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DRAWN BY WARDEN

Whack! Whack! Roddy was perfectly impartial. It was a cold-blooded performance and even more effective than he anticipated

The Bonded Prisoner

The almost universal consensus of opinion is that the Penrod Schofield stories are the most remarkable and amusing of their kind ever written. Mr. Tarkington's exceptional understanding of the real boy and his sympathetic discernment of those impulses and feelings that foreshadow the real man in the making put a value on his work that raises it above even the higher levels of fiction. The story printed here reintroduces these two delightful members of Penrod's "set," Herman and Verman, and the mere mention of their presence on the stirring scene is sufficient hint of the joyful treat in store.

By Booth Tarkington

Author of "Bing!" "Munchausen Penrod," and other Penrod Schofield stories

Illustrated by Worth Brehm

DURING the daylight hours of several autumn Saturdays there had been severe outbreaks of cavalry in the Schofield neighborhood. The sabers were of wood; the steeds were imaginary, and both were employed in a game called "bonded pris'ner" by its inventors, Masters Penrod Schofield and Samuel Williams. The pastime was not intricate. When two enemies met, they fenced spectacularly until the person of one or the other was touched by the opposing weapon; then, when the ensuing claims of foul play had been disallowed and the subsequent argument settled, the combatant touched was considered to be a prisoner until such time as he might be touched by the hilt of a sword belonging to one of his own party, which effected his release and restored to him the full enjoyment of hostile activity. Pending such rescue, however, he was obliged to accompany the forces of his captor whithersoever their strategic necessities led them, which included many strange places. For the game was exciting, and, at its highest pitch, would sweep out of an alley into a stable, out of that stable and into a yard, out of that yard and into a house, and through that house, with the sound (and effect upon furniture) of trampling herds. In fact, this very similarity must have been in the mind of the distressed colored woman in Mrs. Williams' kitchen, when she declared that she might "jes' as well try to cook right spang in the middle o' the stock-yards."

All up and down the neighborhood the campaigns were waged, accompanied by

the martial clashing of wood upon wood and by many clamorous arguments.

"You're a pris'ner, Roddy Bitts!"

"I am not!"

"You are, too! I touched you."

"Where, I'd like to know?"

"On the sleeve."

"You did not! I never felt it. I guess I'd 'a' felt it, wouldn't I?"

"What if you didn't? I touched you, and you're bonded. I leave it to Sam Williams."

"Yah! Course you would! He's on your side! I leave it to Herman."

"No, you won't! If you can't show any sense about it, we'll do it over, and I guess you'll see whether you feel it or not! There! Now, I guess you—"

"Aw, squash!"

Strangely enough, the undoubted champion proved to be the youngest and darkest of all the combatants, one Verman, colored, brother to Herman, and substantially under the size to which his nine years entitled him. Verman was unfortunately tongue-tied, but he was valiant beyond all others, and, in spite of every handicap, he became at once the chief support of his own party and the despair of the opposition.

On the third Saturday this opposition had been worn down by the successive captures of Maurice Levy and Georgie Basset until it consisted of only Sam Williams and Penrod. Hence, it behooved these two to be wary, lest they be wiped out altogether; and Sam was dismayed indeed, upon cautiously scouting round a corner of his own

stable, to find himself face to face with the valorous and skilful Verman, who was acting as an outpost, or picket, of the enemy.

Verman immediately fell upon Sam, horse and foot, and Sam would have fled but dared not, for fear he might be touched from the rear. Therefore, he defended himself as best he could, and there followed a lusty whacking, in the course of which Verman's hat, a relic and too large, fell from his head, touching Sam's weapon in falling.

"There!" panted Sam, desisting immediately. "That counts! You're bonded, Verman."

"Aim meewer!" Verman protested.

Interpreting this as, "Ain't neither," Sam invented a law to suit the occasion. "Yes, you are; that's the rule, Verman. I touched your hat with my sword, and your hat's just the same as you."

"Imm mop!" Verman insisted.

"Yes, it is," said Sam, already warmly convinced (by his own statement) that he was in the right. "Listen here! If I hit you on the shoe, it would be the same as hitting *you*, wouldn't it? I guess it'd count if I hit you on the shoe, wouldn't it? Well, a hat's just the same as shoes. Honest, that's the rule, Verman, and you're a pris'ner."

Now, in the arguing part of the game, Verman's impediment cooperated with a native amiability to render him far less effective than in the actual combat. He chuckled, and ceded the point.

"Aw wi'," he said, and cheerfully followed his captor to a hidden place among some bushes in the front yard, where Penrod lurked.

"Looky what I got!" Sam said importantly, pushing his captive into this retreat. "Now, I guess you won't say I'm not so much use any more! Squat down, Verman, so's they can't see you if they're huntin' for us. That's one o' the rules—honest. You got to squat when we tell you to."

Verman was agreeable. He squatted, and then began to laugh uproariously.

"Stop that noise!" Penrod commanded. "You want to betray us? What you laughin' at?"

"Ep mack im mimmup," Verman giggled.

"What's he mean?" asked Sam.

Penrod was more familiar with Verman's utterance, and he interpreted.

"He says they'll get him back in a minute."

"No, they won't. I'd just like to see——"

"Yes, they will, too," said Penrod. "They'll get him back for the main and simple reason we can't stay here all day, can we? And they'd find us anyhow, if we tried to. There's so many of 'em against just us two, they can run in and touch him soon as they get up to us—and then *he'll* be after us again and——"

"Listen here!" Sam interrupted. "Why can't we put some *real* bonds on him? We could put bonds on his wrists and around his legs—we could put 'em all over him, easy as nothin'. Then we could gag him——"

"No, we can't," said Penrod. "We can't, for the main and simple reason we haven't got any rope or anything to make the bonds with, have we? I wish we had some o' that stuff they give sick people. *Then*, I bet they wouldn't get him back so soon!"

"Sick people?" Sam repeated, not comprehending.

"It makes 'em go to sleep, no matter what you do to 'em," Penrod explained. "That's the main and simple reason they can't wake up, and you can cut off their ole legs—or their arms, or anything you want to."

"Hoy!" exclaimed Verman, in a serious tone. His laughter ceased instantly, and he began to utter a protest sufficiently intelligible.

"You needn't worry," Penrod said gloomily. "We haven't got any o' that stuff; so we can't do it."

"Well, we got to do sumthing," said Sam.

His comrade agreed, and there was a thoughtful silence, but presently Penrod's countenance brightened.

"I know!" he exclaimed. "I know what we'll do with him. Why, I thought of it just as *easy*! I can most always think of things like that, for the main and simple reason—well, I thought of it just as soon——"

"Well, what is it?" Sam demanded crossly. Penrod's reiteration of his new-found phrase, "for the main and simple reason," had been growing more and more irksome to his friend all day, though Sam was not definitely aware that the phrase was the cause of his annoyance. "What are we goin' to do with him, you know so much?"

Penrod rose and peered over the tops of the bushes, shading his eyes with his hand, which was unnecessary but had a

good appearance. He looked all round about him in this manner, finally vouchsafing a report to the impatient Sam.

"No enemies in sight—just for the main and simple reason I expect they're all in the alley and in Georgie Bassett's back yard."

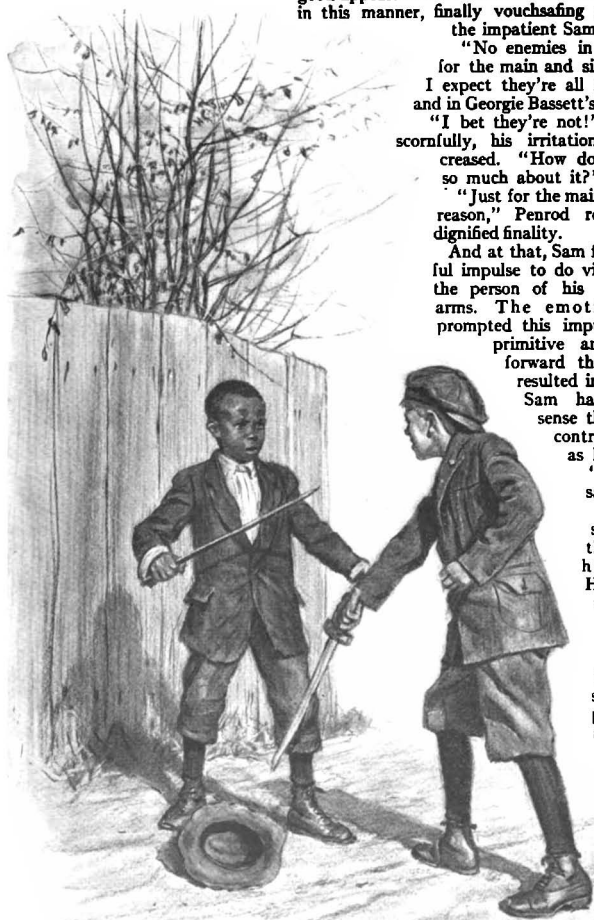
"I bet they're not!" Sam said scornfully, his irritation much increased. "How do you know so much about it?"

"Just for the main and simple reason," Penrod replied, with dignified finality.

And at that, Sam felt a powerful impulse to do violence upon the person of his comrade in arms. The emotion which prompted this impulse was so primitive and straightforward that it almost resulted in action, but Sam had a vague sense that he must control it as long as he could.

"Bugs!" he said.

Penrod was sensitive, and this cold word hurt him. However, he was under the domination of his strategic idea, and he subordinated private grievance to the



WORTH
BENNETT

"Yes, you are; that's the rule, Verman. I touched your hat with my sword, and your hat's just the same as you"

common weal. "Get up!" he commanded. "You get up, too, Verman. You got to—it's the rule. Now here—I'll show you what we're goin' to do. Stoop over, and both o' you do just exactly like I do. You watch me, because this biz'nuss has got to be done right!"

Sam muttered something; he was becoming more insurgent every moment, but he obeyed. Likewise, Verman rose to his feet, ducked his head between his shoulders, and trotted out to the sidewalk at Sam's heels, both following Penrod and assuming a stooping position in imitation of him. Verman was delighted with this phase of the game, and, also, he was profoundly amused by Penrod's pomposity. Something dim and deep within him perceived it to be cause for such merriment that he had ado to master himself, and was forced to bottle and cork his laughter with both hands. They proved insufficient; sputterings burst forth between his fingers.

"You stop that!" said Penrod, looking back darkly upon the prisoner.

Verman endeavored to oblige, though giggles continued to leak from him at intervals, and the three boys stole along the fence in single file, proceeding in this fashion until they reached Penrod's own front gate. Here the leader ascertained, by a reconnaissance as far as the corner, that the hostile forces were still looking for them in another direction. He returned in a stealthy but important manner to his disgruntled follower and the hilarious captive.

"Well," said Sam impatiently, "I guess I'm not goin' to stand around here all day, I guess! You got anything you want to do, why'n't you go on and do it?"

Penrod's brow was already contorted to present the appearance of detached and lofty concentration—a histrionic failure, since it did not deceive the audience. He raised a hushing hand.

"Sh!" he murmured. "I got to think."

"Bugs!" said the impolite Mr. Williams again.

Verman bent double, squealing and sputtering; indeed, he was ultimately forced to sit upon the ground, so exhausting was the mirth to which he now gave way. Penrod's composure was somewhat affected, and he showed annoyance.

"Oh, I guess you won't laugh quite so much about a minute from now, ole Mister

Verman!" he said severely. "You get up from there and do like I tell you."

"Well, why'n't you tell him why he won't laugh so much, then?" Sam demanded, as Verman rose. "Why'n't you do sump-thing and quit talkin' so much about it?"

Penrod haughtily led the way into the yard.

"You follow me," he said, "and I guess you'll learn a little sense!"

Then, abandoning his *hauteur* for an air of mystery equally irritating to Sam, he stole up the steps of the porch, and after a moment's manipulation of the knob of the big front door, contrived to operate the fastenings and pushed the door open.

"Come on," he whispered, beckoning. And the three boys mounted the stairs to the floor above in silence—save for a belated giggle on the part of Verman, which was restrained upon a terrible gesture from Penrod. Verman buried his mouth as deeply as possible in a ragged sleeve, and confined his demonstrations to a heaving of the stomach and diaphragm.

Penrod led the way into the dainty room of his nineteen-year-old sister Margaret and closed the door.

"There," he said, in a low and husky voice, "I expect you'll see what I'm goin' to do now!"

"Well, what?" asked the skeptical Sam. "If we stay here very long your mother'll come and send us down-stairs. What's the good of—"

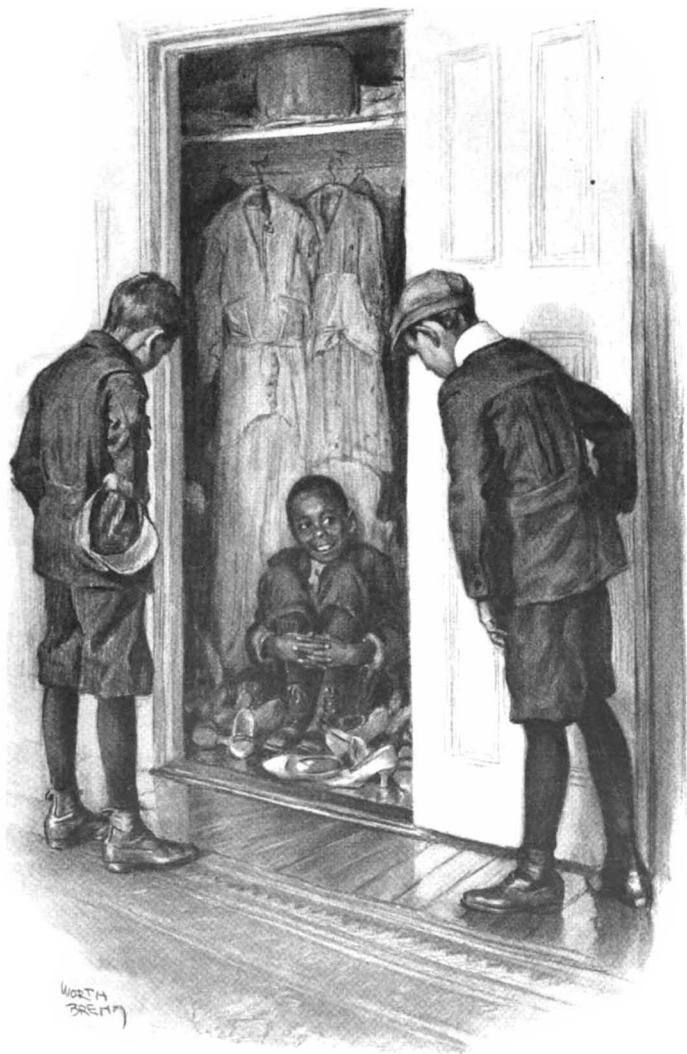
"Wait, can't you?" Penrod wailed, in a whisper. "My goodness!" And going to an inner door, he threw it open, disclosing a clothes-closet hung with pretty garments of many kinds, while upon its floor were two rows of shoes and slippers of great variety and charm.

A significant thing is to be remarked concerning the door of this somewhat intimate treasury: there was no knob or latch upon the inner side, so that, when the door was closed, it could be opened only from the outside.

"There!" said Penrod. "You get in there, Verman, and I'll bet they won't get to touch you back out o' bein' our prisoner very soon, now! Oh, I guess not!"

"Pshaw!" said Sam. "Is that all you were goin' to do? Why, your mother'll come and make him get out the first—"

"No, she won't. She and Margaret have gone to my aunt's in the country,



DRAWN BY WORTH BENNETT

The obedient Verman marched into the closet and sat down among the shoes and slippers, where he presented an interesting effect of contrast

and aren't goin' to be back till dark. And even if he made a lot o' noise, it's kind of hard to hear anything from in there, anyway, when the door's shut. Besides, he's got to keep quiet—that's the rule, Verman. You're a pris'ner, and it's the rule you can't holler or nothin'. You unnerstand that, Verman?"

"Aw wi," said Verman.

"Then go on in there. Hurry!"

The obedient Verman marched into the closet and sat down among the shoes and slippers, where he presented an interesting effect of contrast. He was still subject to hilarity—though endeavoring to suppress it by means of a patent-leather slipper—when Penrod closed the door.

"There!" said Penrod, leading the way from the room, "I guess *now* you see!"

Sam said nothing, and they came out to the open air and reached their retreat in the Williams' yard again without his having acknowledged Penrod's service to their mutual cause.

"I thought of that just as easy!" Penrod remarked, probably prompted to this odious bit of complacency by Sam's withholding the praise which might naturally have been expected. And he was moved to add, "I guess it'd of been a pretty long while if we'd had to wait for you to think of sumpting as good as that, Sam."

"Why would it?" Sam asked. "Why would it of been such a long while?"

"Oh," responded Penrod, airily, "just for the main and simple reason!"

Sam could bear it no longer.

"Oh, hush up!" he shouted.

Penrod was stung.

"Do you mean *me*?" he demanded.

"Yes, I do!" replied the goaled Sam.

"Did you tell *me* to hush up?"

"Yes, I did!"

"I guess you don't know who you're talkin' to," said Penrod ominously. "I guess I just better show you who you're talkin' to like that. I guess you need a little sumpting, for the main and simple—"

Sam uttered an uncontrollable howl and sprang upon Penrod, catching him round the waist. Simultaneously with this impact, the wooden swords spun through the air, and were presently trodden underfoot as the two boys wrestled to and fro.

Penrod was not altogether surprised by the onset of his friend. He had been aware of Sam's increasing irritation (though

neither boy could have clearly stated its cause), and that very irritation produced a corresponding emotion in the bosom of the irritator. Mentally, Penrod was quite ready for the conflict—nay, he welcomed it—though, for the first few moments, Sam had the physical advantage.

However, it is proper that a neat distinction be drawn here. This was a conflict, but neither technically nor in the intention of the contestants was it a fight. Penrod and Sam were both in a state of high exasperation, and there was great bitterness; but no blows fell and no tears. They strained, they wrenched, they twisted, and they panted, and muttered: "Oh, no, you don't!" "Oh, I guess I do!" "Oh, you will, will you?" "You'll see what you get in about a minute!" "I guess you'll learn some sense, this time!"

Streaks and blotches began to appear upon the two faces, where color had been heightened by the ardent application of a cloth sleeve or shoulder, while ankles and insteps were scraped and toes were trampled. Turf and shrubberies suffered, also, as the struggle went on, until finally the wrestlers pitched headlong into a young lilac bush, and came to earth together, among its crushed and sprawling branches.

"Ooch!" and "Wuff!" were the two exclamations which marked this episode, and then, with no further comment, the struggle was energetically continued upon a horizontal plane. Now Penrod was on top, now Sam; they rolled, they squirmed, they suffered. And this contest endured. It went on and on, and it was impossible to imagine its coming to a definite termination. It went on so long that, to both the participants, it seemed to be a permanent thing, a condition which had always existed and which must always exist perpetually.

And thus they were discovered by a foray of the hostile party, headed by Roddy Bitts and Herman (older brother to Verman) and followed by the bonded prisoners, Maurice Levy and Georgie Bassett. These and others caught sight of the writhing figures, and charged down upon them with loud cries of triumph.

"Pris'ner! Pris'ner! Bonded pris'ner!" shrieked Roddy Bitts, and touched Penrod and Sam, each in turn, with his saber. Then, seeing that they paid no attention and that they were at his mercy, he

recalled the fact that several times, during earlier stages of the game, both of them had been unnecessarily vigorous in "touching" his own rather plump person. Therefore, the opportunity being excellent, he raised his weapon again, and, repeating the words "bonded pris'ner" as ample explanation of his deed, brought into play the full strength of his good right arm. He used the flat of the saber.

Whack! Whack! Roddy was perfectly impartial. It was a cold-blooded performance and even more effective than he anticipated. For one thing, it ended the civil war instantly. Sam and Penrod leaped to their feet, shrieking and bloodthirsty, while Maurice Levy capered with joy, Herman was so overcome that he rolled upon the ground, and Georgie Bassett remarked virtuously, "It serves them right for fighting."

But Roddy Bitts foresaw that something not within the rules of the game was about to happen.

"Here! You keep away from me!" he quavered, retreating. "I was just takin' you pris'ners. I guess I had a right to *touch* you, didn't I?"

Alas! Neither Sam nor Penrod was able to see the matter in that light. They had retrieved their own weapons, and they advanced upon Roddy with a purposefulness that seemed horrible to him.

"Here! You keep away from me!" he said, in great alarm. "I'm goin' home."

He did go home—but only subsequently. What took place before his departure had the singular solidity and completeness of systematic violence; also, it bore the moral beauty of all actions which lead to peace and friendship, for, when it was over, and the final vocalizations of Roderick Magsworth Bitts, Junior, were growing faint with increasing distance, Sam and Penrod had forgotten their differences and felt well disposed toward each other once more. All their animosity was exhausted, and they were in a glow of good feeling, though probably they were not conscious of any direct gratitude to Roddy, whose thoughtless opportunism was really the cause of this happy result.

After such rigorous events, everyone comprehended that the game of bonded prisoner was over, and there was no suggestion that it should or might be resumed. The fashion of its conclusion had been so consummately enjoyed by all parties (with the

natural exception of Roddy Bitts) that a renewal would have been tame; hence, the various minds of the company turned to other matters and became restless. Georgie Bassett withdrew first, remembering that if he expected to be as wonderful as usual, to-morrow, in Sunday-school, it was time to prepare himself, though this was not included in the statement he made alleging the cause of his departure. Being detained bodily and pressed for explanation, he desperately said that he had to go home to tease the cook—which had the rakehellly air he thought would insure his release, but was not considered plausible. However, he was finally allowed to go, and, as first hints of evening were already cooling and darkening the air, the party broke up, its members setting forth, whistling, toward their several homes, though Penrod lingered with Sam. Herman was the last to go from them.

"Well, I got git 'at stove-wood f' suppuh," he said, rising and stretching himself. "I got git 'at lil' soap-box wagon, an' go on ovuh wheres 'at new house buil'in' on Secon' Street, pick up few shingles an' blocks layin' roun'."

He went through the yard toward the alley, and, at the alley gate, remembering something, he paused and called to them. The lot was a deep one, and they were too far away to catch his meaning. Sam shouted, "Can't *hear* you," and Herman replied, but still unintelligibly; then, upon Sam's repetition of "Can't *hear* you," Herman waved his arm in farewell, implying that the matter was of little significance, and vanished. But if they had understood him, Penrod and Sam might have considered his inquiry of instant importance, for Herman's last shout was to ask if either of them had noticed "where Verman went."

Verman and Verman's whereabouts were, at this hour, of no more concern to Sam and Penrod than was the other side of the moon. That unfortunate bonded prisoner had been long since utterly effaced from their fields of consciousness, and the dark secret of their Bastille troubled them not—for the main and simple reason that they had forgotten it.

They drifted indoors, and found Sam's mother's white cat drowsing on a desk in the library, the which coincidence obviously inspired the experiment of ascertaining how successfully ink could be used in

making a clean white cat look like a coach-dog. There was neither malice nor mischief in their idea; simply, a problem presented itself to the biological and artistic questionings beginning to stir within them. They did not mean to do the cat the slightest injury or to cause her any pain. They were above teasing cats, and they merely detained this one and made her feel a little wet—at considerable cost to themselves from both the ink and the cat. However, at the conclusion of their efforts, it was thought safer to drop the cat out of the window before anybody came, and, after some hasty work with blotters, the desk was moved to cover certain sections of the rug, and the two boys repaired to the bathroom for hot water and soap. They knew they had done nothing wrong, but they felt easier when the only traces remaining upon them were the less prominent ones upon their garments.

These precautions taken, it was time for them to make their appearance at Penrod's house for dinner, for it had been arranged, upon petition, earlier in the day, that Sam should be his friend's guest for the evening meal. Clean to the elbows and with light hearts, they set forth. They marched, whistling—though not producing a distinctly musical effect, since neither had any particular air in mind—and they found nothing wrong with the world; they had not a care. Arrived at their adjacent destination, they found Miss Margaret Schofield just entering the front door.

"Hurry, boys!" she said. "Mamma came home long before I did, and I'm sure dinner is waiting. Run on out to the dining-room and tell them I'll be right down."

And, as they obeyed, she mounted the stairs, humming a little tune and unfastening the clasp of the long, light-blue military cape she wore. She went to her own quiet room, lit the gas, removed her hat, and placed it and the cape upon the bed; after which she gave her hair a push, subsequent to her scrutiny of a mirror; then, turning out the light, she went as far as the door. Being an orderly girl, she returned to the bed and took the cape and the hat to her clothes-closet. She opened the door of this sanctuary, and, in the dark, hung her cape upon a hook and placed her hat upon the shelf. Then she closed the door again, having noted nothing unusual, though she

had an impression that the place needed airing. She descended to the dinner table.

The other members of the family were already occupied with the meal, and the visitor was replying politely, in his non-masticatory intervals, to inquiries concerning the health of his relatives. So sweet and assured was the condition of Sam and Penrod, that Margaret's arrival from her room meant nothing to them. Their memories were not stirred, and they continued eating, their expressions brightly placid.

But from out of doors there came the sound of a calling and queuing voice, at first in the distance, then growing louder—coming nearer.

"Oh, Ver-er-man! O-o-o-oh, Ver-er-ma-a-an!"

It was the voice of Herman.

"O-o-o-o-oh, Ver-er-er-ma-a-a-an!"

And then two boys sat stricken at that cheerful table and ceased to eat. Recollection awoke with a *bang!*

"Oh, my!" Sam gasped.

"What's the matter?" said Mr. Schofield. "Swallow something the wrong way, Sam?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"O-o-o-o-oh, Ver-er-er-ma-a-an!"

And now the voice was near the windows of the dining-room.

Penrod, very pale, pushed back his chair and jumped up.

"What's the matter with *you!*" his father demanded. "Sit down!"

"It's Herman—that colored boy lives in the alley," said Penrod hoarsely. "I—expect—I think—"

"Well, what's the matter?"

"I think his little brother's maybe got lost, and Sam and I better go help look—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Schofield sharply. "Sit down and eat your dinner."

In a palsy, the miserable boy resumed his seat. He and Sam exchanged a single dumb glance; then the eyes of both swung fearfully to Margaret. Her appearance was one of sprightly content, and, from a certain point of view, nothing could have been more alarming. If she had opened her closet door without discovering Verman, that must have been because Verman was dead and Margaret had failed to notice the body. (Such were the thoughts of Penrod and Sam.) But she might not have



DRAWN BY NORTH BERRY

"I think his little brother's maybe got lost, and Sam and I better go help look —"

opened the closet door. And whether she had or not, Verman must still be there, alive or dead, for if he had escaped, he would have gone home, and their ears would not be ringing with the sinister and melancholy cry that now came from the distance, "Oo-o-oh, Ver-er-ma-an!"

Verman, in his seclusion, did not hear that appeal from his brother; there were too many walls between them. But he was becoming impatient for release, though, all in all, he had not found the confinement intolerable or even very irksome. His character was philosophic, his imagination calm; no bugaboos came to trouble him. When the boys closed the door upon him, he made himself comfortable upon the floor and, for a time, thoughtfully chewed a patent leather slipper that had come under his hand. He found the patent leather not unpleasant to his palate, though he swallowed only a portion of what he detached, not being hungry at that time. The soul-fabric of Verman was of a fortunate weave; he was not a seeker and questioner. When it happened to him that he was at rest in a shady corner, he did not even think about a place in the sun. Verman took life as it came.

Naturally, he fell asleep. And toward the conclusion of his slumbers, he had this singular adventure: A lady set her foot down within less than half an inch of his nose—and neither of them knew it. Verman slept on, without being wakened by either the closing or the opening of the door. What did rouse him was something ample and soft falling upon him—Margaret's cape, which slid from the hook after she had gone.

Enveloped in its folds, Verman sat up, corkscrewing his knuckles into the corners of his eyes. Slowly he became aware of two important vacuums—one in time and one in his stomach. Hours had vanished strangely into nowhere; the game of bonded prisoner was something cloudy and remote of the long, long ago, and, although Verman knew where he was, he had partially forgotten how he came there. He perceived, however, that something had gone wrong, for he was certain that he ought not to be where he found himself.

White-Folks' House! The fact that Verman could not have pronounced these words rendered them no less clear in his

mind; they began to stir his apprehension and nothing becomes more rapidly tumultuous than apprehension once it is stirred. That he might possibly obtain release by making a noise was too daring a thought and not even conceived, much less entertained, by the little and humble Verman. For, with the bewildering gap of his slumber between him and previous events, he did not place the responsibility for his being in White-Folks' House upon the white folks who had put him there. His state of mind was that of the stable-puppy who knows he *must* not be found in the parlor. Not thrice in his life had Verman been within the doors of White-Folks' House, and, above all things, he felt that it was in some undefined way vital to him to get out of White-Folks' House unobserved and unknown. It was in his very blood to be sure of that.

Further than this point, the processes of Verman's mind become mysterious to the observer. It appears, however, that he had a definite (though somewhat primitive) conception of the usefulness of disguise; and he must have begun his preparations before he heard footsteps in the room outside his closed door.

These footsteps were Margaret's. Just as Mr. Schofield's coffee was brought, and just after Penrod had been baffled in another attempt to leave the table, Margaret rose and patted her father impatiently upon the head.

"You can't bully me that way!" she said. "I got home too late to dress, and I'm going to a dance. 'Scuse!"

And she began her dancing on the spot, pirouetting herself swiftly out of the room, and was immediately heard running up the stairs.

"Penrod!" Mr. Schofield shouted. "Sit down! How many times am I going to tell you? What is the matter with you to-night?"

"I got to go," gasped Penrod. "I got to tell Margaret sumthing."

"What have you 'got' to tell her?"

"It's—it's sumthing I forget to tell her."

"Well, it will keep till she comes downstairs," said Mr. Schofield grimly. "You sit down till this meal is finished."

Penrod was becoming frantic.

"I got to tell her—it's sumthing Sam's mother told me to tell her," he babbled. "Didn't she, Sam? You heard her tell me to tell her; didn't you, Sam?"

Sam offered prompt corroboration. "Yes, sir; she did. She said for us both to tell her. I better go, too, I guess, because she said—"

He was interrupted. Startlingly upon their ears rang shriek on shriek. Mrs. Schofield, recognizing Margaret's voice, likewise shrieked, and Mr. Schofield uttered various sounds, but Penrod and Sam were incapable of doing anything vocally. All rushed from the table.

Margaret continued to shriek, and it is not to be denied that there was some cause for her agitation. When she opened the closet door, her light-blue military cape, instead of hanging on the hook where she had left it, came out into the room in a manner which she afterward described as "a kind of horrible creep, but faster than a creep." Nothing was to be seen except the creeping cape, she said, but, of course, she could tell there was some awful thing inside of it. It was too large to be a cat, and too small to be a boy; it was too large to be Duke, Penrod's little old dog, and, besides, Duke wouldn't act like that. It crept rapidly out into the upper hall, and then, as she recovered the use of her voice and began to scream, the animated cape abandoned its creeping for a quicker gait—"a weird, heaving flop," she defined it.

The Thing then decided upon a third style of locomotion, evidently, for when Sam and Penrod, a few steps in advance of Mr. and Mrs. Schofield, reached the front hall, it was rolling grandly down the stairs.

Mr. Schofield had only a hurried glimpse of it as it reached the bottom, close by the front door.

"Grab that thing!" he shouted, dashing forward. "Stop it! Hit it!"

It was at this moment that Sam Williams displayed the presence of mind which was his most eminent characteristic. Sam's wonderful instinct for the right action almost never failed him in a crisis, and it did not fail him now. Leaping to the door, at the very instant when the rolling cape touched it, Sam flung the door open—and the cape rolled on. With incredible rapidity and intelligence, it rolled, indeed, out into the night.

Penrod jumped after it, and the next second reappeared in the doorway holding the cape. He shook out its folds, breathing

hard but acquiring confidence. In fact, he was able to look up in his father's face and say, with bright ingenuousness:

"It was just laying there. Do you know what I think? Well, it couldn't have acted that way itself. I think there must have been something kind of inside of it!"

Mr. Schofield shook his head slowly, in marveling admiration.

"Brilliant—oh, brilliant!" he murmured, while Mrs. Schofield ran to support the enfeebled form of Margaret at the top of the stairs.

In the library, after Margaret's departure to her dance, Mr. and Mrs. Schofield were still discussing the visitation, Penrod having accompanied his homeward-bound guest as far as the front gate.

"No; you're wrong," said Mrs. Schofield, upholding a theory, earlier developed by Margaret, that the animated behavior of the cape could be satisfactorily explained on no other ground than the supernatural. "You see, the boys saying they couldn't remember what Mrs. Williams wanted them to tell Margaret, and that probably she hadn't told them anything to tell her, because most likely they'd misunderstood something she said—well, of course, all that does sound mixed-up and peculiar, but they sound that way about half the time, anyhow. No; it couldn't possibly have had a thing to do with it. They were right there at the table with us all the time, and they came straight to the table the minute they entered the house. Before that, they'd been over at Sam's all afternoon. So, it *couldn't* have been the boys." Mrs. Schofield paused to ruminate with a little air of pride, then added: "Margaret has often thought—oh, long before this!—that she was a medium. I mean—if she would let herself. So it wasn't anything the boys did."

Mr. Schofield grunted.

"I'll admit this much," he said. "I'll admit it wasn't anything we'll ever get out of 'em."

And the remarks of Sam and Penrod, taking leave of each other, one on each side of the gate, appeared to corroborate Mr. Schofield's opinion.

"Well, g'-night, Penrod," Sam said. "It was a pretty good Saturday, wasn't it?"

"Fine!" said Penrod casually. "G'-night, Sam."