

The Story Page

The Resignation of Mr. Barnes.

By Sarah Frances Lindsay.

The north study door was closed, and outside in the hall a group of the Barton Military Academy boys were carrying on a conversation in an animated undertone. There were five of them, after Harry Bingham came down the hall and joined them.

"What's up fellows?" he asked in that slow, drawling way of his that had won for him the nickname of Old Slow.

It was red-haired, freckled-faced Tom Watkins, always the quickest of tongue of that particular little circle of chums, who answered:

"Jack's in another scrape, and Barnesey's got him in the study. We're waiting for him. When he comes out 'The Jolly Six' is going to hold a meeting and decide how to get even with Barnesey. We knew you'd be around soon, so that's why we didn't notify you." As he spoke, Tom pushed his way past the other boys to the doorway, stooped down, and squinting up one brown eye, pressed the other one against the keyhole.

"What did Jack do?" Harry asked again. Tom was in too dangerous a position to answer, so Will Turner gave the necessary information.

"There's a spot of sulphuric acid burned into the chemistry floor, and Barnesey says Jack did it. Jack told us on his honor that he never did it at all, and this club can't allow injustice to any of its members."

"Jack'll get a lot of marks this time," put in Sam Besley, a bluish, fair-haired boy, because Barnesey was mad. He'll probably have to spend all his play hours for a week walking that old square."

"He does more walking than any boy in the school anyhow," said Will; "and then to have to walk for something he didn't do, just the week we're beginning ball practice!"

Tom's wiry body sprang away from the door with agile alertness. "They're coming," he whispered excitedly.

The door opened and a man and boy appeared. The boy was larger than his companions who had been awaiting him, but not older. He had broad shoulders and a large face with clear-cut features. His eyes, which were brown and deep-set, had just now a steady glow that meant a restrained determination and in their expression an outsider could readily read why he was the acknowledged leader of The Jolly Six. The teacher was but little larger than the boy, and much less imposing in appearance. He was very round shouldered and held his head forward in a way that made the large, thick eyeglasses he wore seem peculiarly prominent. His manner had the nervous, timid shrinking of a man utterly without social ease.

The boys responded to his greeting half-heartedly, and stood awkwardly waiting until he had disappeared through the office door halfway down the hall where they knew he had gone to report Jack's demerits. Then they clustered about Jack.

"Well, how many?" asked Will.

"Ten," answered Jack.

"Whew," said Sam Besley, and Ed Norton together with long breaths, while the brown eyes of Tom showed fire. He began to talk so fast that he almost stammered.

"Come on, boys, let's have our meeting. 'We're going to get even with old Barnesey, Jack. We're not going to let you suffer injustice.'"

Jack threw his arms across Tom's shoulders. "Cool down, Tommy," he said, quietly; then he turned to the other boys: "I'm much obliged, fellows, but I don't need you this time. I've got a plan. For once, I'm glad old Barnesey is our dormitory teacher."

"What is it?" asked Tom.

"I'm not going to tell," answered Jack with decision, "because if there's a scrape, nobody's going to be in it but me. I'm not going to hurt the trembling old thing, but I'm going to give him a good scare. And if I can, I'm going to make him be laughed at."

The boys' curiosity was not at all satisfied—especially Tom's,—but they knew the uselessness of further questions. Tom thought about the matter a good deal during that afternoon and evening, and even long after the retiring bell had rung and he was snuggled warmly in his bed, he lay awake wondering what Jack's plan could be. The last thing he remembered was the sound of Jack's even breathing coming from the bed on the opposite side of the room.

It must have been after midnight when Jack was awakened with a violent start. The room was pitch black and the door was shut, but from the corridor without there came the sound of a noisy confusion that made Tom tremble under the bedclothes. It was the sound of blows,—dull, heavy blows on some hard surface. Suddenly he set up in bed, then jumped onto the floor, and taking a match from the match safe, struck it and peered into the corner where Jack's bed stood. The bed clothes lay in a heap on the floor, and the bed was empty. As the match flickered and went out, over Tom's face there spread in the darkness, a broad, satisfied smile. With

one bound he covered the space to the door, opened it, and thrust out his head.

It was scarcely a minute before every one in the corridor was awakened. One at a time here and there along the hallway, doors opened, through which the tousled heads of boys appeared. Some were visibly startled; other scarcely awake. At last only one door remained closed,—the one that stood apart at the end of the long stretch of hall, and toward which Jack was making his way in a direct line. Will Upton's room was nearest the gas jet. When Jack had safely passed him, he thrust out his arm and turned the light up full. As if this was a signal the voices of the boys broke out in a chorus of exclamations and questions.

"Who is it? What's he doing? Where'd he get that bat?" was heard on every side. "He break the house down. Why doesn't somebody stop him? Do you suppose he's gone crazy?"

Tom stood in the doorway watching the scene exultingly, quiet himself for once, but glorying in the noise of the boys as it grew louder and louder. He waited for some minutes until the confusion seemed to have reached its height. Then he opened his mouth and shouted. He had a clear, high voice that rang out distinctly above all the other noise.

"Mr. Barnes, oh, Mr. Barnes!" he called.

Somehow, in spite of himself, the call ended in a chuckle that was clearly audible to Sam Besley, whose head and shoulders protruding from the door right next to Tom's, almost touched his neighbor's. In less than a moment Sam took up the cry. "Oh, Mr. Barnes, come out and stop him," he shouted.

"Jack's walking in his sleep, and he won't stop until somebody shakes him to wake him up. We're all afraid of him," cried Tom again.

Still the door at the end of the hall remained closed. Jack had reached it by this time; he gave it one thud from the bat, and turning around, he began to retrace his steps just as he had come.

"Mr. Barnes, oh, Mr. Barnes!" It was now the common cry of thirty boys' voices. It rang out several times in quick succession, and then there came a lull, into which there fell as from a height the sound of Mr. Barnes' voice.

"Boys, what's the cause of all this disturbance?"

"Look," cried Sam Besley, instantly, overcome with laughter, and pointing upward. Thirty pairs of eyes followed his finger to the room at the end of the hall. The door was still closed, but the transom was opened. Through it was visible to them all the top of a man's bald head that rose higher and higher until a pair of near-sighted eyes appeared, then a full, smooth-shaven face, and at last the white-robed neck and shoulders of Mr. Barnes.

"What—what's all this commotion?" he inquired, again, blinking in the sudden light.

"We're scared," came in an answering chorus.

"I'll do it, if you'll help me," shouted Tom.

Then immediately he regretted his words. He had not meant to go so far as to be openly impudent, and when to his surprise Mr. Barnes' head disappeared from the transom, he felt that it was time to put an end to matters. He stepped boldly out into the hall, walked up to Jack, and taking him by the collar, shook him vigorously.

"Wake up, old man," he said aloud; and then whispered in an undertone, "It's time to quit."

Jack let the bat fall to the floor with a thud, and rubbed his eyes sleepily.

A new voice, one of authoritative command, had come upon the scene. The noise had penetrated beyond the corridor into the farther part of the house, where it had reached the ears of Mr. Swift, the principal. Now, all unexpected, he stood among them. His words brought the obedience they always met with, and in an instant the noise had subsided into an oppressive silence, broken only by the creak of an opening door at the end of the hall, in the outline of whose framework, Mr. Barnes appeared, clothed in his bathrobe.

"Back into your rooms; every one of you, and understand, I do not want one more word spoken to-night. Tomorrow this matter will be fully investigated."

The next afternoon after school hours Mr. Swift sat alone in his office thinking. The boys had appeared remarkable docile all day, but the restlessness of restrained excitement underneath the calm exterior had been perfectly evident to the teacher. It was always so when the pronunciation of a punishment was hanging over Jack Broughton. Mr. Swift took out his watch and looked at it. It was just a quarter of an hour before the time he had appointed for Jack to come to the office and that the boy would be punctual to the minute, the teacher knew well. Meanwhile he must decide what was to be done.

Mr. Swift liked Jack. The boy had been in the school two years, and Mr. Swift had watched and studied him as he did all his boys. Never in all that time had he known Jack to tell a falsehood or to do a contemptible mean thing. Jack's spirit among the boys was strong and in so many ways commendable. The teacher admired Jack's power of leadership; it promised so much to the boy in man-

hood, and in Mr. Swift's mind, to develop able boys into men of integrity and influence was the one thing in the world most worth doing. But Jack's pranks, always frequent, had been growing more numerous of late, and the spirit of them more manifest among the boys. Jack never escaped punishment, and the quiet, manly way he always received the sentence that fell upon him, aroused the teacher's respect. Yet it seemed as if no sooner was the punishment well over than a new prank began to take shape in Jack's mind, and of late the principal had noticed that all of them in some way involved Mr. Barnes. A rap disturbed the teacher's meditation.

"Come in," he said in response. The door opened, Jack entered and stood just within the room.

"Sit down," said Mr. Swift again, indicating a seat in front of him. Jack obeyed quietly. The teacher looked at him keenly without speaking. He saw that there was no nervousness in the boy's manner, and yet there was not a tinge of disrespect.

"Jack," said Mr. Swift after the pause had become painful, "before we speak of anything, I want to ask you a question. Were you asleep last night when you were out in the corridor?"

Jack's brown eyes looked into Mr. Swift's with a direct frankness. "No, sir," he answered.

There was another pause. Then Mr. Swift spoke again. "Do you wish to tell me what led you to the prank?"

"I would rather not, sir."

There lay on Mr. Swift's desk several loose sheets of paper covered with writing. He picked them up slowly, folded them, and taking an envelope from a pile on the corner of his desk, put the folded papers within it, and sealed it. Then he leaned back in his chair and looked at Jack again.

"Jack," he said at last, "I'm going to tell you a story. I want you to listen well, but make no comment. When I am through, you may leave the room. I want you to think about the story to-night, and tomorrow after school hours, you may come to my office again and tell me your opinion of it."

"Yes, sir," answered Jack, while Mr. Swift pushed back his chair a little and began in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Some years ago there were two young men attending the same college. One of them was poor and homeless; the other belonged to the richest family of the little town in which the college was located, but in many ways he was a peculiar fellow. He was exceedingly shy and lacking in self-confidence, of very frail health, but a profound student. His family understood him, and knew him to be a nature little fitted to cope with the world. As I said, they had means, and this young fellow was brought up with the idea that his life was to be the life of a student. As soon as he finished college, he was to go abroad to study, and his sister, between whom and himself there existed a very beautiful friendship, was to go with him.

"This young man had very little to do with the boys in college. He never entered into their sports and pleasures, and always stood aloof from their college life, but in spite of his shyness, there was one thing he seemed to know by divination—their troubles. I don't suppose there was a man in the school who had any idea of the number of hidden kindnesses that fellow was responsible for. He never acted openly for himself, always through an agent, and somehow much that he did passed unsuspected. His most frequent agent was his mother, a woman of sweet, motherly instincts and a generous heart. The man I mentioned first, the poor student, had good reason to know her. In the middle of his junior year he was taken sick with a very severe attack of typhoid fever, and this woman took him, penniless, into her own home and nursed him through a long illness. It is probably to her that he owes his life.

"All that was ten years ago. Since then circumstances have changed very much with that family. The son was kept from Europe by several years of very poor health, and during that time the sister of whom he was so fond lost her eyesight. Two years ago another misfortune overtook them. They lost their money, and the mother and sister became dependent for their support upon the brother. They still had their pride.

"The young man whom they had befriended during his illness had become the principal of a boys' military school, and to him the brother of the family applied for a position to teach science in his school. The principal knew the young man's real ability as a student, but he also knew his peculiar and apparently unconquerable diffidence. He was doubtful of his friend's ability to govern boys. Yet the principal gave the man the position, hoping with all his heart that the new teacher might prove a success.

"Just as the principal feared, it was not long before there began to be trouble. We'll pass over a good many of them. The most of them in the new teacher's dormitory, and the prime mover in all was one particular boy. He was not a bad boy, but one

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