

ness, and he could not believe him guilty; but he felt, nevertheless, that it was necessary that something should be done, although he put it off from day to day in the hope of finding some clue to this mysterious affair, but without success. The boys exchanged glances when the summons came at length for Frank to join him in his study immediately after school. Howard trembled and turned pale.

'What is the matter?' whispered Rushton, who was watching him narrowly. 'I cannot help thinking, Howard, that you know more than you care to mention. Perhaps you suspect some one else?'

'No,' answered Howard, 'I have told you that I know nothing; I wish I did. I only know that Frank Netherton is innocent.'

'I hope he will not be punished,' murmured Rushton, in a low voice.

'Thank you—thank you, for those words!' exclaimed Howard, seizing his hand. 'I hope not. Frank was right. He always said that you had a good heart.'

'He had little cause to think so,' replied Rushton, turning away.

Frank entered Mr. Campbell's study with a cheerful countenance. 'Has anything been found out sir?' asked he after a pause.

'Nothing.'

Frank sighed. 'I am sorry for that,' thought he, 'but I must bear it as well as I can. God's time is not come yet; but it will come; no one ever trusted him in vain. Sooner or later everything will be discovered, and then Mr. Campbell will regret having punished me. After all, I do not mind a few hard lessons; it is nothing to the hard words I have had to bear of late.'

'Well, Netherton,' exclaimed Mr. Campbell, at length, 'have you nothing to say for yourself?'

'No, sir, nothing but what I have already said, that I am innocent.'

'You still maintain that the pencil-case was lost some days previous to the preaches being taken?'

'Yes, sir.'

'So far some of your school-fellows seem to corroborate your account by mentioning their having assisted you in looking for it. Have you any idea where you lost it?'

Frank hesitated and colored, and the consciousness that he did so added to the embarrassment which the searching glance of his preceptor was not calculated to remove. 'I have no idea where it was lost,' stammered he, at length.

'Is this the truth?' asked Mr. Campbell, sternly.

'It is, sir; but not the whole truth.'

'And why not the whole truth? Take care, Netherton.'

'Because—because I am not at liberty to tell you more, whatever you may think of me,' replied Frank, in a faltering voice.

'There is but one conclusion left,' replied Mr. Campbell, coldly, 'and I am very sorry for it. I shall write by to-day's post to your father.'

'To my father!' repeated Frank clasping his hands wildly together. 'O Mr. Campbell! anything but that. I will bear the heaviest punishment you like to inflict upon me—anything but that. Spare my father!'

'On one condition only,' said Mr. Campbell, after a pause, 'that you will immediately confess everything.'

'There is nothing to confess,' replied Frank. 'I am innocent, indeed I am!'

Mr. Campbell regarded him with a stern and yet sorrowful glance. 'Netherton' said he, 'I am deeply grieved and disappointed in you—grieved above all for your good of them. It will, indeed be a shock to him. You may retire now until I can think what is best to be done. In future you will study and take your meals alone.'

'I will do anything—bear anything,' exclaimed Frank, 'if you will not write to my father.'

'You have heard the conditions.'

For a moment Frank was sorely tempted to break his word with Howard, and tell Mr. Campbell all; but it was only for a moment; after which, not trusting himself to reply, he bowed in silence, and went sorrowfully away.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONFESSION.

HOWARD and Philip Doyle sat together in the deserted school-room, waiting Frank's return. The rest of the boys were in the play-ground, and the sound of their merry voices came at intervals through the open windows. 'Do you think that Mr. Campbell has heard anything?' asked the former; anything, I mean, to exculpate Frank?'

'I am afraid not. I suppose he will be punished. It is very hard.'

Howard sighed, or rather groaned an affirmative.

'Hark!' exclaimed Doyle. 'I heard the study door shut. Yes, he is coming. Now we shall know all.'

Howard crouched down behind a desk, and Frank passed without perceiving him.

'Well,' exclaimed Doyle cheerfully, as he advanced to meet him, 'so it is over at last. But how pale you look! You are not to be beaten, are you, Frank?'

Frank shook his head.

'Come, you must not give way in this manner. Never mind a hard lesson. I promise to help you all I can.'

'You will not be permitted,' said Frank: 'henceforth I am to study, and even take my meals alone. But it is not that. They might have beaten me to a mummy, and I would not

have cried out. Mr. Campbell is going to write to my father;—not that he will believe a word—he knows and loves me too well—but the least excitement makes him ill; it may kill him. O Philip! what shall I do? What will become of me?'

'My dear Frank, this is sad indeed. I scarcely know what to advise. We had better talk to Hamilton about it.'

'No; there is no person who can help me. Where is Howard?'

'He was here a moment ago,' said Doyle, looking round the room. 'But I do not see what good he can do you. No one ever thinks of consulting Howard.'

'I must see him immediately, nevertheless,' exclaimed Frank, rising up.

'In that case I will send him to you, for you are not fit to move.'

'Thank you,' said Frank; 'you are very kind.'

Several of the boys now entered the school-room. Frederick, and one or two others, went up to Frank, while the rest stood apart, and whispered among themselves.

'What will be done to him?' asked one.

'I do not know, Mr. Campbell is going to write to Mr. Netherton. That is what Frank feels so much. They say that his father is in bad health, and the shock may make him worse. Frank is his only son.'

'I cannot help pitying him,' exclaimed another.

'I should think that he would never have the face to preach to us again,' observed one.

'Surely, surely Mr. Campbell will not write,' exclaimed Rushton. 'He only says so to frighten Frank.'

'Mr. Campbell seldom says what he does not mean.'

Several of the boys whispered earnestly together.

'The only thing to be done,' exclaimed Claude Hamilton, whose keen glance watched every movement, is for the guilty to come forward and clear the innocent. Sooner or later their sin will be sure to find them out; it may be when it is too late to atone for it.'

'Who volunteers to take Netherton's place?' inquired a mocking voice.

Rushton was about to speak when he was interrupted by the entrance of Philip Doyle. 'You cannot see Howard this moment,' said he to Frank. 'He is with Mr. Campbell in his study, where he went, it appears, of his own accord, almost immediately after you left.'

Frank laid his head upon his cousin's shoulder, and burst into tears—but they were tears of joy and hope; while Frederick wept too, without knowing why.

'Even now,' said Claude Hamilton, 'my suggestion is perhaps in the act of being accomplished.'