They’ll find out what they get!”

The barber chuckled. Then a fly lit on the barber’s nose and he slapped at it, and the slap missed the fly but did not miss the nose. The barber was irritated. At this moment his birdlike eye gleamed a gleam as it fell upon customers approaching: the prettiest little girl in the world, leading by the hand her baby brother, Mitchy-Mitch, coming to have Mitchy-Mitch’s hair clipped, against the heat.

It was a hot day and idle, with little to feed the mind–and the barber was a mischievous man with an irritated nose. He did his worst.

Meanwhile, the brooding Penrod pursued his homeward way; no great distance, but long enough for several one-sided conflicts with malign insulters made of thin air. “You better not call me that!” he muttered. “You just try it, and you’ll get what other people got when they tried it. You better not ack fresh with me! Oh, you will, will you?” He delivered a vicious kick full upon the shins of an iron fence-post, which suffered little, though Penrod instantly regretted his indiscretion. “Oof!” he grunted, hopping; and went on after bestowing a look of awful hostility upon the fence-post. “I guess you’ll know better next time,” he said, in parting, to this antagonist. “You just let me catch you around here again and I’ll——” His voice sank to inarticulate but ominous murmurings. He was in a dangerous mood.

Nearing home, however, his belligerent spirit was diverted to happier interests by the discovery that some workmen had left a caldron of tar in the cross-street, close by his father’s stable. He tested it, but found it inedible. Also, as a substitute for professional chewing-gum it was unsatisfactory, being insufficiently boiled down and too thin, though of a pleasant, lukewarm temperature. But it had an excess of one quality–it was sticky. It was the stickiest tar Penrod had ever used for any purposes whatsoever, and nothing upon which he wiped his hands served to rid them of it; neither his polka-dotted shirt waist nor his knickerbockers; neither the fence, nor even Duke, who came unthinkingly wagging out to greet him, and retired wiser.

Nevertheless, tar is tar. Much can be done with it, no matter what its condition; so Penrod lingered by the caldron, though from a neighbouring yard could be heard the voices of comrades, including that of Sam Williams. On the ground about the caldron were scattered chips and sticks and bits of wood to the number of a great multitude. Penrod mixed quantities of this refuse into the tar, and interested himself in seeing how much of it he could keep moving in slow swirls upon the ebon surface.

Other surprises were arranged for the absent workmen. The caldron was almost full, and the surface of the tar near the rim. Penrod endeavoured to ascertain how many pebbles and brickbats, dropped in, would cause an overflow. Labouring heartily to this end, he had almost accomplished it, when he received the suggestion for an experiment on a much larger scale. Embedded at the corner of a grassplot across the street was a whitewashed stone, the size of a small watermelon and serving no purpose whatever save the questionable one of decoration. It was easily pried up with a stick; though getting it to the caldron tested the full strength of the ardent labourer. Instructed to perform such a task, he would have sincerely maintained its impossibility but now, as it was unbidden, and promised rather destructive results, he set about it with unconquerable energy, feeling certain that he would be rewarded with a mighty splash. Perspiring, grunting vehemently, his back aching and all muscles strained, he progressed in short stages until the big stone lay at the base of

the caldron. He rested a moment, panting, then lifted the stone, and was bending his shoulders for the heave that would lift it over the rim, when a sweet, taunting voice, close behind him, startled him cruelly.

"How do you do, little gentleman!"

Penrod squawked, dropped the stone, and shouted, "Shut up, you dern fool!" purely from instinct, even before his about-face made him aware who had so spitefully addressed him.

It was Marjorie Jones. Always dainty, and prettily dressed, she was in speckless and starchy white to-day, and a refreshing picture she made, with the new-shorn and powerfully scented Mitchy-Mitch clinging to her hand. They had stolen up behind the toiler, and now stood laughing together in sweet merriment. Since the passing of Penrod's Rupe Collins period he had experienced some severe qualms at the recollection of his last meeting with Marjorie and his Apache behaviour; in truth, his heart instantly became as wax at sight of her, and he would have offered her fair speech; but, alas! in Marjorie's wonderful eyes there shone a consciousness of new powers for his undoing, and she denied him opportunity.

"Oh, oh!" she cried, mocking his pained outcry. "What a way for a little gentleman to talk! Little gentleman don't say wicked——"

“Marjorie!” Penrod, enraged and dismayed, felt himself stung beyond all endurance. Insult from her was bitterer to endure than from any other. “Don’t you call me that again!”

“Why not, little gentleman?”

He stamped his foot. “You better stop!”

Marjorie sent into his furious face her lovely, spiteful laughter.

“Little gentleman, little gentleman, little gentleman!” she said deliberately. “How’s the little gentleman, this afternoon? Hello, little gentleman!”

Penrod, quite beside himself, danced eccentrically. “Dry up!” he howled. “Dry up, dry up, dry up, dry up!”

Mitchy-Mitch shouted with delight and applied a finger to the side of the caldron—a finger immediately snatched away and wiped upon a handkerchief by his fastidious sister.

“‘Ittle gellamun!” said Mitchy-Mitch.

“You better look out!” Penrod whirled upon this small offender with grim satisfaction. Here was at least something male that could without dishonour be held responsible. “You say that again, and I’ll give you the worst——”

“You will not!” snapped Marjorie, instantly vitriolic. “He’ll say just whatever he wants to, and he’ll say it just as much as he wants to. Say it again, Mitchy-Mitch!”

“‘Ittle gellamun!” said Mitchy-Mitch promptly.

“Ow-yah!” Penrod’s tone-production was becoming affected by his mental condition. “You say that again, and I’ll—-”

“Go on, Mitchy-Mitch,” cried Marjorie. “He can’t do a thing. He don’t dare! Say it some more, Mitchy-Mitch–say it a whole lot!” Mitchy-Mitch, his small, fat face shining with confidence in his immunity, complied.

“‘Ittle gellamun!” he squeaked malevolently. “‘Ittle gellamun! ‘Ittle gellamun! ‘Ittle gellamun!”

The desperate Penrod bent over the whitewashed rock, lifted it, and then–outdoing Porthos, John Ridd, and Ursus in one miraculous burst of strength–heaved it into the air.
Marjorie screamed.

But it was too late. The big stone descended into the precise midst of the caldron and Penrod got his mighty splash. It was far, far beyond his expectations.

Spontaneously there were grand and awful effects—volcanic spectacles of nightmare and eruption. A black sheet of eccentric shape rose out of the caldron and descended upon the three children, who had no time to evade it.

After it fell, Mitchy-Mitch, who stood nearest the caldron, was the thickest, though there was enough for all. Br'er Rabbit would have fled from any of them.

Chapter 25: Tar

When Marjorie and Mitchy-Mitch got their breath, they used it vocally; and seldom have more penetrating sounds issued from human throats. Coincidentally, Marjorie, quite baresark, laid hands upon the largest stick within reach and fell upon Penrod with blind fury. He had the presence of mind to flee, and they went round and round the caldron, while Mitchy-Mitch feebly endeavoured to follow–his appearance, in this pursuit, being pathetically like that of a bug fished out of an ink-well, alive but discouraged.

Attracted by the riot, Samuel Williams made his appearance, vaulting a fence, and was immediately followed by Maurice Levy and Georgie Bassett. They stared incredulously at the extraordinary spectacle before them.

“Little gen-til-mun!” shrieked Marjorie, with a wild stroke that

landed full upon Penrod's tarry cap.

"Ooooch!" bleated Penrod.

"It's Penrod!" shouted Sam Williams, recognizing him by the voice. For an instant he had been in some doubt.

"Penrod Schofield!" exclaimed Georgie Bassett. "What does this mean?" That was Georgie's style, and had helped to win him his title.

Marjorie leaned, panting, upon her stick. "I cu-called–uh–him–oh!" she sobbed–"I called him a lul-little–oh–gentleman! And oh–lul-look!–oh! lul-look at my du-dress! Lul-look at Mu-mitchy–oh–Mitch–oh!"

Unexpectedly, she smote again–with results–and then, seizing the indistinguishable hand of Mitchy-Mitch, she ran wailing homeward down the street.

"'Little gentleman'?" said Georgie Bassett, with some evidences of disturbed complacency. "Why, that's what they call me!"

"Yes, and you are one, too!" shouted the maddened Penrod. "But you better not let anybody call me that! I've stood enough around here for one day, and you can't run over me, Georgie Bassett. Just you put that in your gizzard and smoke it!"

“Anybody has a perfect right,” said Georgie, with, dignity, “to call a person a little gentleman. There’s lots of names nobody ought to call, but this one’s a nice——”

“You better look out!”

Unavenged bruises were distributed all over Penrod, both upon his body and upon his spirit. Driven by subtle forces, he had dipped his hands in catastrophe and disaster: it was not for a Georgie Bassett to beard him. Penrod was about to run amuck.

“I haven’t called you a little gentleman, yet,” said Georgie. “I only said it. Anybody’s got a right to say it.”

“Not around me! You just try it again and——”

“I shall say it,” returned Georgie, “all I please. Anybody in this town has a right to say ‘little gentleman’——”

Bellowing insanely, Penrod plunged his right hand into the caldron, rushed upon Georgie and made awful work of his hair and features.

Alas, it was but the beginning! Sam Williams and Maurice Levy screamed with delight, and, simultaneously infected, danced about the struggling pair, shouting frantically:

“Little gentleman! Little gentleman! Sick him, Georgie! Sick him, little gentleman! Little gentleman! Little gentleman!”

The infuriated outlaw turned upon them with blows and more tar, which gave Georgie Bassett his opportunity and later seriously impaired the purity of his fame. Feeling himself hopelessly tarred, he dipped both hands repeatedly into the caldron and applied his gatherings to Penrod. It was bringing coals to Newcastle, but it helped to assuage the just wrath of Georgie.

The four boys gave a fine imitation of the Laocoon group complicated by an extra figure frantic splutterings and chokings, strange cries and stranger words issued from this tangle; hands dipped lavishly into the inexhaustible reservoir of tar, with more and more picturesque results. The caldron had been elevated upon bricks and was not perfectly balanced; and under a heavy impact of the struggling group it lurched and went partly over, pouring forth a Stygian tide which formed a deep pool in the gutter.

It was the fate of Master Roderick Bitts, that exclusive and immaculate person, to make his appearance upon the chaotic scene at this juncture. All in the cool of a white “sailor suit,” he turned aside from the path of duty–which led straight to the house of a maiden aunt–and paused to hop with joy upon the sidewalk. A repeated epithet continuously half panted, half squawked, somewhere in the nest of gladiators, caught his ear, and he took it up excitedly, not knowing why.

“Little gentleman!” shouted Roderick, jumping up and down in childish glee. “Little gentleman! Little gentleman! Lit—-”

A frightful figure tore itself free from the group, encircled this innocent bystander with a black arm, and hurled him headlong. Full length and flat on his face went Roderick into the Stygian pool. The frightful figure was Penrod.

Instantly, the pack flung themselves upon him again, and, carrying them with him, he went over upon Roderick, who from that instant was as active a belligerent as any there.

Thus began the Great Tar Fight, the origin of which proved, afterward, so difficult for parents to trace, owing to the opposing accounts of the combatants. Marjorie said Penrod began it; Penrod said Mitchy-Mitch began it; Sam Williams said Georgie Bassett began it; Georgie and Maurice Levy said Penrod began it; Roderick Bitts, who had not recognized his first assailant, said Sam Williams began it.

Thus began the Great Tar Fight

Nobody thought of accusing the barber. But the barber did not begin it; it was the fly on the barber’s nose that

began it–though, of course, something else began the fly. Somehow, we never manage to hang the real offender.

The end came only with the arrival of Penrod's mother, who had been having a painful conversation by telephone with Mrs. Jones, the mother of Marjorie, and came forth to seek an errant son. It is a mystery how she was able to pick out her own, for by the time she got there his voice was too hoarse to be recognizable. Mr. Schofield's version of things was that Penrod was insane. "He's a stark, raving lunatic!" declared the father, descending to the library from a before-dinner interview with the outlaw, that evening. "I'd send him to military school, but I don't believe they'd take him. Do you know why he says all that awfulness happened?"

"When Margaret and I were trying to scrub him," responded Mrs. Schofield wearily, "he said 'everybody' had been calling him names."

"'Names!'" snorted her husband. "'Little gentleman!' That's the vile epithet they called him! And because of it he wrecks the peace of six homes!"

"Sh! Yes; he told us about it," said Mrs. Schofield, moaning. "He told us several hundred times, I should guess, though I didn't count. He's got it fixed in his head, and we couldn't get it out. All we could do was to put him in the closet. He'd have gone out

again after those boys if we hadn't. I don't know what to make of him!"

"He's a mystery to me!" said her husband. "And he refuses to explain why he objects to being called 'little gentleman.' Says he'd do the same thing–and worse–if anybody dared to call him that again. He said if the President of the United States called him that he'd try to whip him. How long did you have him locked up in the closet?"

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield warningly. "About two hours; but I don't think it softened his spirit at all, because when I took him to the barber's to get his hair clipped again, on account of the tar in it, Sammy Williams and Maurice Levy were there for the same reason, and they just whispered 'little gentleman,' so low you could hardly hear them–and Penrod began fighting with them right before me, and it was really all the barber and I could do to drag him away from them. The barber was very kind about it, but Penrod——"

"I tell you he's a lunatic!" Mr. Schofield would have said the same thing of a Frenchman infuriated by the epithet "camel." The philosophy of insult needs expounding.

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield. "It does seem a kind of frenzy."
"Why on earth should any sane person mind being called——"

“Sh!” said Mrs. Schofield. “It’s beyond me!”

“What are you sh-ing me for?” demanded Mr. Schofield explosively.

“Sh!” said Mrs. Schofield. “It’s Mr. Kinosling, the new rector of Saint Joseph’s.”

“Where?”

“Sh! On the front porch with Margaret; he’s going to stay for dinner. I do hope—-”

“Bachelor, isn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“Our old minister was speaking of him the other day,” said Mr. Schofield, “and he didn’t seem so terribly impressed.”

“Sh! Yes; about thirty, and of course so superior to most of Margaret’s friends–boys home from college. She thinks she likes young Robert Williams, I know–but he laughs so much! Of course there isn’t any comparison. Mr. Kinosling talks so intellectually; it’s a good thing for Margaret to hear that kind of thing, for a change and, of course, he’s very spiritual. He seems very much interested in her.” She paused to muse. “I think Margaret likes

him; he's so different, too. It's the third time he's dropped in this week, and I——"

"Well," said Mr. Schofield grimly, "if you and Margaret want him to come again, you'd better not let him see Penrod."

"But he's asked to see him; he seems interested in meeting all the family. And Penrod nearly always behaves fairly well at table."

She paused, and then put to her husband a question referring to his interview with Penrod upstairs. "Did you–did you–do it?"

"No," he answered gloomily. "No, I didn't, but——" He was interrupted by a violent crash of china and metal in the kitchen, a shriek from Della, and the outrageous voice of Penrod. The well-informed Della, ill-inspired to set up for a wit, had ventured to address the scion of the house roguishly as "little gentleman," and Penrod, by means of the rapid elevation of his right foot, had removed from her supporting hands a laden tray. Both parents, started for the kitchen, Mr. Schofield completing his interrupted sentence on the way.

"But I will, now!"

The rite thus promised was hastily but accurately performed in that apartment most distant from the front porch; and, twenty minutes later, Penrod descended to dinner. The Rev. Mr. Kinosling

had asked for the pleasure of meeting him, and it had been decided that the only course possible was to cover up the scandal for the present, and to offer an undisturbed and smiling family surface to the gaze of the visitor.

Scorched but not bowed, the smouldering Penrod was led forward for the social formulae simultaneously with the somewhat bleak departure of Robert Williams, who took his guitar with him, this time, and went in forlorn unconsciousness of the powerful forces already set in secret motion to be his allies.

The punishment just undergone had but made the haughty and unyielding soul of Penrod more stalwart in revolt; he was unconquered. Every time the one intolerable insult had been offered him, his resentment had become the hotter, his vengeance the more instant and furious. And, still burning with outrage, but upheld by the conviction of right, he was determined to continue to the last drop of his blood the defense of his honour, whenever it should be assailed, no matter how mighty or august the powers that attacked it. In all ways, he was a very sore boy.

During the brief ceremony of presentation, his usually inscrutable countenance wore an expression interpreted by his father as one of insane obstinacy, while Mrs. Schofield found it an incentive to inward prayer. The fine graciousness of Mr. Kinosling, however, was unimpaired by the glare of virulent suspicion given him by this little brother: Mr. Kinosling mistook it for a natural curiosity

concerning one who might possibly become, in time, a member of the family. He patted Penrod upon the head, which was, for many reasons, in no condition to be patted with any pleasure to the patter. Penrod felt himself in the presence of a new enemy.

"How do you do, my little lad," said Mr. Kinosling. "I trust we shall become fast friends."

To the ear of his little lad, it seemed he said, "A trost we shall bick-home fawst frainds." Mr. Kinosling's pronunciation was, in fact, slightly precious; and, the little lad, simply mistaking it for some cryptic form of mockery of himself, assumed a manner and expression which argued so ill for the proposed friendship that Mrs. Schofield hastily interposed the suggestion of dinner, and the small procession went in to the dining-room.

"It has been a delicious day," said Mr. Kinosling, presently; "warm but balmy." With a benevolent smile he addressed Penrod, who sat opposite him. "I suppose, little gentleman, you have been indulging in the usual outdoor sports of vacation?"

Penrod laid down his fork and glared, open-mouthed at Mr. Kinosling.

"You'll have another slice of breast of the chicken?" Mr. Schofield inquired, loudly and quickly.

“A lovely day!” exclaimed Margaret, with equal promptitude and emphasis. “Lovely, oh, lovely! Lovely!”

“Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!” said Mrs. Schofield, and after a glance at Penrod which confirmed her impression that he intended to say something, she continued, “Yes, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful beautiful!”

Penrod closed his mouth and sank back in his chair—and his relatives took breath.

Mr. Kinosling looked pleased. This responsive family, with its ready enthusiasm, made the kind of audience he liked. He passed a delicate white hand gracefully over his tall, pale forehead, and smiled indulgently.

“Youth relaxes in summer,” he said. “Boyhood is the age of relaxation; one is playful, light, free, unfettered. One runs and leaps and enjoys one’s self with one’s companions. It is good for the little lads to play with their friends; they jostle, push, and wrestle, and simulate little, happy struggles with one another in harmless conflict. The young muscles are toughening. It is good. Boyish chivalry develops, enlarges, expands. The young learn quickly, intuitively, spontaneously. They perceive the obligations of noblesse oblige. They begin to comprehend the necessity of caste and its requirements. They learn what birth means—ah,—that is, they learn what it means to be well born. They learn

courtesy in their games; they learn politeness, consideration for one another in their pastimes, amusements, lighter occupations. I make it my pleasure to join them often, for I sympathize with them in all their wholesome joys as well as in their little bothers and perplexities. I understand them, you see; and let me tell you it is no easy matter to understand the little lads and lassies." He sent to each listener his beaming glance, and, permitting it to come to rest upon Penrod, inquired:

"And what do you say to that, little gentleman?"

Mr. Schofield uttered a stentorian cough. "More? You'd better have some more chicken! More! Do!"

"More chicken!" urged Margaret simultaneously. "Do please! Please! More! Do! More!"

"Beautiful, beautiful," began Mrs. Schofield. "Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful——"

It is not known in what light Mr. Kinosling viewed the expression of Penrod's face. Perhaps he mistook it for awe; perhaps he received no impression at all of its extraordinary quality. He was a rather self-engrossed young man, just then engaged in a double occupation, for he not only talked, but supplied from his own consciousness a critical though favourable auditor as well, which of course kept him quite busy. Besides, it is oftener than is

expected the case that extremely peculiar expressions upon the countenances of boys are entirely overlooked, and suggest nothing to the minds of people staring straight at them. Certainly Penrod's expression–which, to the perception of his family, was perfectly horrible–caused not the faintest perturbation in the breast of Mr. Kinosling.

Mr. Kinosling waived the chicken, and continued to talk. "Yes, I think I may claim to understand boys," he said, smiling thoughtfully. "One has been a boy one's self. Ah, it is not all playtime! I hope our young scholar here does not overwork himself at his Latin, at his classics, as I did, so that at the age of eight years I was compelled to wear glasses. He must be careful not to strain the little eyes at his scholar's tasks, not to let the little shoulders grow round over his scholar's desk. Youth is golden; we should keep it golden, bright, glistening. Youth should frolic, should be sprightly; it should play its cricket, its tennis, its hand-ball. It should run and leap; it should laugh, should sing madrigals and glees, carol with the lark, ring out in chanties, folk-songs, ballads, roundelays——"

He talked on. At any instant Mr. Schofield held himself ready to cough vehemently and shout, "More chicken," to drown out Penrod in case the fatal words again fell from those eloquent lips; and Mrs. Schofield and Margaret kept themselves prepared at all times to assist him. So passed a threatening meal, which Mrs. Schofield hurried, by every means with decency, to its conclusion.

She felt that somehow they would all be safer out in the dark of the front porch, and led the way thither as soon as possible.

"No cigar, I thank you." Mr. Kinosling, establishing himself in a wicker chair beside Margaret, waved away her father's proffer. "I do not smoke. I have never tasted tobacco in any form." Mrs. Schofield was confirmed in her opinion that this would be an ideal son-in-law. Mr. Schofield was not so sure.

"No," said Mr. Kinosling. "No tobacco for me. No cigar, no pipe, no cigarette, no cheroot. For me, a book–a volume of poems, perhaps. Verses, rhymes, lines metrical and cadenced–those are my dissipation. Tennyson by preference: 'Maud,' or 'Idylls of the King'–poetry of the sound Victorian days; there is none later. Or Longfellow will rest me in a tired hour. Yes; for me, a book, a volume in the hand, held lightly between the fingers."

Mr. Kinosling looked pleasantly at his fingers as he spoke, waving his hand in a curving gesture which brought it into the light of a window faintly illumined from the interior of the house. Then he passed those graceful fingers over his hair, and turned toward Penrod, who was perched upon the railing in a dark corner.

"The evening is touched with a slight coolness," said Mr. Kinosling. "Perhaps I may request the little gentleman——"

"B'gr-r-ruff!" coughed Mr. Schofield. "You'd better change your

mind about a cigar."

"No, I thank you. I was about to request the lit——"

"Do try one," Margaret urged. "I'm sure papa's are nice ones. Do try——"

"No, I thank you. I remarked a slight coolness in the air, and my hat is in the hallway. I was about to request——"

"I'll get it for you," said Penrod suddenly.

"If you will be so good," said Mr. Kinosling. "It is a black bowler hat, little gentleman, and placed upon a table in the hall."

"I know where it is." Penrod entered the door, and a feeling of relief, mutually experienced, carried from one to another of his three relatives their interchanged congratulations that he had recovered his sanity.

"'The day is done, and the darkness,'" began Mr. Kinosling—and recited that poem entire. He followed it with "The Children's Hour," and after a pause, at the close, to allow his listeners time for a little reflection upon his rendition, he passed his hand again over his head, and called, in the direction of the doorway:

"I believe I will take my hat now, little gentleman."

“Here it is,” said Penrod, unexpectedly climbing over the porch railing, in the other direction. His mother and father and Margaret had supposed him to be standing in the hallway out of deference, and because he thought it tactful not to interrupt the recitations. All of them remembered, later, that this supposed thoughtfulness on his part struck them as unnatural.

“Very good, little gentleman!” said Mr. Kinosling, and being somewhat chilled, placed the hat firmly upon his head, pulling it down as far as it would go. It had a pleasant warmth, which he noticed at once. The next instant, he noticed something else, a peculiar sensation of the scalp–a sensation which he was quite unable to define. He lifted his hand to take the hat off, and entered upon a strange experience: his hat seemed to have decided to remain where it was.

“Do you like Tennyson as much as Longfellow, Mr. Kinosling?” inquired Margaret.

“I–ah–I cannot say,” he returned absently. “I–ah–each has his own–ugh! flavour and savour, each his–ah–ah—-”

Struck by a strangeness in his tone, she peered at him curiously through the dusk. His outlines were indistinct, but she made out that his arms were, uplifted in a singular gesture. He seemed to be wrenching at his head.

“Is–is anything the matter?” she asked anxiously. “Mr. Kinosling, are you ill?”

“Not at–ugh!–all,” he replied, in the same odd tone. “I–ah–I believe–ugh!”

He dropped his hands from his hat, and rose. His manner was slightly agitated. “I fear I may have taken a trifling–ah–cold. I should–ah–perhaps be–ah–better at home. I will–ah–say good-night.”

At the steps, he instinctively lifted his hand to remove his hat, but did not do so, and, saying “Goodnight,” again in a frigid voice, departed with visible stiffness from that house, to return no more.

“Well, of all—-!” cried Mrs. Schofield, astounded. “What was the matter? He just went–like that!” She made a flurried gesture. “In heaven’s name, Margaret, what did you say to him?”

“I!” exclaimed Margaret indignantly. “Nothing! He just went!”

“Why, he didn’t even take off his hat when he said good- night!” said Mrs. Schofield.

Margaret, who had crossed to the doorway, caught the ghost of a whisper behind her, where stood Penrod.

“You bet he didn’t!”

He knew not that he was overheard.

A frightful suspicion flashed through Margaret’s mind—a suspicion that Mr. Kinosling’s hat would have to be either boiled off or shaved off. With growing horror she recalled Penrod’s long absence when he went to bring the hat.

“Penrod,” she cried, “let me see your hands!”

She had toiled at those hands herself late that afternoon, nearly scalding her own, but at last achieving a lily purity.

“Let me see your hands!”

She seized them.

Again they were tarred!

Chapter 26: The Quiet Afternoon

Perhaps middle-aged people might discern Nature's real intentions in the matter of pain if they would examine a boy's punishments and sorrows, for he prolongs neither beyond their actual duration. With a boy, trouble must be of Homeric dimensions to last overnight. To him, every next day is really a new day. Thus, Penrod woke, next morning, with neither the unspared rod, nor Mr. Kinosling in his mind. Tar, itself, so far as his consideration of it went, might have been an undiscovered substance. His mood was cheerful and mercantile; some process having worked mysteriously within him, during the night, to the result that his first waking thought was of profits connected with the sale of old iron–or perhaps a ragman had passed the house, just before he woke.

By ten o'clock he had formed a partnership with the indeed amiable Sam, and the firm of Schofield and Williams plunged

headlong into commerce. Heavy dealings in rags, paper, old iron and lead gave the firm a balance of twenty-two cents on the evening of the third day; but a venture in glassware, following, proved disappointing on account of the scepticism of all the druggists in that part of town, even after seven laborious hours had been spent in cleansing a wheelbarrow-load of old medicine bottles with hydrant water and ashes. Likewise, the partners were disheartened by their failure to dispose of a crop of "greens," although they had uprooted specimens of that decorative and unappreciated flower, the dandelion, with such persistence and energy that the Schofields' and Williams' lawns looked curiously haggard for the rest of that summer.

The fit passed: business languished; became extinct. The dog-days had set in.

One August afternoon was so hot that even boys sought indoor shade. In the dimness of the vacant carriage-house of the stable, lounged Masters Penrod Schofield, Samuel Williams, Maurice Levy, Georgie Bassett, and Herman. They sat still and talked. It is a hot day, in rare truth, when boys devote themselves principally to conversation, and this day was that hot.

Their elders should beware such days. Peril hovers near when the fierceness of weather forces inaction and boys in groups are quiet. The more closely volcanoes, Western rivers, nitroglycerin, and boys are pent, the deadlier is their action at the point of outbreak.

Thus, parents and guardians should look for outrages of the most singular violence and of the most peculiar nature during the confining weather of February and August.

The thing which befell upon this broiling afternoon began to brew and stew peacefully enough. All was innocence and languor; no one could have foretold the eruption.

They were upon their great theme: “When I get to be a man!”

Being human, though boys, they considered their present estate too commonplace to be dwelt upon. So, when the old men gather, they say: “When I was a boy!” It really is the land of nowadays that we never discover.

“When I’m a man,” said Sam Williams, “I’m goin’ to hire me a couple of coloured waiters to swing me in a hammock and keep pourin’ ice-water on me all day out o’ those waterin’-cans they sprinkle flowers from. I’ll hire you for one of ’em, Herman.”

“No; you ain’ goin’ to,” said Herman promptly. “You ain’ no flowuh. But nev’ min’ nat, anyway. Ain’ nobody goin’ haih me whens I’m a man. Goin’ be my own boss. I’m go’ be a rai’road man!”

“You mean like a superintendent, or sumpthing like that, and sell tickets?” asked Penrod.

“Sup’in–nev’ min’ nat! Sell ticket? No suh! Go’ be a po’tuh! My uncle a po’tuh right now. Solid gole buttons–oh, oh!”

“Generals get a lot more buttons than porters,” said Penrod.

“Generals—-”

“Po’tuhs make the bes’ l’vin’,” Herman interrupted. “My uncle spen’ mo’ money ‘n any white man n’is town.”

“Well, I rather be a general,” said Penrod, “or a senator, or sumpthing like that.”

“Senators live in Warshington,” Maurice Levy contributed the information. “I been there. Warshington ain’t so much; Niag’ra Falls is a hundred times as good as Warshington. So’s ‘Tlantic City, I was there, too. I been everywhere there is. I—-”

“Well, anyway,” said Sam Williams, raising his voice in order to obtain the floor, “anyway, I’m goin’ to lay in a hammock all day, and have ice-water sprinkled on top o’ me, and I’m goin’ to lay there all night, too, and the next day. I’m goin’ to lay there a couple o’ years, maybe.”

“I bet you don’t!” exclaimed Maurice. “What’d you do in winter?”

“What?”

“What you goin’ to do when it’s winter, out in a hammock with water sprinkled on top o’ you all day? I bet you——”

“I’d stay right there,” Sam declared, with strong conviction, blinking as he looked out through the open doors at the dazzling lawn and trees, trembling in the heat. “They couldn’t sprinkle too much for me!”

“It’d make icicles all over you, and——”

“I wish it would,” said Sam. “I’d eat ’em up.”

“And it’d snow on you——”

“Yay! I’d swaller it as fast as it’d come down. I wish I had a barrel o’ snow right now. I wish this whole barn was full of it. I wish they wasn’t anything in the whole world except just good ole snow.”

Penrod and Herman rose and went out to the hydrant, where they drank long and ardently. Sam was still talking about snow when they returned.

“No, I wouldn’t just roll in it. I’d stick it all round inside my clo’es, and fill my hat. No, I’d freeze a big pile of it all hard, and I’d roll her out flat and then I’d carry her down to some ole tailor’s and have him make me a suit out of her, and——”

“Can’t you keep still about your ole snow?” demanded Penrod petulantly. “Makes me so thirsty I can’t keep still, and I’ve drunk so much now I bet I bust. That ole hydrant water’s mighty near hot anyway.”

“I’m goin’ to have a big store, when I grow up,” volunteered Maurice.

“Candy store?” asked Penrod.

“No, sir! I’ll have candy in it, but not to eat, so much. It’s goin’ to be a deportment store: ladies’ clothes, gentlemen’s clothes, neckties, china goods, leather goods, nice lines in woollings and lace goods—-”

“Yay! I wouldn’t give a five-for-a-cent marble for your whole store,” said Sam. “Would you, Penrod?”

“Not for ten of ’em; not for a million of ’em! I’m goin’ to have—”

“Wait!” clamoured Maurice. “You’d be foolish, because they’d be a toy deportment in my store where they’d be a hunderd marbles! So, how much would you think your five-for-a-cent marble counts for? And when I’m keepin’ my store I’m goin’ to get married.”

“Yay!” shrieked Sam derisively. “Married! Listen!” Penrod and

Herman joined in the howl of contempt.

"Certumly I'll get married," asserted Maurice stoutly. "I'll get married to Marjorie Jones. She likes me awful good, and I'm her beau."

"What makes you think so?" inquired Penrod in a cryptic voice.

"Because she's my beau, too," came the prompt answer. "I'm her beau because she's my beau; I guess that's plenty reason! I'll get married to her as soon as I get my store running nice."

Penrod looked upon him darkly, but, for the moment, held his peace.

"Married!" jeered Sam Williams. "Married to Marjorie Jones! You're the only boy I ever heard say he was going to get married. I wouldn't get married for–why, I wouldn't for–for——" Unable to think of any inducement the mere mention of which would not be ridiculously incommensurate, he proceeded: "I wouldn't do it! What you want to get married for? What do married people do, except just come home tired, and worry around and kind of scold? You better not do it, M'rice; you'll be mighty sorry."

"Everybody gets married," stated Maurice, holding his ground.

"They gotta."

“I’ll bet I don’t!” Sam returned hotly. “They better catch me before they tell me I have to. Anyway, I bet nobody has to get married unless they want to.”

“They do, too,” insisted Maurice. “They gotta!”

“Who told you?”

“Look at what my own papa told me!” cried Maurice, heated with argument. “Didn’t he tell me your papa had to marry your mamma, or else he never’d got to handle a cent of her money? Certumly, people gotta marry. Everybody. You don’t know anybody over twenty years old that isn’t married–except maybe teachers.”

“Look at policemen!” shouted Sam triumphantly. ‘You don’t s’pose anybody can make policemen get married, I reckon, do you?”

“Well, policemen, maybe,” Maurice was forced to admit.

“Policemen and teachers don’t, but everybody else gotta.”

“Well, I’ll be a policeman,” said Sam. “then I guess they won’t come around tellin’ me I have to get married. What you goin’ to be, Penrod?”

“Chief police,” said the laconic Penrod.

“What you?” Sam inquired of quiet Georgie Bassett.

“I am going to be,” said Georgie, consciously, “a minister.”

This announcement created a sensation so profound that it was followed by silence. Herman was the first to speak.

“You mean preachuh?” he asked incredulously. “You go’ preach?”

“Yes,” answered Georgie, looking like Saint Cecilia at the organ. Herman was impressed. “You know all ‘at preachuh talk?”

“I’m going to learn it,” said Georgie simply.

“How loud kin you holler?” asked Herman doubtfully.

“He can’t holler at all,” Penrod interposed with scorn. “He hollers like a girl. He’s the poorest hollerer in town!”

Herman shook his head. Evidently he thought Georgie’s chance of being ordained very slender. Nevertheless, a final question put to the candidate by the coloured expert seemed to admit one ray of hope.

“How good kin you clim a pole?”

“He can’t climb one at all,” Penrod answered for Georgie. “Over at Sam’s turning-pole you ought to see him try to—-”

“Preachers don’t have to climb poles,” Georgie said with dignity.
“Good ones do,” declared Herman. “Bes’ one ev’ I hear, he clim up an’ down same as a circus man. One n’em big ‘vivals outen whens we livin’ on a fahm, preachuh clim big pole right in a middle o’ the church, what was to hol’ roof up. He clim way high up, an’ holler: ‘Goin’ to heavum, goin’ to heavum, goin’ to heavum now. Hallelujah, praise my Lawd!’ An’ he slide down little, an’ holler: ‘Devil’s got a hol’ o’ my coat- tails; devil tryin’ to drag me down! Sinnuhs, take wawnun! Devil got a hol’ o’ my coat-tails; I’m a-goin’ to hell, oh Lawd!’ Nex’, he clim up little mo’, an’ yell an’ holler: ‘Done shuck ole devil loose; goin’ straight to heavum agin! Goin’ to heavum, goin’ to heavum, my Lawd!’ Nex’, he slide down some mo’ an’ holler, ‘Leggo my coat-tails, ole devil! Goin’ to hell agin, sinnuhs! Goin’ straight to hell, my Lawd!’ An’ he clim an’ he slide, an’ he slide, an’ he clim, an’ all time holler: ‘Now ‘m a-goin’ to heavum; now ‘m a-goin’ to hell! Goin’ to heavum, heavum, heavum, my Lawd!’ Las’ he slide all a-way down, jes’ a-squallin’ an’ a-kickin’ an’ a-rarin’ up an’ squealin’, ‘Goin’ to hell. Goin’ to hell! Ole Satum got my soul! Goin’ to hell! Goin’ to hell! Goin’ to hell, hell, hell!”

Herman possessed that extraordinary facility for vivid acting which is the great native gift of his race, and he enchained his listeners. They sat fascinated and spellbound.

“Herman, tell that again!” said Penrod, breathlessly.

Herman, nothing loath, accepted the encore and repeated the Miltonic episode, expanding it somewhat, and dwelling with a fine art upon those portions of the narrative which he perceived to be most exciting to his audience. Plainly, they thrilled less to Paradise gained than to its losing, and the dreadful climax of the descent into the Pit was the greatest treat of all.

The effect was immense and instant. Penrod sprang to his feet.

“Georgie Bassett couldn’t do that to save his life,” he declared.

“I’m goin’ to be a preacher! I’d be all right for one, wouldn’t I, Herman?”

“So am I!” Sam Williams echoed loudly. “I guess I can do it if you can. I’d be better’n Penrod, wouldn’t I, Herman?”

“I am, too!” Maurice shouted. “I got a stronger voice than anybody here, and I’d like to know what–”

The three clamoured together indistinguishably, each asserting his qualifications for the ministry according to Herman’s theory, which had been accepted by these sudden converts without question.

“Listen to me!” Maurice bellowed, proving his claim to at least the voice by drowning the others. “Maybe I can’t climb a pole so good, but who can holler louder’n this? Listen to me-e-e!”

“Shut up!” cried Penrod, irritated. “Go to heaven; go to hell!”

“Oo-o-oh!” exclaimed Georgie Bassett, profoundly shocked.

Sam and Maurice, awed by Penrod’s daring, ceased from turmoil, staring wide-eyed.

“You cursed and swore!” said Georgie.

“I did not!” cried Penrod, hotly. “That isn’t swearing.”

“You said, ‘Go to a big H’!” said Georgie.

“I did not! I said, ‘Go to heaven,’ before I said a big H. That isn’t swearing, is it, Herman? It’s almost what the preacher said, ain’t it, Herman? It ain’t swearing now, any more—not if you put ‘go to heaven’ with it, is it, Herman? You can say it all you want to, long as you say ‘go to heaven’ first, can’t you, Herman? Anybody can say it if the preacher says it, can’t they, Herman? I guess I know when I ain’t swearing, don’t I, Herman?”

Judge Herman ruled for the defendant, and Penrod was considered to have carried his point. With fine consistency, the

conclave established that it was proper for the general public to "say it," provided "go to heaven" should in all cases precede it. This prefix was pronounced a perfect disinfectant, removing all odour of impiety or insult; and, with the exception of Georgie Bassett (who maintained that the minister's words were "going" and "gone," not "go"), all the boys proceeded to exercise their new privilege so lavishly that they tired of it.

But there was no diminution of evangelical ardour; again were heard the clamours of dispute as to which was the best qualified for the ministry, each of the claimants appealing passionately to Herman, who, pleased but confused, appeared to be incapable of arriving at a decision.

During a pause, Georgie Bassett asserted his prior rights. "Who said it first, I'd like to know?" he demanded. "I was going to be a minister from long back of to-day, I guess. And I guess I said I was going to be a minister right to-day before any of you said anything at all. Didn't I, Herman? You heard me, didn't you, Herman? That's the very thing started you talking about it, wasn't it, Herman?"

"You' right," said Herman. "You the firs' one to say it."

Penrod, Sam, and Maurice immediately lost faith in Herman.

"What if you did say it first?" Penrod shouted. "You couldn't be a

minister if you were a hunderd years old!"

"I bet his mother wouldn't let him be one," said Sam. "She never lets him do anything."

"She would, too," retorted Georgie. "Ever since I was little, she—_"
"He's too sissy to be a preacher!" cried Maurice. "Listen at his squeaky voice!"

"I'm going to be a better minister," shouted Georgie, "than all three of you put together. I could do it with my left hand!"
The three laughed bitingly in chorus. They jeered, derided, scoffed, and raised an uproar which would have had its effect upon much stronger nerves than Georgie's. For a time he contained his rising choler and chanted monotonously, over and over: "I could! I could, too! I could! I could, too!" But their tumult wore upon him, and he decided to avail himself of the recent decision whereby a big H was rendered innocuous and unprofane. Having used the expression once, he found it comforting, and substituted it for: "I could! I could, too!"

But it relieved him only temporarily. His tormentors were unaffected by it and increased their howlings, until at last Georgie lost his head altogether. Badgered beyond bearing, his eyes shining with a wild light, he broke through the besieging trio, hurling little Maurice from his path with a frantic hand.

“I’ll show you!” he cried, in this sudden frenzy. “You give me a chance, and I’ll prove it right now!”

“That’s talkin’ business!” shouted Penrod. “Everybody keep still a minute. Everybody!”

He took command of the situation at once, displaying a fine capacity for organization and system. It needed only a few minutes to set order in the place of confusion and to determine, with the full concurrence of all parties, the conditions under which Georgie Bassett was to defend his claim by undergoing what may be perhaps intelligibly defined as the Herman test. Georgie declared he could do it easily. He was in a state of great excitement and in no condition to think calmly or, probably, he would not have made the attempt at all. Certainly he was overconfident.

Chapter 27: Conclusion of the Quiet Afternoon

It was during the discussion of the details of this enterprise that Georgie's mother, a short distance down the street, received a few female callers, who came by appointment to drink a glass of iced tea with her, and to meet the Rev. Mr. Kinosling. Mr. Kinosling was proving almost formidably interesting to the women and girls of his own and other flocks. What favour of his fellow clergymen a slight precociousness of manner and pronunciation cost him was more than balanced by the visible ecstasies of ladies. They blossomed at his touch.

He had just entered Mrs. Bassett's front door, when the son of the house, followed by an intent and earnest company of four, opened the alley gate and came into the yard. The unconscious Mrs. Bassett was about to have her first experience of a fatal coincidence. It was her first, because she was the mother of a boy so well behaved that he had become a proverb of transcendency. Fatal coincidences were plentiful in the Schofield and Williams families, and would have been familiar to Mrs. Bassett had Georgie been permitted greater intimacy with Penrod and Sam. Mr. Kinosling sipped his iced tea and looked about, him approvingly. Seven ladies leaned forward, for it was to be seen that he meant to speak.

“This cool room is a relief,” he said, waving a graceful hand in a neatly limited gesture, which everybody’s eyes followed, his own included. “It is a relief and a retreat. The windows open, the blinds closed–that is as it should be. It is a retreat, a fastness, a bastion against the heat’s assault. For me, a quiet room–a quiet room and a book, a volume in the hand, held lightly between the fingers. A volume of poems, lines metrical and cadenced; something by a sound Victorian. We have no later poets.”

“Swinburne?” suggested Miss Beam, an eager spinster.

“Swinburne, Mr. Kinosling? Ah, Swinburne!”

“Not Swinburne,” said Mr. Kinosling chastely. “No.”

That concluded all the remarks about Swinburne.

Miss Beam retired in confusion behind another lady; and somehow there became diffused an impression that Miss Beam was erotic.

“I do not observe your manly little son,” Mr. Kinosling addressed his hostess.

“He’s out playing in the yard,” Mrs. Bassett returned. “I heard his voice just now, I think.”

“Everywhere I hear wonderful report of him,” said Mr. Kinosling.

“I may say that I understand boys, and I feel that he is a rare, a fine, a pure, a lofty spirit. I say spirit, for spirit is the word I hear spoken of him.”

A chorus of enthusiastic approbation affirmed the accuracy of this proclamation, and Mrs. Bassett flushed with pleasure. Georgie’s spiritual perfection was demonstrated by instances of it, related by the visitors; his piety was cited, and wonderful things he had said were quoted.

“Not all boys are pure, of fine spirit, of high mind,” said Mr. Kinosling, and continued with true feeling: “You have a neighbour, dear Mrs. Bassett, whose household I indeed really feel it quite impossible to visit until such time when better, firmer, stronger handed, more determined discipline shall prevail. I find Mr. and Mrs. Schofield and their daughter charming—-”

Three or four ladies said “Oh!” and spoke a name simultaneously. It was as if they had said, “Oh, the bubonic plague!”

“Oh! Penrod Schofield!”

“Georgie does not play with him,” said Mrs. Bassett quickly– “that is, he avoids him as much as he can without hurting Penrod’s feelings. Georgie is very sensitive to giving pain. I

suppose a mother should not tell these things, and I know people who talk about their own children are dreadful bores, but it was only last Thursday night that Georgie looked up in my face so sweetly, after he had said his prayers and his little cheeks flushed, as he said: "Mamma, I think it would be right for me to go more with Penrod. I think it would make him a better boy."

A sibilance went about the room. "Sweet! How sweet! The sweet little soul! Ah, sweet!"

"And that very afternoon," continued Mrs. Bassett, "he had come home in a dreadful state. Penrod had thrown tar all over him."

"Your son has a forgiving spirit!" said Mr. Kinosling with vehemence. "A too forgiving spirit, perhaps." He set down his glass. "No more, I thank you. No more cake, I thank you. Was it not Cardinal Newman who said——"

He was interrupted by the sounds of an altercation just outside the closed blinds of the window nearest him.

"Let him pick his tree!" It was the voice of Samuel Williams. "Didn't we come over here to give him one of his own trees? Give him a fair show, can't you?"

"The little lads!" Mr. Kinosling smiled. "They have their games, their outdoor sports, their pastimes. The young muscles are

toughening. The sun will not harm them. They grow; they expand; they learn. They learn fair play, honour, courtesy, from one another, as pebbles grow round in the brook. They learn more from themselves than from us. They take shape, form, outline. Let them."

"Mr. Kinosling!" Another spinster–undeterred by what had happened to Miss Beam–leaned fair forward, her face shining and ardent. "Mr. Kinosling, there's a question I do wish to ask you."
"My dear Miss Cosslit," Mr. Kinosling responded, again waving his hand and watching it, "I am entirely at your disposal."
"Was Joan of Arc," she asked fervently, "inspired by spirits?"
He smiled indulgently. "Yes–and no," he said. "One must give both answers. One must give the answer, yes; one must give the answer, no."

"Oh, thank you!" said Miss Cosslit, blushing.

"She's one of my great enthusiasms, you know."

"And I have a question, too," urged Mrs. Lora Rewbush, after a moment's hasty concentration. "I've never been able to settle it for myself, but now——"

"Yes?" said Mr. Kinosling encouragingly.

"Is–ah–is–oh, yes: Is Sanskrit a more difficult language than

Spanish, Mr. Kinosling?"

"It depends upon the student," replied the oracle smiling. "One must not look for linguists everywhere. In my own especial case–if one may cite one's self as an example–I found no great, no insurmountable difficulty in mastering, in conquering either."
"And may I ask one?" ventured Mrs. Bassett. "Do you think it is right to wear egrets?"

"There are marks of quality, of caste, of social distinction," Mr. Kinosling began, "which must be permitted, allowed, though perhaps regulated. Social distinction, one observes, almost invariably implies spiritual distinction as well. Distinction of circumstances is accompanied by mental distinction. Distinction is hereditary; it descends from father to son, and if there is one thing more true than 'Like father, like son,' it is–" he bowed gallantly to Mrs. Bassett–"it is, 'Like mother, like son.' What these good ladies have said this afternoon of your——"

This was the fatal instant. There smote upon all ears the voice of Georgie, painfully shrill and penetrating–fraught with protest and protracted, strain. His plain words consisted of the newly sanctioned and disinfected curse with a big H.

With an ejaculation of horror, Mrs. Bassett sprang to the window and threw open the blinds.

Georgie's back was disclosed to the view of the tea-party. He was endeavouring to ascend a maple tree about twelve feet from the window. Embracing the trunk with arms and legs, he had managed to squirm to a point above the heads of Penrod and Herman, who stood close by, watching him earnestly–Penrod being obviously in charge of the performance. Across the yard were Sam Williams and Maurice Levy, acting as a jury on the question of voice-power, and it was to a complaint of theirs that Georgie had just replied.

"That's right, Georgie," said Penrod encouragingly. "They can, too, hear you. Let her go!"

"Going to heaven!" shrieked Georgie, squirming up another inch. "Going to heaven, heaven, heaven!"

His mother's frenzied attempts to attract his attention failed utterly. Georgie was using the full power of his lungs, deafening his own ears to all other sounds. Mrs. Bassett called in vain; while the tea-party stood petrified in a cluster about the window.

"Going to heaven!" Georgie bellowed. "Going to heaven! Going to heaven, my Lord! Going to heaven, heaven, heaven!"

He tried to climb higher, but began to slip downward, his exertions causing damage to his apparel. A button flew into the air, and his knickerbockers and his waistband severed relations.

“Devil’s got my coat-tails, sinners! Old devil’s got my coat-tails!” he announced appropriately. Then he began to slide.

He relaxed his clasp of the tree and slid to the ground.

“Going to hell!” shrieked Georgie, reaching a high pitch of enthusiasm in this great climax. “Going to hell! Going to hell! I’m gone to hell, hell, hell!”

With a loud scream, Mrs. Bassett threw herself out of the window, alighting by some miracle upon her feet with ankles unsprained. Mr. Kinosling, feeling that his presence as spiritual adviser was demanded in the yard, followed with greater dignity through the front door. At the corner of the house a small departing figure collided with him violently. It was Penrod, tactfully withdrawing from what promised to be a family scene of unusual painfulness. Mr. Kinosling seized him by the shoulders and, giving way to emotion, shook him viciously.

“You horrible boy!” exclaimed Mr. Kinosling. “You ruffianly creature! Do you know what’s going to happen to you when you grow up? Do you realize what you’re going to be!”

With flashing eyes, the indignant boy made know his unshaken purpose. He shouted the reply:

“A minister!”

Chapter 28: Twelve

This busy globe which spawns us is as incapable of flattery and as intent upon its own affair, whatever that is, as a gyroscope; it keeps steadily whirling along its lawful track, and, thus far seeming to hold a right of way, spins doggedly on, with no perceptible diminution of speed to mark the most gigantic human events–it did not pause to pant and recuperate even when what seemed to Penrod its principal purpose was accomplished, and an enormous shadow, vanishing westward over its surface, marked the dawn of his twelfth birthday.

To be twelve is an attainment worth the struggle. A boy, just twelve, is like a Frenchman just elected to the Academy. Distinction and honour wait upon him. Younger boys show deference to a person of twelve: his experience is guaranteed, his judgment, therefore, mellow; consequently, his influence is profound. Eleven is not quite satisfactory: it is only an approach. Eleven has the disadvantage of six, of nineteen, of forty-four, and of sixty-nine. But, like twelve, seven is an honourable age, and

the ambition to attain it is laudable. People look forward to being seven. Similarly, twenty is worthy, and so, arbitrarily, is twenty-one; forty-five has great solidity; seventy is most commendable and each year thereafter an increasing honour. Thirteen is embarrassed by the beginnings of a new colthood; the child becomes a youth. But twelve is the very top of boyhood.

Dressing, that morning, Penrod felt that the world was changed from the world of yesterday. For one thing, he seemed to own more of it; this day was his day. And it was a day worth owning; the midsummer sunshine, pouring gold through his window, came from a cool sky, and a breeze moved pleasantly in his hair as he leaned from the sill to watch the tribe of clattering blackbirds take wing, following their leader from the trees in the yard to the day's work in the open country. The blackbirds were his, as the sunshine and the breeze were his, for they all belonged to the day which was his birthday and therefore most surely his. Pride suffused him: he was twelve!

His father and his mother and Margaret seemed to understand the difference between to-day and yesterday. They were at the table when he descended, and they gave him a greeting which of itself marked the milestone. Habitually, his entrance into a room where his elders sat brought a cloud of apprehension: they were prone to look up in pathetic expectancy, as if their thought was, "What new awfulness is he going to start now?" But this morning they

laughed; his mother rose and kissed him twelve times, so did Margaret; and his father shouted, “Well, well! How’s the man?” Then his mother gave him a Bible and “The Vicar of Wakefield”; Margaret gave him a pair of silver-mounted hair brushes; and his father gave him a “Pocket Atlas” and a small compass.

“And now, Penrod,” said his mother, after breakfast, “I’m going to take you out in the country to pay your birthday respects to Aunt Sarah Crim.”

Aunt Sarah Crim, Penrod’s great-aunt, was his oldest living relative. She was ninety, and when Mrs. Schofield and Penrod alighted from a carriage at her gate they found her digging with a spade in the garden.

“I’m glad you brought him,” she said, desisting from labour. “Jinny’s baking a cake I’m going to send for his birthday party. Bring him in the house. I’ve got something for him.”

She led the way to her “sitting-room,” which had a pleasant smell, unlike any other smell, and, opening the drawer of a shining old what-not, took therefrom a boy’s “sling-shot,” made of a forked stick, two strips of rubber and a bit of leather.

“This isn’t for you,” she said, placing it in Penrod’s eager hand. “No. It would break all to pieces the first time you tried to shoot it, because it is thirty-five years old. I want to send it back to your

father. I think it's time. You give it to him from me, and tell him I say I believe I can trust him with it now. I took it away from him thirty-five years ago, one day after he'd killed my best hen with it, accidentally, and broken a glass pitcher on the back porch with it—accidentally. He doesn't look like a person who's ever done things of that sort, and I suppose he's forgotten it so well that he believes he never did, but if you give it to him from me I think he'll remember. You look like him, Penrod. He was anything but a handsome boy."

After this final bit of reminiscence—probably designed to be repeated to Mr. Schofield—she disappeared in the direction of the kitchen, and returned with a pitcher of lemonade and a blue china dish sweetly freighted with flat ginger cookies of a composition that was her own secret. Then, having set this collation before her guests, she presented Penrod with a superb, intricate, and very modern machine of destructive capacities almost limitless. She called it a pocket-knife.

"I suppose you'll do something horrible with it," she said, composedly. "I hear you do that with everything, anyhow, so you might as well do it with this, and have more fun out of it. They tell me you're the Worst Boy in Town."

"Oh, Aunt Sarah!" Mrs. Schofield lifted a protesting hand.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Crim.

“But on his birthday!”

“That’s the time to say it. Penrod, aren’t you the Worst Boy in Town?”

Penrod, gazing fondly upon his knife and eating cookies rapidly, answered as a matter of course, and absently, “Yes’m.”

“Certainly!” said Mrs. Crim. “Once you accept a thing about yourself as established and settled, it’s all right. Nobody minds. Boys are just people, really.”

“No, no!” Mrs. Schofield cried, involuntarily.

“Yes, they are,” returned Aunt Sarah. “Only they’re not quite so awful, because they haven’t learned to cover themselves all over with little pretences. When Penrod grows up he’ll be just the same as he is now, except that whenever he does what he wants to do he’ll tell himself and other people a little story about it to make his reason for doing it seem nice and pretty and noble.”

“No, I won’t!” said Penrod suddenly.

“There’s one cookie left,” observed Aunt Sarah. “Are you going to eat it?”

“Well,” said her great-nephew, thoughtfully, “I guess I better.”

“Why?” asked the old lady. “Why do you guess you’d ‘better’?”

“Well,” said Penrod, with a full mouth, “it might get all dried up if nobody took it, and get thrown out and wasted.”

“You’re beginning finely,” Mrs. Crim remarked. “A year ago you’d have taken the cookie without the same sense of thrift.”

“Ma’am?”

“Nothing. I see that you’re twelve years old, that’s all. There are more cookies, Penrod.” She went away, returning with a fresh supply and the observation, “Of course, you’ll be sick before the day’s over; you might as well get a good start.”

Mrs. Schofield looked thoughtful. “Aunt Sarah,” she ventured, “don’t you really think we improve as we get older?”

“Meaning,” said the old lady, “that Penrod hasn’t much chance to escape the penitentiary if he doesn’t? Well, we do learn to restrain ourselves in some things; and there are people who really want someone else to take the last cookie, though they aren’t very common. But it’s all right, the world seems to be getting on.” She gazed whimsically upon her great-nephew and added, “Of course, when you watch a boy and think about him, it doesn’t seem to be getting on very fast.”

Penrod moved uneasily in his chair; he was conscious that he was her topic but unable to make out whether or not her observations were complimentary; he inclined to think they were not. Mrs. Crim settled the question for him.

"I suppose Penrod is regarded as the neighbourhood curse?"
"Oh, no," cried Mrs. Schofield. "He——"

"I dare say the neighbours are right," continued the old lady placidly. "He's had to repeat the history of the race and go through all the stages from the primordial to barbarism. You don't expect boys to be civilized, do you?"

"Well, I——"

"You might as well expect eggs to crow. No; you've got to take boys as they are, and learn to know them as they are."

"Naturally, Aunt Sarah," said Mrs. Schofield, "I know Penrod."

Aunt Sarah laughed heartily. "Do you think his father knows him, too?"

"Of course, men are different," Mrs. Schofield returned, apologetically. "But a mother knows——"

“Penrod,” said Aunt Sarah, solemnly, “does your father understand you?”

“Ma’am?”

“About as much as he’d understand Sitting Bull!” she laughed.

“And I’ll tell you what your mother thinks you are, Penrod. Her real belief is that you’re a novice in a convent.”

“Ma’am?”

“Aunt Sarah!”

“I know she thinks that, because whenever you don’t behave like a novice she’s disappointed in you. And your father really believes that you’re a decorous, well-trained young business man, and whenever you don’t live up to that standard you get on his nerves and he thinks you need a walloping. I’m sure a day very seldom passes without their both saying they don’t know what on earth to do with you. Does whipping do you any good, Penrod?”

“Ma’am?”

“Go on and finish the lemonade; there’s about glassful left. Oh, take it, take it; and don’t say why! Of course you’re a little pig.”

Penrod laughed gratefully, his eyes fixed upon her over the rim of his uptilted glass.

“Fill yourself up uncomfortably,” said the old lady. “You’re twelve years old, and you ought to be happy—if you aren’t anything else. It’s taken over nineteen hundred years of Christianity and some hundreds of thousands of years of other things to produce you, and there you sit!”

“Ma’am?”

“It’ll be your turn to struggle and muss things up, for the betterment of posterity, soon enough,” said Aunt Sarah Crim.

“Drink your lemonade!”

Chapter 29: Fanchon

"Aunt Sarah's a funny old lady," Penrod observed, on the way back to the town. "What's she want me to give papa this old sling for? Last thing she said was to be sure not to forget to give it to him. He don't want it; and she said, herself, it ain't any good. She's older than you or papa, isn't she?"

"About fifty years older," answered Mrs. Schofield, turning upon him a stare of perplexity. "Don't cut into the leather with your new knife, dear; the livery man might ask us to pay if—- No. I wouldn't scrape the paint off, either–nor whittle your shoe with it. Couldn't you put it up until we get home?"

"We goin' straight home?"

"No. We're going to stop at Mrs. Gelbraith's and ask a strange little girl to come to your party, this afternoon."

"Who?"

"Her name is Fanchon. She's Mrs. Gelbraith's little niece."

“What makes her so queer?”

“I didn’t say she’s queer.”

“You said—-”

“No; I mean that she is a stranger. She lives in New York and has come to visit here.”

“What’s she live in New York for?”

“Because her parents live there. You must be very nice to her, Penrod; she has been very carefully brought up. Besides, she doesn’t know the children here, and you must help to keep her from feeling lonely at your party.”

“Yes’m.”

When they reached Mrs. Gelbraith’s, Penrod sat patiently humped upon a gilt chair during the lengthy exchange of greetings between his mother. and Mrs. Gelbraith. That is one of the things a boy must learn to bear: when his mother meets a compeer there is always a long and dreary wait for him, while the two appear to be using strange symbols of speech, talking for the greater part, it seems to him, simultaneously, and employing a wholly incomprehensible system of emphasis at other times not in vogue. Penrod twisted his legs, his cap and his nose.

“Here she is!” Mrs. Gelbraith cried, unexpectedly, and a dark-haired, demure person entered the room wearing a look of gracious social expectancy. In years she was eleven, in manner about sixty-five, and evidently had lived much at court. She performed a curtsey in acknowledgment of Mrs. Schofield’s greeting, and bestowed her hand upon Penrod, who had entertained no hope of such an honour, showed his surprise that it should come to him, and was plainly unable to decide what to do about it.

“Fanchon, dear,” said Mrs. Gelbraith, “take Penrod out in the yard for a while, and play.”

“Let go the little girl’s hand, Penrod,” Mrs. Schofield laughed, as the children turned toward the door.

Penrod hastily dropped the small hand, and exclaiming, with simple honesty, “Why, I don’t want it!” followed Fanchon out into the sunshiny yard, where they came to a halt and surveyed each other.

Penrod stared awkwardly at Fanchon, no other occupation suggesting itself to him, while Fanchon, with the utmost coolness, made a very thorough visual examination of Penrod, favouring him with an estimating scrutiny which lasted until he literally wiggled. Finally, she spoke.

“Where do you buy your ties?” she asked.

“What?”

“Where do you buy your neckties? Papa gets his at Skoone’s. You ought to get yours there. I’m sure the one you’re wearing isn’t from Skoone’s.”

“Skoone’s?” Penrod repeated. “Skoone’s?”

“On Fifth Avenue,” said Fanchon. “It’s a very smart shop, the men say.”

“Men?” echoed Penrod, in a hazy whisper. “Men?”

“Where do your people go in summer?” inquired the lady. “We go to Long Shore, but so many middle-class people have begun coming there, mamma thinks of leaving. The middle classes are simply awful, don’t you think?”

“What?”

“They’re so boorjaw. You speak French, of course?”

“Me?”

“We ran over to Paris last year. It’s lovely, don’t you think? Don’t

you love the Rue de la Paix?"

Penrod wandered in a labyrinth. This girl seemed to be talking, but her words were dumfounding, and of course there was no way for him to know that he was really listening to her mother. It was his first meeting with one of those grown-up little girls, wonderful product of the winter apartment and summer hotel; and Fanchon, an only child, was a star of the brand. He began to feel resentful.

"I suppose," she went on, "I'll find everything here fearfully Western. Some nice people called yesterday, though. Do you know the Magsworth Bittses? Auntie says they're charming. Will Roddy be at your party?"

"I guess he will," returned Penrod, finding this intelligible. "The mutt!"

"Really!" Fanchon exclaimed airily. "Aren't you great pals with him?"

"What's 'pals'?"

"Good heavens! Don't you know what it means to say you're 'great pals' with any one? You are an odd child!"

It was too much.

“Oh, Bugs!” said Penrod.

This bit of ruffianism had a curious effect. Fanchon looked upon him with sudden favour.

“I like you, Penrod!” she said, in an odd way, and, whatever else there may have been in her manner, there certainly was no shyness.

“Oh, Bugs!” This repetition may have lacked gallantry, but it was uttered in no very decided tone. Penrod was shaken.

“Yes, I do!” She stepped closer to him, smiling. “Your hair is ever so pretty.”

Sailors’ parrots swear like mariners, they say; and gay mothers ought to realize that all children are imitative, for, as the precocious Fanchon leaned toward Penrod, the manner in which she looked into his eyes might have made a thoughtful observer wonder where she had learned her pretty ways.

Penrod was even more confused than he had been by her previous mysteries: but his confusion was of a distinctly pleasant and alluring nature: he wanted more of it. Looking intentionally into another person’s eyes is an act unknown to childhood; and Penrod’s discovery that it could be done was sensational. He had never thought of looking into the eyes of Marjorie Jones.

Despite all anguish, contumely, tar, and Maurice Levy, he still secretly thought of Marjorie, with pathetic constancy, as his "beau"–though that is not how he would have spelled it. Marjorie was beautiful; her curls were long and the colour of amber; her nose was straight and her freckles were honest; she was much prettier than this accomplished visitor. But beauty is not all.
"I do!" breathed Fanchon, softly.

She seemed to him a fairy creature from some rosier world than this. So humble is the human heart, it glorifies and makes glamorous almost any poor thing that says to it: "I like you!"

Penrod was enslaved. He swallowed, coughed, scratched the back of his neck, and said, disjointedly:

"Well–I don't care if you want to. I just as soon."

"We'll dance together," said Fanchon, "at your party."

"I guess so. I just as soon."

"Don't you want to, Penrod?"

"Well, I'm willing to."

"No. Say you want to!"

“Well—-”

He used his toe as a gimlet, boring into the ground, his wide open eyes staring with intense vacancy at a button on his sleeve.

His mother appeared upon the porch in departure, calling farewells over her shoulder to Mrs. Gelbraith, who stood in the doorway.

“Say it!” whispered Fanchon.

“Well, I just as soon.”

She seemed satisfied.

Chapter 30: The Birthday Party

A dancing floor had been laid upon a platform in the yard, when Mrs. Schofield and her son arrived at their own abode; and a white and scarlet striped canopy was in process of erection overhead, to shelter the dancers from the sun. Workmen were busy everywhere under the direction of Margaret, and the smitten heart of Penrod began to beat rapidly. All this was for him; he was Twelve!

After lunch, he underwent an elaborate toilette and murmured not. For the first time in his life he knew the wish to be sand-papered, waxed, and polished to the highest possible degree. And when the operation was over, he stood before the mirror in new bloom, feeling encouraged to hope that his resemblance to his father was not so strong as Aunt Sarah seemed to think.

The white gloves upon his hands had a pleasant smell, he found; and, as he came down the stairs, he had great content in the twinkling of his new dancing slippers. He stepped twice on each step, the better to enjoy their effect and at the same time he deeply inhaled the odour of the gloves. In spite of everything,

Penrod had his social capacities. Already it is to be perceived that there were in him the makings of a cotillon leader.

Then came from the yard a sound of tuning instruments, squeak of fiddle, croon of 'cello, a falling triangle ringing and tinkling to the floor; and he turned pale.

Chosen guests began to arrive, while Penrod, suffering from stage-fright and perspiration, stood beside his mother, in the "drawing-room," to receive them. He greeted unfamiliar acquaintances and intimate fellow-criminals with the same frigidity, murmuring: "'M glad to see y'," to all alike, largely increasing the embarrassment which always prevails at the beginning of children's festivities. His unnatural pomp and circumstance had so thoroughly upset him, in truth, that Marjorie Jones received a distinct shock, now to be related. Doctor Thrope, the kind old clergyman who had baptized Penrod, came in for a moment to congratulate the boy, and had just moved away when it was Marjorie's turn, in the line of children, to speak to Penrod. She gave him what she considered a forgiving look, and, because of the occasion, addressed him in a perfectly courteous manner. "I wish you many happy returns of the day, Penrod."

"Thank you, sir!" he returned, following Dr. Thrope with a glassy stare in which there was absolutely no recognition of Marjorie.

Then he greeted Maurice Levy, who was next to Marjorie: "'M

glad to see y'!"

Dumfounded, Marjorie turned aside, and stood near, observing Penrod with gravity. It was the first great surprise of her life. Customarily, she had seemed to place his character somewhere between that of the professional rioter and that of the orang-outang; nevertheless, her manner at times just hinted a consciousness that this Caliban was her property. Wherefore, she stared at him incredulously as his head bobbed up and down, in the dancing-school bow, greeting his guests. Then she heard an adult voice, near her, exclaim:

"What an exquisite child!"

Mariorie galanced up–a little consciously, though she was used to it–naturally curious to ascertain who was speaking of her. It was Sam Williams' mother addressing Mrs. Bassett, both being present to help Mrs. Schofield make the festivities festive.

"Exquisite!"

Here was a second heavy surprise for Marjorie: they were not looking at her. They were looking with beaming approval at a girl she had never seen; a dark and modish stranger of singularly composed and yet modest aspect. Her downcast eyes, becoming in one thus entering a crowded room, were all that produced the effect of modesty, counteracting something about her which

might have seemed too assured. She was very slender, very dainty, and her apparel was disheartening to the other girls; it was of a knowing picturesqueness wholly unfamiliar to them. There was a delicate trace of powder upon the lobe of Fanchon's left ear, and the outlines of her eyelids, if very closely scrutinized, would have revealed successful experimentation with a burnt match.

Marjorie's lovely eyes dilated: she learned the meaning of hatred at first sight. Observing the stranger with instinctive suspicion, all at once she seemed, to herself, awkward. Poor Marjorie underwent that experience which hearty, healthy, little girls and big girls undergo at one time or another–from heels to head she felt herself, somehow, too thick.

Fanchon leaned close to Penrod and whispered in his ear:

"Don't you forget!"

Penrod blushed.

Marjorie saw the blush. Her lovely eyes opened even wider, and in them there began to grow a light. It was the light of indignation;–at least, people whose eyes glow with that light always call it indignation.

Roderick Magsworth Bitts, Junior, approached Fanchon, when she

had made her courtesy to Mrs. Schofield. Fanchon whispered in Roderick's ear also.

"Your hair is pretty, Roddy! Don't forget what you said yesterday!"

Roderick likewise blushed.

Maurice Levy, captivated by the newcomer's appearance, pressed close to Roderick.

"Give us an intaduction, Roddy?"

Roddy being either reluctant or unable to perform the rite, Fanchon took matters into her own hands, and was presently favourably impressed with Maurice, receiving the information that his tie had been brought to him by his papa from Skoone's, whereupon she privately informed him that she liked wavy hair, and arranged to dance with him. Fanchon also thought sandy hair attractive, Sam Williams discovered, a few minutes later, and so catholic was her taste that a ring of boys quite encircled her before the musicians in the yard struck up their thrilling march, and Mrs. Schofield brought Penrod to escort the lady from out-of-town to the dancing pavilion.

Headed by this pair, the children sought partners and paraded solemnly out of the front door and round a corner of the house.

There they found the gay marquee; the small orchestra seated on the lawn at one side of it, and a punch bowl of lemonade inviting attention, under a tree. Decorously the small couples stepped upon the platform, one after another, and began to dance.
"It's not much like a children's party in our day," Mrs. Williams said to Penrod's mother. "We'd have been playing 'Quaker-meeting,' 'Clap-in, Clap-out,' or 'Going to Jerusalem,' I suppose."

"Yes, or 'Post-office' and 'Drop-the-handkerchief,'" said Mrs. Schofield. "Things change so quickly. Imagine asking little Fanchon Gelbraith to play 'London Bridge'! Penrod seems to be having a difficult time with her, poor boy; he wasn't a shining light in the dancing class."

However, Penrod's difficulty was not precisely of the kind his mother supposed. Fanchon was showing him a new step, which she taught her next partner in turn, continuing instructions during the dancing. The children crowded the floor, and in the kaleidoscopic jumble of bobbing heads and intermingling figures her extremely different style of motion was unobserved by the older people, who looked on, nodding time benevolently.

Fanchon fascinated girls as well as boys. Many of the former eagerly sought her acquaintance and thronged about her between the dances, when, accepting the deference due a cosmopolitan and an oracle of the mode, she gave demonstrations of the new

step to succeeding groups, professing astonishment to find it unknown: it had been "all the go," she explained, at the Long Shore Casino for fully two seasons. She pronounced "slow" a "Fancy Dance" executed during an intermission by Baby Rennsdale and Georgie Bassett, giving it as her opinion that Miss Rennsdale and Mr. Bassett were "dead ones"; and she expressed surprise that the punch bowl contained lemonade and not champagne.

The dancing continued, the new step gaining instantly in popularity, fresh couples adventuring with every number. The word "step" is somewhat misleading, nothing done with the feet being vital to the evolutions introduced by Fanchon. Fanchon's dance came from the Orient by a roundabout way; pausing in Spain, taking on a Gallic frankness in gallantry at the Bal Bullier in Paris, combining with a relative from the South Seas encountered in San Francisco, flavouring itself with a carefree negroid abandon in New Orleans, and, accumulating, too, something inexpressible from Mexico and South America, it kept, throughout its travels, to the underworld, or to circles where nature is extremely frank and rank, until at last it reached the dives of New York, when it immediately broke out in what is called civilized society. Thereafter it spread, in variously modified forms–some of them disinfected–to watering-places, and thence, carried by hundreds of older male and female Fanchons, over the country, being eagerly adopted everywhere and made wholly pure and respectable by the supreme moral axiom that anything is all

right if enough people do it. Everybody was doing it.

Not quite everybody. It was perhaps some test of this dance that earth could furnish no more grotesque sight than that of children doing it.

Earth, assisted by Fanchon, was furnishing this sight at Penrod's party. By the time ice-cream and cake arrived, about half the guests had either been initiated into the mysteries by Fanchon or were learning by imitation, and the education of the other half was resumed with the dancing, when the attendant ladies, unconscious of what was happening, withdrew into the house for tea.

"That orchestra's a dead one," Fanchon remarked to Penrod. "We ought to liven them up a little!"

She approached the musicians.

"Don't you know," she asked the leader, "the Slingo Sligo Slide?" The leader giggled, nodded, rapped with his bow upon his violin; and Penrod, following Fanchon back upon the dancing floor, blindly brushed with his elbow a solitary little figure standing aloof on the lawn at the edge of the platform.

It was Marjorie.

In no mood to approve of anything introduced by Fanchon, she had scornfully refused, from the first, to dance the new "step," and, because of its bonfire popularity, found herself neglected in a society where she had reigned as beauty and belle. Faithless Penrod, dazed by the sweeping Fanchon, had utterly forgotten the amber curls; he had not once asked Marjorie to dance. All afternoon the light of indignation had been growing brighter in her eyes, though Maurice Levy's defection to the lady from New York had not fanned this flame. From the moment Fanchon had whispered familiarly in Penrod's ear, and Penrod had blushed, Marjorie had been occupied exclusively with resentment against that guilty pair. It seemed to her that Penrod had no right to allow a strange girl to whisper in his ear; that his blushing, when the strange girl did it, was atrocious; and that the strange girl, herself, ought to be arrested.

Forgotten by the merrymakers, Marjorie stood alone upon the lawn, clenching her small fists, watching the new dance at its high tide, and hating it with a hatred that made every inch of her tremble. And, perhaps because jealousy is a great awakener of the virtues, she had a perception of something in it worse than lack of dignity–something vaguely but outrageously reprehensible.

Finally, when Penrod brushed by her, touched her with his elbow, and, did not even see her, Marjorie's state of mind (not unmingled with emotion!) became dangerous. In fact, a trained nurse, chancing to observe her at this juncture, would probably

have advised that she be taken home and put to bed. Marjorie was on the verge of hysterics.

She saw Fanchon and Penrod assume the double embrace required by the dance; the "Slingo Sligo Slide" burst from the orchestra like the lunatic shriek of a gin-maddened nigger; and all the little couples began to bob and dip and sway.

Marjorie made a scene. She sprang upon the platform and stamped her foot.

"Penrod Schofield!" she shouted. "You behave yourself!"

The remarkable girl took Penrod by the ear. By his ear she swung him away from Fanchon and faced him toward the lawn.

"You march straight out of here!" she commanded.

Penrod marched.

He was stunned; obeyed automatically, without question, and had very little realization of what was happening to him. Altogether, and without reason, he was in precisely the condition of an elderly spouse detected in flagrant misbehaviour. Marjorie, similarly, was in precisely the condition of the party who detects such misbehaviour. It may be added that she had acted with a

promptness, a decision and a disregard of social consequences all to be commended to the attention of ladies in like predicament.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself!” she raged, when they reached the lawn. “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”

“What for?” he inquired, helplessly.

“You be quiet!”

“But what’d I do, Marjorie? I haven’t done anything to you,” he pleaded. “I haven’t even seen you, all aftern——”

“You be quiet!” she cried, tears filling her eyes. “Keep still! You ugly boy! Shut up!”

She slapped him.

He should have understood from this how much she cared for him. But he rubbed his cheek and declared ruefully:

“I’ll never speak to you again!”

“You will, too!” she sobbed, passionately.

“I will not!”

He turned to leave her, but paused.

His mother, his sister Margaret, and their grownup friends had finished their tea and were approaching from the house. Other parents and guardians were with them, coming for their children; and there were carriages and automobiles waiting in the street. But the "Slingo Slide" went on, regardless.

The group of grown-up people hesitated and came to a halt, gazing at the pavilion.

"What are they doing?" gasped Mrs. Williams, blushing deeply.

"What is it? What is it?"

"What is it?" Mrs. Gelbraith echoed in a frightened whisper.

"What——"

"They're Tangoing!" cried Margaret Schofield. "Or Bunny Hugging or Grizzly Bearing, or——"

"They're only Turkey Trotting," said Robert Williams.

With fearful outcries the mothers, aunts, and sisters rushed upon the pavilion.

“Of course it was dreadful,” said Mrs. Schofield, an hour later, rendering her lord an account of the day, “but it was every bit the fault of that one extraordinary child. And of all the quiet, demur little things–that is, I mean, when she first came. We all spoke of how exquisite she seemed–so well trained, so finished! Eleven years old! I never saw anything like her in my life!”

“I suppose it’s the New Child,” her husband grunted.

“And to think of her saying there ought to have been champagne in the lemonade!”

“Probably she’d forgotten to bring her pocket flask,” he suggested musingly.

“But aren’t you proud of Penrod?” cried Penrod’s mother. “It was just as I told you: he was standing clear outside the pavilion—-”

“I never thought to see the day! And Penrod was the only boy not doing it, the only one to refuse? All the others were—-”

“Every one!” she returned triumphantly. “Even Georgie Bassett!”

“Well,” said Mr. Schofield, patting her on the shoulder. “I guess we can hold up our heads at last.”

Chapter 31: Over the Fence

Penrod was out in the yard, staring at the empty marquee. The sun was on the horizon line, so far behind the back fence, and a western window of the house blazed in gold unbearable to the eye: his day was nearly over. He sighed, and took from the inside pocket of his new jacket the “sling-shot” aunt Sarah Crim had given him that morning.

He snapped the rubbers absently. They held fast; and his next impulse was entirely irresistible. He found a shapely stone, fitted it to the leather, and drew back the ancient catapult for a shot. A sparrow hopped upon a branch between him and the house, and he aimed at the sparrow, but the reflection from the dazzling window struck in his eyes as he loosed the leather.

He missed the sparrow, but not the window. There was a loud crash, and to his horror he caught a glimpse of his father, stricken

in mid-shaving, ducking a shower of broken glass, glittering razor flourishing wildly. Words crashed with the glass, stentorian words, fragmentary but collossal.

Penrod stood petrified, a broken sling in his hand. He could hear his parent's booming descent of the back stairs, instant and furious; and then, red-hot above white lather, Mr. Schofield burst out of the kitchen door and hurtled forth upon his son.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, shaking Penrod by the shoulder. "Ten minutes ago, for the very first time in our lives, your mother and I were saying we were proud of you, and here you go and throw a rock at me through the window when I'm shaving for dinner!"

"I didn't!" Penrod quavered. "I was shooting at a sparrow, and the sun got in his eyes, and the sling broke——"

"What sling?"

"This'n."

"Where'd you get that devilish thing? Don't you know I've forbidden you a thousand times——"

"It ain't mine," said Penrod. "It's yours."

"What?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy meekly. "Aunt Sarah Crim gave it to me this morning and told me to give it back to you. She said she took it away from you thirty-five years ago. You killed her hen, she said. She told me some more to tell you, but I've forgotten."

"Oh!" said Mr. Schofield.

He took the broken sling in his hand, looked at it long and thoughtfully—and he looked longer, and quite as thoughtfully, at Penrod. Then he turned away, and walked toward the house.
"I'm sorry, papa," said Penrod.

Mr. Schofield coughed, and, as he reached the door, called back, but without turning his head.

"Never mind, little boy. A broken window isn't much harm."

When he had gone in, Penrod wandered down the yard to the back fence, climbed upon it, and sat in reverie there.

A slight figure appeared, likewise upon a fence, beyond two neighbouring yards.

"Yay, Penrod!" called comrade Sam Williams.

“Yay!” returned Penrod, mechanically.

“I caught Billy Blue Hill!” shouted Sam, describing retribution in a manner perfectly clear to his friend. “You were mighty lucky to get out of it.”

“I know that!”

“You wouldn’t of, if it hadn’t been for Marjorie.”

“Well, don’t I know that?” Penrod shouted, with heat.

“Well, so long!” called Sam, dropping from his fence; and the friendly voice came then, more faintly, “Many happy returns of the day, Penrod!”

And now, a plaintive little whine sounded from below Penrod’s feet, and, looking down, he saw that Duke, his wistful, old, scraggly dog sat in the grass, gazing seekingly up at him.
The last shaft of sunshine of that day fell graciously and like a blessing upon the boy sitting on the fence. Years afterward, a quiet sunset would recall to him sometimes the gentle evening of his twelfth birthday, and bring him the picture of his boy self, sitting in rosy light upon the fence, gazing pensively down upon his wistful, scraggly, little old dog, Duke. But something else, surpassing, he would remember of that hour, for, in the side street, close by, a pink skirt flickered from behind a shade tree to

the shelter of the fence, there was a gleam of amber curls, and Penrod started, as something like a tiny white wing fluttered by his head, and there came to his ears the sound of a light laugh and of light footsteps departing, the laughter tremulous, the footsteps fleet.

In the grass, between Duke's forepaws, there lay a white note, folded in the shape of a cocked hat, and the sun sent forth a final amazing glory as Penrod opened it and read: "Your my bow."

THE END