

just rapped it—why—why—your hands all over blood.”

“It’s my head,” replied Roderick, putting his hand up again to the place where his head had come in contact with the edge of the fender. “Hang you, Cuthbert!” he added faintly. “I—I feel beastly sick.” He had risen to his feet, and as he spoke he clutched unsteadily at the table. “It’s going round like anything,” he murmured. “I’d like to sit down.”

Cuthbert, who was more concerned than he liked to show, pushed him into the nearest chair, and put his handkerchief to the bleeding head, while Jack ran for the housekeeper.

“Dear! dear! now what have you been doing, and what will the Major say?” said Mrs Franklin, as she bustled in and proceeded to wash and bandage Roderick’s head. “I knew you’d get into some mischief.”

Cuthbert explained briefly that his cousin had fallen over the piano-stool and collided with the fender. Mrs Franklin said she didn’t wonder, and Roderick, who had not quite collected his wits yet, muttered by way of an excuse that it was the snake. “The snake! Bless the child, what does he mean? I hope he’s not much hurt; he seems that dazed and queer!”

Cuthbert and Jack exchanged guilty glances, but did not offer any explanation of Roderick’s remark. The box was on the floor, and Cuthbert endeavoured to thrust it further under the table with his foot, but unfortunately Mrs Franklin dropped her scissors, and, stooping to pick them up, she saw the box with its hideous contents, and seized upon it.

“Oh, you naughty boys!” she cried. “What’s the meaning of this? You have been at the Major’s cabinet!”

In a moment she was receiving confused explanations from both boys. She caught up Roderick’s hand and examined the queer little puncture in it caused by a tiny point of bone protruding from the snake’s head like a tooth, then wrung her own in terror and despair.

“It’s *poisoned!*” she cried. “Oh, merciful Heavens, what shall we do? Them *fearful* Indian things! You bad, bad boys to go and disobey and touch them—look at him, white and stupefied! Oh, merciful Lord, he’s dying!”

Jack and Cuthbert grow as white as poor Roderick. They trembled and looked at their own hands, which, however, had come off scathless. Who could have guessed that so harmless a lark held death in it? They grew sick with terror and unavailing remorse. Oh, why, why had they disobeyed and touched the contents of the cabinet?”

A panic seized poor Roderick. He sprang up from the chair only to fling himself down on the sofa. The sickness and dizziness he felt were not the effects of the fall, but the cruel, deadly poison already working in his blood.

“Oh, Cuthbert!” he cried in a frightened voice.

“Mrs Franklin! oh, can’t you do something, can’t you do something? It’ll kill me!”

“I never meant——. I didn’t know——” faltered Cuthbert, and Roderick began to cry helplessly.

“A doctor! go for a doctor!” cried Mrs Franklin, dashing out of the room to get brandy and call the housemaid for assistance.

The two boys stood irresolute and panic-stricken, gazing at each other, and at poor bandaged, dying Roderick, who continued to sob somewhat vigorously for a person in an almost comatose condition.

In a moment Mrs. Franklin returned with the housemaid at her heels.

She shook the boy roughly into an upright position, and made him drink some strong brandy and water.

“Go for a doctor!” she reiterated, as the victim coughed and choked and resisted.

“I don’t know where to go,” stammered the frightened Cuthbert.

“The first red lamp—down the street. Run, quick! quick! Oh, why isn’t the Major here?”

Cuthbert, hatless and distraught, rushed