"PENROD: A BOY IN THE AIR"--BY BOOTH TARKINGTON

NEXT day Penrod acquired a dime by a simple and antique process which was without doubt sometimes practised by the boys of Babylon. When the teacher of his class in Sunday school requested the weekly contribution Penrod, fumbling honestly (at first) in the wrong pockets, managed to look so embarrassed that the gentle lady told him not to mind, and said she was often forgetful herself. He was so sweet about it that, looking into the future, Penrod began to feel confident of a small and regular income.

At the close of the afternoon services he did not go home, but proceeded to squander the funds withheld from China upon an orgy of the most pungently forbidden description. In a drug emporium near the church he purchased a five-cent sack of candy consisting for the most part of the heavily flavored hoofs of horned cattle, undeniably substantial, and so generously capable of resisting solution that the purchaser might reasonably be avaricious beyond reason who did not realize his money's worth.

Equipped with this collation Penrod contributed his remaining nickel to a picture show, maintained upon the seventh day by the legal but not the moral authorities. Here in cosey darkness he placidly insulted his liver with jawbreaker upon jaw-breaker from the paper sack, and in a surfeit of content watched the silent figures on the screen.

The film made a lasting impression upon him. It depicted with relentless pathos the drunkard's progress; beginning with his conversion to beer in the company of loose travelling men; pursuing him through an inexplicable lapse into evening clothes and the society of some remarkably painful ladies; next, exhibiting the effects of alcohol on the victim's domestic disposition. The unfortunate man was seen in the act of striking his wife and, subsequently, his pleading baby daughter with an abnormally heavy walking stick. Their flight—through the snow—to seek the protection of a relative was shown, and, finally, the drunkard's picturesque behavior at the portals of a madhouse.

So fascinated was Penrod that he postponed his departure until this film came around again, by which time he had finished his unnatural repast and almost, but not quite, decided against following the profession of a drunkard when he grew up. Emerging, satiated, from the theatre, a public timepiece before a jeweller's shop confronted him with an unexpected dial and imminent perplexities. How was he to explain at home these hours of dalliance? There was a steadfast rule that he return direct from Sunday school, and Sunday rules were important, because on that day there was his father, always at home and at hand, perilously ready for action. One of the hardest conditions of boyhood is the almost continuous strain put upon the powers of invention by the constant and harassing necessity for explanations of every natural act.

Proceeding homeward through the deepening twilight as rapidly as possible at a gait half skip and half canter, Penrod made up his mind in what manner he could account for his long delay, and as he drew nearer rehearsed in words the opening passage of his defence.

"Now see here," he determined to begin; "I do not wish to be blamed for things I couldn't help, more any other boy. I was going along the street by a cottage and a lady put her head out of the window and said her husband was drunk and whipping her and her little girl, and she asked me wouldn't I come in and help hold him. So I went in and tried to get hold of this drunken lady's husband where he was whipping their baby daughter, but he wouldn't pay any attention, and I told her I ought to be getting home, but she kep' on askin' me to stay"——

At this point he reached the corner of his own yard, where a coincidence not only checked the rehearsal of his eloquence but happily obviated all occasion for it. A cab from the station drew up in front of the gate, and there descended a troubled lady in black and a fragile little girl about three. Mrs. Schofield rushed from the house and enfolded both in hospitable arms.

They were Penrod's Aunt Clara and cousin, also Clara, from Dayton, Illinois, and in the flurry of their arrival everybody forgot to put Penrod to the question. It is doubtful, however, if he felt any relief; there may have been even a slight, unconscious disappointment not altogetner dissimilar to that of an actor deprived of a good part.

Next morning, when he had once more resumed the dreadful burden of education, it seemed infinitely duller. And yet what pleasanter sight is there than a schoolroom well filled with children of those sprouting years just before the 'teens? The casual visitor, gazing from the teacher's platform upon these busy little heads, needs only a blunted memory to experience the most agreeable and exhilarating sensations. Still, for the greater part, the children are unconscious of the happiness of their condition; for nothing is more pathetically true than that we "never know when we are well off." The boys in a public school are less aware of their happy state than are the girls; and of all the boys in his room, probably Penrod himself had the least appreciation of his felicity.

He sat staring at an open page of a textbook, but not studying; not even reading; not even thinking. Nor was he lost in a reverie; his mind's eye was shut, as his physical eye might well have been, for the optic nerve, flaccid with ennui, conveyed nothing whatever of the printed page upon which the orb of vision was partially focussed. Penrod was doing something very unusual and rare, something almost never accomplished except by colored people or by a boy in school on a spring day. He was doing really nothing at all. He was merely a state of being.

Roused from perfect apathy, the boy cast about the schoolroom an eye wearied to nausea by the perpetual vision of the neat teacher upon the platform, the backs of the heads of the pupils in front of him, and the monotonous stretches of blackboard threateningly defaced by arithmetical trouble and other insignia of torture. Above the blackboard the walls of the high room were of white plaster—white with the qualified whiteness of old stow in a soft coal town. This dismal expanse was broken by four lithographic portraits, native offerings of a thoughtful publisher. The portraits were of good and great men—kind men, men who loved children. Their faces were noble and benevolent. But the lithographs offered the only rest for the eyes of children fatigued by the everlasting sameness of the schoolroom. Long day after long day, interminable week in and interminable week out, vast month on vast month, the pupils sat with those four portraits beaming kindness down upon them. The faces became permanent in the consciousness of the children; they became an obsession—in and out of school the children were never free of them. The four faces haunted the minds of children falling asleep; they hung upon the minds of children waking at night; they rose forebodingly in the minds of children waking in the morning; they became monstrously alive in the minds of children lying sick of fever. Never, while the children of that schoolroom lived, would they be able to forget one detail of those four lithographs—the hand of Longfellow was frozen for them, forever in his beard. And by a logical and unconscious association of ideas, Penrod Schofield was accumulating an antipathy for the gentle Longfellow and for James Russell Lowell and for Oliver Wendell Holmes and for John Greenleaf Whittier, which would never permit him to peruse a work of one of those great New Englanders without a feeling of personal resentment.

His eyes fell slowly and inimically from the brow of Whittier to the braid of reddish hair belonging to Victorine Riordan, the little octoroon girl who sat directly in front of him. Victorine's back was as familiar to Penrod as the necktie of Oliver Wendell Holmes. So was her gayly colored plaid waist. He hated the waist as he hated Victorine herself, without knowing why. Enforced companionship in large quantities and on an equal basis between the sexes appears to sterilize the affections, and schoolroom romances are few.

The nervous monotony of the schoolroom inspires a sometimes unbearable longing for something astonishing to happen, and as every boy's fundamental desire is to do something astonishing himself, so as to be the centre of all human interest and awe, it was natural that Penrod should discover in fancy the delightful secret of self-levitation. He found, in this curious series of imaginings, during the lesson in arithmetic, that the atmosphere may be navigated as by a swimmer under water, but with infinitely greater ease and with perfect comfort in breathing. In his mind he extended his arms gracefully, at a level with his shoulders, and delicately paddled the air with his hands, which at once caused him to be drawn up out of his seat and elevated gently to a position about midway between the floor and the ceiling, where he came to an equilibrium and floated; a sensation not the less exquisite because of the screams of his fellow pupils, appalled by the miracle.

With almost no exertion he paddled himself, many yards at a stroke, to the girls' private school where Marjorie Jones was a pupil—Marjorie Jones of the amber curls and the golden voice! Long before the "Pageant of the Table Round" she had offered Penrod a hundred proofs that she considered him wholly undesirable and ineligible. At the Friday Afternoon Dancing Class she consistently incited and led the laughter at him whenever Professor Bartet singled him out for admonition in matters of deportment and decorum. And but yesterday she had chid him for his slavish lack of memory in daring to offer her greeting on the way to Sunday school. "Well, I expect you must forgot I told you never to speak to me again! If I was a boy I'd be too proud to come hanging around people that don't speak to me, even if I was the Worst Boy in Town!" So she flouted him. But now, as he floated in through the window of her classroom and swam gently along the ceiling like an escaped toy balloon, she fell upon her knees beside her little desk and, lifting up her arms toward him, cried with love and admiration:

"Oh, Penrod!"

He negligently kicked a globe from the high chandelier and, smiling coldly, floated out through the hall to the front steps of the school, while Marjorie followed, imploring him to grant her one kind look.

In the street an enormous crowd had gathered, headed by Miss Spence and a brass band, and a cheer from a hundred thousand throats shook the very ground as Penrod swam overhead. Marjorie knelt upon the steps and watched adoringly while Penrod took the drum-major's baton and, performing sinuous evolutions above the crowd, led the band. Then he threw the baton so high that it disappeared from sight; but he went swiftly after it, a double delight, for he had not only the delicious sensation of rocketing safely up and up into the blue sky, but also that of standing in the crowd below, watching and admiring himself as he dwindled to a speck, disappeared, and then, emerging from a cloud, came speeding down, with the baton in his hand, to the level of the tree tops, where he beat time for the band and the vast throng and Marjorie Jones, who all united in the "Star-Spangled Banner" in honor of his aerial achievements. It was a great moment.

It was a great moment, but something seemed to threaten it. The face of Miss Spence looking up from the crowd grew too vivid—unpleasantly vivid. She was beckoning him and shouting, "Come down, Penrod Schofield! Penrod Schofield, come down here!" He could hear her above the band and the singing of the multitude; she seemed intent on spoiling everything. Marjorie Jones was weeping, to show how sorry she was that she had formerly slighted him, and throwing kisses to prove that she loved him; but Miss Spence kept jumping between him and Marjorie, incessantly calling his name.

From the beginning of his aerial experiments in his own schoolroom, he had not opened his lips, knowing somehow that one of the requirements for air floating is perfect silence on the part of the floater; but, finally, irritated beyond measure by Miss Spence's clamorous insistence, he was unable to restrain an indignant rebuke—and immediately came to earth with a frightful bump.

Miss Spence—in the flesh—had directed toward the physical body of the absent Penrod an inquiry as to the fractional consequences of dividing seventeen apples, fairly, among the boys, and she was surprised and displeased to receive no answer, although to the best of her knowledge and belief he was looking fixedly at her. She repeated her question crisply, without visible effect; then summoned him by name with increasing asperity. Twice she called him, while all his fellow pupils turned to stare at the gazing boy. She advanced a step from the platform.

"Penrod Schofield!"

"Oh, my goodness!" he shouted, suddenly. "Can't you keep still a minute?"

Miss Spence gasped. So did the pupils. The whole room filled with a swelling, conglomerate, "O-o-o-o-h!"

As for Penrod himself, the walls reeled with the shock. He sat with his mouth open, a mere lump of stupefaction. For the appalling words that he had hurled at the teacher were as inexplicable to him as to any other who heard them.

Nothing is more treacherous than the human mind; nothing else so loves to play the Iscariot. Even when patiently bullied into a semblance of order and training it may prove but a base and shifty servant. And Penrod's mind was not his servant; it was a master, with the April wind's whims; and it had just played him a diabolical trick. The very jolt with which he came back to the schoolroom in the midst of his fancied flight jarred his day-dream utterly out of him; and he sat, open-mouthed in horror at what he had said.

The unanimous gasp of awe was protracted. Miss Spence, however, finally recovered her breath, and, returning deliberately to the platform, faced the school. "And then, for a little while," as pathetic stories sometimes recount, "everything was very still." It was so still, in fact, that Penrod's newborn notoriety could almost be heard growing. This grisly silence was at last broken by the teacher.

"Penrod Schofield, stand up!"

The miserable child obeyed.

"What did you mean by speaking to me in that way?"

He hung his head, raked the floor with the side of his shoe, swayed, swallowed, looked suddenly at his hands with the air of never having seen them before, then clasped them behind him. The school shivered in ecstatic horror, every fascinated eye upon him; yet there was not a soul in the room but was profoundly grateful to him for the sensation—including the offended teacher herself. Unhappily, all this gratitude was unconscious and altogether different from the kind which results in testimonials and loving cups. On the contrary!

"Penrod Schofield!"

He gulped.

"Answer me at once! Why did you speak to me like that?"

"I was"——. He choked, unable to continue.

"Speak out!"

"I was just—thinking," he managed to stammer.

"That will not do," she returned sharply. "I wish to know immediately why you spoke as you did."

The stricken Penrod answered helplessly:

"Because I was just thinking."

Upon the very rack he could have offered no ampler truthful explanation. It was all he knew about it.

"Thinking what?"

"Just thinking."

Miss Spence's expression gave evidence that her power of self-restraint was undergoing a remarkable test. However, after taking counsel with herself, she commanded:

"Come here!"

He shuffled forward and she placed a chair upon the platform near her own.

"Sit there!"

Classes came and classes went, grilling him with eyes. Newcomers received the story of the crime in darkling whispers; and the outcast sat and sat and sat, and squirmed and squirmed and squirmed. (He did one or two things with his spine which a professional contortionist would have observed with real interest.) And all this while of freezing suspense was but the criminal's detention awaiting trial. A known punishment may be anticipated with some pleasure of equanimity; at least, the prisoner may prepare himself to undergo it; but the unknown looms more monstrous for every attempt to guess it. Penrod's crime was unique; there were no rules to aid him in estimating the vengeance to fall upon him for it. What seemed most probable was that he would be expelled from the schools in the presence of his family, the Mayor and council and afterward whipped by his father upon the State House steps, with the entire city as audience by invitation of the authorities.

Noon came. The rows of children filed out, every head turning for a last unpleasingly speculative look at the outlaw. Then Miss Spence closed the door into the cloakroom and that into the big hall, and came and sat her desk near Penrod. The tramping of feet outside, the shrill calls and shouting and the changing voices of the older boys ceased to be heard—and there was silence. Penrod, still affecting to be occupied with Lowell, was conscious that Miss Spence looked at him intently.

"Penrod," she said gravely, "what excuse have you to offer before I report your case to the principal?"

The word "principal" struck him to the vitals. Grand Inquisitor, Grand Kahn, Sultan, Emperor, Czar, Cæsar Augustus—these are comparable. He stopped squirming instantly, and sat rigid.

"I want an answer. Why did you shout those words at me?"

"Well," he murmured, "I was just—thinking."

"Thinking what?" she asked sharply.

"I don't know."

"That won't do."

He took his left ankle in his right hand and regarded it helplessly.

"That won't do, Penrod Schofield," she repeated, severely. "If that is all the excuse you have to offer I shall report your case this instant."

And she rose with fatal intent.

But Penrod was one of those whom the precipice inspires. "Well, I have got an excuse."

"Well"—she paused impatiently—"what is it?"

He had not an idea, but he felt one coming, and replied automatically, in a plaintive tone.

"I guess anybody that had been through what I had to go through last night would think they had an excuse."

Miss Spence resumed her seat, though with the air of being ready to leap from it instantly.

"What has last night to do with your insolence to me this morning?"

"Well, I guess you'd see," he returned, emphasizing the plaintive note, "if you knew what I know."

"Now, Penrod," she said, in a kinder voice, "I have a high regard for your mother and father, and it would hurt me to distress them, but you must either tell me what was the matter with you or I'll have to take you to Mrs. Houston.

"Well, ain't I going to?" he cried, spurred by the dread name. "It's because I didn't sleep last night."

"Were you ill?" The question was put with some dryness.

"It wasn't illness," he returned, shaking his head mournfully. "It was lots worse'n anybody being sick. It was—it was—well, it was jest awful."

"What was?" He marked with anxiety the incredulity in her tone.

"It was about Aunt Clara," he said.

"Your Aunt Clara?" she repeated. "Do you mean your mother's sister, who married Mr. Farry of Dayton, Illinois?"

"Yes—Uncle John," returned Penrod, sorrowfully. "The trouble was about him."

Miss Spence frowned a frown which he rightly interpreted as one of continued suspicion. "She and I were in school together," she said. "I used to know her very well, and I've always heard her married life was entirely happy. I don't"——

"Yes, it was," he interrupted, "until last year when Uncle John took to running with travelling men"——

"What?"

"Yes'm." He nodded solemnly. "That was what started it. At first he was a good, kind husband, but these travelling men would coax him into a saloon on his way from work, and they got him to drinking beer and then ales, wines, liquors and cigars"——

"Penrod!"

"Ma'am?"

"I'm not inquiring into your Aunt Clara's private affairs; I'm asking you if you have anything to say which would palliate"——

"That's what I'm tryin' to tell you about, Miss Spence," he pleaded—"if you'd jest only let me. When Aunt Clara and her little baby daughter got to our house last night"——

"You say Mrs. Farry is visiting your mother?"

"Yes'm—not just visiting—you see, she had to come. Well, of course, little baby Clara, she was so bruised up and mauled, where he'd been hittin' her with his cane"——

"You mean that your uncle had done such a thing as that!" exclaimed Miss Spence, suddenly disarmed by this scandal.

"Yes'm, and mamma and Margaret had to sit up all night nursin' little Clara—and Aunt Clara was in such a state somebody had to keep talkin' to her, and there wasn't anybody but me to do it, so I"——

"But where was your father?" she cried.

"Ma'am?"

"Where was your father while"——

"Oh—papa?" Penrod paused, reflected; then brightened. "Why, he was down at the train, waitin' to see if Uncle John would try to follow 'em and make 'em come home so's he could persecute 'em some more. I wanted to do that, but they said if he did come I mightn't be strong enough to hold him, and"—— The brave lad paused again, modestly. Miss Spence's expression was encouraging. Her eyes were wide with astonishment, and there may have been in them, also, the mingled beginnings of admiration and self-reproach. Penrod, warming to his work, felt safer every moment.

"And so," he continued, "I had to sit up with Aunt Clara. She had some pretty big bruises, too, and I had to"——

"But why didn't they send for a doctor?" However, this question was only a flicker of dying incredulity.

"Oh, they didn't want any doctor," exclaimed the inspired realist promptly. "They don't want anybody to hear about it, because Uncle John might reform—and then where'd he be if everybody knew he'd been a drunkard and whipped his wife and baby daughter?"

"Oh!" said Miss Spence.

"You see, he used to be upright as anybody," he went on, explanatively. "It all begun"——

"Began, Penrod."

"Yes'm. It all commenced from the first day he let those travelling men coax him into the saloon."

His eloquence increased with what it fed on; and as with the eloquence so with self-reproach in the gentle bosom of the teacher. She cleared her throat with difficulty once or twice during his description of his ministering night with Aunt Clara. "And I said to her, 'Why, Aunt Clara, what's the use of takin' on so about it?' And I said, 'Now, Aunt Clara, all the crying in the world can't make things any better.' And then she'd just keep catchin' hold of me and sob and kind of holler, and I'd say, 'Don't cry, Aunt Clara—please don't cry.'"

Then, under the influence of some fragmentary survivals of the respectable portion of his Sunday adventures, his theme became more exalted, and, only partially misquoting a phrase from a psalm, he related how he had made it of comfort to Aunt Clara, and how he had besought her to seek higher guidance in her trouble.

"You mean, dear," she said gently, "that you were all worn out and hardly knew what you were saying?"

"Yes'm."

"And you were thinking about all those dreadful things so hard that you forgot where you were?"

"I was thinking," he said simply, "how to save Uncle John."

And the end of it for this mighty boy was that the teacher kissed him!

The returning students that afternoon observed that Penrod's desk was vacant—and nothing could have been more impressive than that sinister mere emptiness. The accepted theory was that Penrod had been arrested. How breath taking, then, the sensation when, at the beginning of the second hour, he strolled in with inimitable carelessness and, rubbing his eyes somewhat noticeably in the manner of one who has snatched an hour of much needed sleep, took his place as if nothing in particular had happened. This, at first supposed to be a superhuman exhibition of sheer audacity, became but the more dumfounding when Miss Spence, looking up from her desk, greeted him with a pleasant little nod. Even after school Penrod gave numerous maddened investigators no relief. All he would consent to say was:

"Oh, I just *talked* to her."

A mystification not entirely unconnected with the one thus produced was manifested at his own family dinner table the following evening. Aunt Clara had been out rather late and came to the table after the rest were seated. She wore a puzzled expression.

"Do you ever see Mary Spence nowadays?" she inquired, as she unfolded her napkin, addressing Mrs. Schofield. Penrod abruptly set down his soup spoon and gazed at his aunt with flattering attention.

"Yes, sometimes," said Mrs. Schofield. "She's Penrod's teacher."

"Is she?" said Mrs. Farry. Do you"—— She paused. "Do people think her a little—queer these days?"

"Why no," returned her sister. "What makes you say that?"

"She has acquired a very odd manner," said Mrs. Farry decidedly. "At least, she seemed odd to *me*. I met her at the corner just before I got to the house a few minutes ago, and, after we'd said howdy-do to each other, she kept hold of my hand and looked as though she was going to cry. She seemed to be trying to say something, and choking"——

"But I don't think that's so very queer, Clara. She knew you in school, didn't she?"

"Yes, but"——

"And she hadn't seen you for so many years. I think it's perfectly natural she"——

"Wait! She stood there squeezing my hand and struggling to get her voice—and I got really embarrassed—and then finally she said in a kind of tearful whisper, 'Be of good cheer; this trial will pass!'"

"How queer!" exclaimed Margaret.

Penrod sighed and returned somewhat absently to his soup.

"Well, I don't know," said Mrs. Schofield thoughtfully. "Of course, she's heard about the outbreak of measles in Dayton, since they had to close the schools, and she knows you live there"——

"But doesn't it seem a very exaggerated way," suggested Margaret, "to talk about measles?"

"Wait!" begged Aunt Clara. "After she said that she said something even queerer, and then put her handkerchief to her eyes and hurried away."

Penrod laid down his spoon again and moved his chair slightly back from the table. A spirit of prophecy was upon him: he knew that some one was going to ask a question which he felt might better remain unspoken.

"What was the other thing she said?" Mr. Schofield inquired, thus immediately fulfilling his son's premonition.

"She said," returned Mrs. Farry slowly, looking about the table, "she said, 'I know that Penrod is a great, great comfort to you!'"

There was a general exclamation of surprise. It was a singular thing, and in no manner may it be considered complimentary to Penrod that this speech of Miss Spence's should have immediately confirmed Mrs. Farry's doubts about her in the minds of all his family.

Mr. Schoefield shook his head pityingly.

"I'm afraid she's a goner," he went so far as to say.

"Of all the weird ideas!"

"I never heard anything like it in my life!" Mrs. Schofield exclaimed. "Was that all she said?"

"Every word!"

Penrod again resumed attention to his soup. His mother looked at him curiously, and then, struck by a sudden thought, gathered the glances of the adults of the table by a significant movement of the head, and, by another, conveyed an admonition to drop the subject until later. Miss Spence was Penrod's teacher: it was better for many reasons not to discuss the subject of her queerness before him. This was Mrs. Schofield's thought at the time. Later she had another, and it kept her awake.

The next afternoon Mr. Schofield, returning at 5 o'clock from the cares of the day, found the house deserted, and sat down to read his evening paper in what appeared to be an uninhabited apartment known to its own world as the "drawing room." A sneeze, unexpected both to him and the owner, informed him of the presence of another person.

"Where are you, Penrod?" the parent asked, looking about.

"Here," said Penrod meekly.

Stooping, Mr. Schofield discovered his son squatting under the piano, near an open window—his wistful Duke lying beside him.

"What are you doing there?"

"Me?"

"Why under the piano?"

"Well," the boy returned, with grave sweetness, "I was just kind of sitting here—thinking."

"All right." Mr. Schofield, rather touched, returned to the digestion of a murder, his back once more to the piano; and Penrod silently drew from beneath his jacket (where he had slipped it simultaneously with the sneeze) a paper-backed volume entitled: "Slimsy, the Sioux City Squealer, or, 'Not Guilty, Your Honor.'"

In this manner the reading club continued in peace, absorbed, contented, the world well forgot—until a sudden, violently irritated slam-bang of the front door startled the members, and Mrs. Schofield burst into the room and threw herself into a chair, moaning.

"What's the matter, mamma?" asked her husband, laying aside his paper.

"Henry Passloe Schofield," returned the lady, "I don't know what is to be done with that boy; I do not!"

"You mean Penrod?"

"Who else could I mean?" She sat up, exasperated, to stare at him. "Henry Passloe Schofield, you've got to take this matter in your hands—it's beyond me!"

"Well, what has he"——

"Last night I got to thinking," she began rapidly, "about what Clara told us—thank heaven she and Margaret and little Clara have gone to tea at Cousin Charlotte's!—but they'll be home soon—about what she said about Miss Spence"——

"You mean about Penrod's being a comfort?"

"Yes, and I kept thinking and thinking and thinking about it till I couldn't stand it any"——

"By George!" shouted Mr. Schofield startlingly, stooping to look under the piano. A statement that he had suddenly remembered his son's presence would be lacking in accuracy, for the highly sensitized Penrod was, in fact, no longer present. No more was Duke, his faithful dog.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," he returned, striding to the open window and looking out. "Go on."

"Oh," she moaned, "it must be kept from Clara—and I'll never hold up my head again if John Farry ever hears of it!"

"Hears of what?"

"Well, I just couldn't stand it, I got so curious; and I thought of course if Miss Spence had become a little unbalanced it was my duty to know it, as Penrod's mother and she his teacher; so I thought I would just call on her at her apartment after school and have a chat and see—and I did and—oh"——

"Well?"

"I've just come from there, and she told me—she told me! Oh, I've never known anything like this!"

"What did she tell you?"

Mrs. Schofield, making a great effort, managed to assume a temporary appearance of calm. "Henry," she said solemnly, "bear this in mind: whatever you do to Penrod, it must be done in some place when Clara won't hear it. But the first thing to do is to find him."

Within view of the window from which Mr. Schofield was gazing was the closed door of the storeroom in the stable, and just outside this door Duke was performing a most engaging trick.

His young master had taught Duke to "sit up and beg" when he wanted anything, and if that didn't get it, to "speak." Duke was facing the closed door and sitting up and begging, and now he also spoke—in a loud, clear bark.

There was an open transom over the door, and from this descended—hurled by an unseen agency—a can half filled with old paint.

It caught the small besieger of the door on his thoroughly surprised right ear, encouraged him to some remarkable acrobatics, and turned large portions of him a dull blue. Allowing only a moment to perplexity, and deciding, after a single and evidently unappetizing experiment, not to cleanse himself of paint, the loyal animal resumed his quaint, upright posture.

Mr. Schofield seated himself on the windowsill, whence he could keep in view that pathetic picture of unrequited love.

"Go on with your story, mamma," he said. "I think I can find Penrod when we want him."

And a few minutes later he added: "And I think I know the place to do it in."

Again the faithful voice of Duke was heard, pleading outside the bolted door.

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"CLASSES CAME AND CLASSES WENT, GRILLING HIM WITH EYES."