

## *“A Flat”*

### *A Story of College Life*

Arthur Hoyt looked at himself in the glass curiously, and without self-love or self-prejudice. He saw there a frank, good-natured face, a pair of blue eyes and a mass of curly brown hair. As far as he could judge there was nothing particularly out of the way with his countenance.

“Say, Dick,” he began, to his roommate, who was puzzling over a page of Xenophon, “I’ve been taking account of stock, and I don’t see anything unpardonably wrong about my features. They are not angular enough to be called sharp, nor level enough to be justly called flat; so I can’t exactly see the suitability of the expression which has somehow come to be my college cognomen.”

“Don’t be a fool,” growled Dick, without looking up from his book.

“I’ve always been a great stickler for the fitness of things, eternal and temporal,” continued Arthur, “and if to be ‘a flat’ is really applicable as a correct description of the impression my personal appearance makes on my companions, all right! I’d as soon respond to that name as any other; but if it’s not mine, then, old fellow, it’s got to be stopped!”

“If you’d rob hen-roosts, and steal the housekeeper’s preserves, and lay [traps] to trip up old men and women, and raise Cain generally, you’d be the most popular fellow in college,” said Dick, with a disdainful grimace, still with his eyes fixed on his book. “They let me alone, you see, because I don’t care a hang for ‘em, and because they know I’m as poor as poverty and as dull as a hard-shell clam. You get ahead of ‘em in class. I’m always in the rear. You have money to subscribe to everything there is going, and you refuse to spend it in riotous living. I haven’t any money, and, therefore, I’m of no consequence. Whoever says that there isn’t compensation for everything don’t know what he’s talking about.”

“You’re a patient old soldier,” said Arthur, with a merry laugh, “and I wish I had some of your philosophy! But, the fact is, every time I’m called ‘a flat.’ I feel the fight tingling all over me. I am afraid that some time my fists will become unmanageable.”

“I guess not!” Dick replied. “You’d only get yourself in a worse [mess], besides having something to be sorry for all the days of your life, perhaps! But there’s the bell, and I’m all out of the bolt-ropes, as usual.”

“But there’s a row in camp!” said Arthur’s right-hand neighbor, as the young men took their seats in class. “Some of the boys scared old Mrs. Allen into a fit last night, and they say it’s a ‘liner.’ Nobody thinks she’ll pull through. One of the fellows dressed up in white, and rode the old woman’s cow clear into the kitchen. They let out the pig, and stoned the house, and broke her windows, and goodness knows what they didn’t do. There won’t be any show for the boys that

cut up those capers.”

“Well, there oughtn’t to be!” said Arthur, indignantly.

Just then the Greek professor entered the class-room, and, after surveying the students a moment, said, with great seriousness:

“I am requested by the President to say to Arthur Hoyt and Richard Denham that they are to repair at once to the library, where the faculty of this college wait to see them.”

“All right, sir,” responded Arthur, pleasantly. Conscious integrity made him bold. Dick arose slowly, and walked out in his usual dogged manner.

“Say, ‘A flat,’ you’re in for it!” said one of the class, in a low tone, as the young man passed him. “Your turn has come now, ‘A flat!’” said another. “Mebbe you won’t be so high and mighty now you’re found out at last!”

“What do you suppose it is?” Dick inquired, as he came up with Arthur.

“Some contemptible trick of the boys,” said Arthur; “but we shall soon know. Brace up, old fellow, for here we are.”

A few words sufficed to put the visitors in possession of all they wanted to know. After a few preliminary remarks, such as having been led to expect better things from the young men before him, the President produced a large silk handkerchief, with “Arthur Hoyt” plainly marked in one corner.

“Does this belong to you, Hoyt?” the President inquired.

“It does, sir,” replied Arthur, pleasantly.

“And is this yours?” the gentleman asked of Dick, presenting a crooked stick or cane, which the young man was accustomed to carry on long walks.

“That’s mine, sir,” said Dick.

“And here is a cuff with ‘A. Hoyt’ marked on it,” the President continued, “torn from the wrist, probably, in the pleasant excitement of frightening an innocent old woman into a fit. I shall be compelled to hold your property, sirs, until such time as the law of the college or the law of the State shall be passed upon you. Mrs. Allen is not expected to live.”

“I am very sorry, sir,” said Arthur, respectfully; “and I am sure Dick is, too; but what sort of justice is this that takes our guilt so entirely for granted? Your evidence is simply circumstantial,

sir, and I wish to say here that I was never on Mrs. Allen's premises in my life, and I am quite sure Denham never was."

"I never was," said Dick, with characteristic doggedness, "and I never expect to be."

"What would you say, Hoyt, if I were to tell you that one of the professors saw you there last night?" inquired the President.

"I should say, sir," Arthur responded, quickly, "that the professor was greatly mistaken; but if you were to tell me that one of the students saw me there, I should say that student lied."

There was a straightforwardness in the attitude of these suspected young men that was irresistible, still everything was against them. The old woman had testified that morning that she heard the names of Hoyt and Denham pronounced more than once the night before. The conspiracy was well arranged, nothing, so far as known, having been left out in its calculation. Arthur was in his room alone all the previous evening, but, as he thought it over, there was absolutely no one to testify to this fact. Dick had taken one of his long walks into the country, returning at 10 o'clock. There was no way of proving this, either, for Dick had not spoken to a soul, and there was literally no way by which he could prove an alibi. Nothing more could be said at present, and Arthur and his chum withdrew and passed slowly along to their room, as the President had ordered. On their way they met several students, who, it was plain to be seen, were waiting for them to leave the library.

"You can't most always tell a flat from a sharp," said one of the number, a young man who had been particularly offensive in his manner to Arthur. "We have all been mistaken in your character, my boy. I take notice that when these goody-goody fellows do take it into their soft pates to cut up, they generally beat the rest of us all hollow in the meanness of their efforts."

Arthur's face was scarlet, and his hands worked nervously. He was full of desire to knock this fellow down, and, under the exasperating circumstances, it was hardly to be wondered at; but the young man had been trained in a different school, so he valiantly turned on his heel and left his enemy without a word. "Valiantly" is the proper term to describe Arthur Hoyt's behavior in this crisis. It would have taken physical strength only—and Arthur had plenty of that—to have flogged Steve Cary, the young man who had just publicly insulted him, but it required real valor to turn away without either word or blow. That afternoon the tidings of the death of Mrs. Allen threw the college into terrible excitement. Officers were promptly on hand, and Arthur and Dick were subjected to the most rigid scrutiny. The Coroner's jury would convene the next morning, and until then, at any rate, the two young men were prisoners. The detective who had charge of them was a good-natured fellow, and, after asking all sorts of questions, relevant and irrelevant, as it seemed to his companions, he finally said with a chuckle:

"They may be pretty smart up here in this college, but they've got the wrong pigs by the ears this time. Say, boys, come out for a walk! I can keep an eye on you just as well out-doors as in the

house, and mebbe it 'ill chirp you up a bit."

So out they went, the detective asking all sorts of questions, it seemed to his companions for no other purpose than to make conversation. As they drew near the lake, a large and very deep sheet of water, Arthur saw that Cary was out in his—Arthur's—tiny, shallow shell of a boat.

"He'll have to be more careful, or he'll upset, as sure as fate!" said Arthur, more to himself than those about him.

"'Twould be a pity to have him drown now!" growled Dick. "Great heavens! There he goes!"

Arthur, who had been watching the boat and its occupant, threw off his coat and his boots, and, before the detective could lay a hand on him, he had plunged into the water, and was making with all his might for the drowning man. Cary could not swim, and when Arthur reached him he had come to the surface the second time. It required almost superhuman strength to bring him in, but the brave swimmer succeeded, and for a moment Arthur lay, panting and exhausted, beside the inanimate form he had snatched from the water. A half an hour later, the still-unconscious young man was borne to the college. Arthur, forgetting that he was a prisoner, did all in his power toward his enemy's restoration. As they removed his coat, a large Russia-leather pocketbook dropped to the floor, and this Arthur took into his possession.

"You had better change your clothes at once, Hoyt!" a kind voice said, after all had been done. Arthur turned, and saw the President.

"All right, sir," said the young man, presenting Cary's pocketbook. "I was afraid this might fall into improper hands, sir. It seems very full of papers."

"I hope I haven't wronged you," said the President, with considerable feeling.

"Rather hope that you have, sir," said Arthur, with a smile; "if you have wronged us, then we are innocent, you know; but, whatever the result, I shall always feel that you have acted according to your best judgment."

That evening, as Arthur, Dick and the detective sat in their room, waiting for they knew not what, a knock on the door was followed by the entrance of the President.

"Officer," he said, with trembling voice, "you can go to the parlor, if you please. These young men are not guilty, therefore they require no guard."

"I knew that afore," said the detective, as he hastily left the room.

"The pocketbook you gave me, Arthur," the President began, "has solved the mystery. There was but one student engaged in that miserable affair, and he has passed to his account," he continued

reverently. “He was joined by some young men from the city—what young men we shall probably never find out. I should have been more careful, boys,” and now the tears rolled down the good man’s face. “I have cleared your name before the whole college, and that is all I can do. Even with poor Cary dead upstairs, your friends and enemies joined in a hearty cheer of goodwill when I told them what I thought necessary.”

Somehow it came to pass from that day till the day Arthur Hoyt left college he was never again called “A flat.”

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