

Stratemeyer Edward

**The Rover Boys at Big
Horn Ranch: or, The Cowboys'
Double Round-Up**



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INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: This book is a complete story in itself, but forms the sixth volume in a line issued under the general title, "The Second Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

As noted in some volumes of the first series, this line was started years ago with the publication of "The Rover Boys at School," "On the Ocean," and "In the Jungle," in which I introduced my readers to Dick, Tom and Sam Rover and their relatives and friends. The twenty volumes of the First Series related the doings of these three Rover boys while attending Putnam Hall Military Academy, Brill College, and while on numerous outings.

Having finished their education, the three young men established themselves in business and became married. Dick Rover was blessed with a son and a daughter, as was also his brother Sam, while Tom became the proud father of a pair of the liveliest kind of twin boys.

From their home in New York City the young Rovers were sent to a boarding school, as related in the first volume of the Second Series, entitled "The Rover Boys at Colby Hall." From that institution of learning the scene was shifted to "Snowshoe Island," where the lads spent a mid-winter outing. Then they rejoined their fellow-cadets and had some strenuous doings while "Under Canvas." After that, in a volume entitled "The Rover Boys on a Hunt," I related how they uncovered the mystery surrounding a strange house in the woods. And following this came a trip to Texas and Oklahoma, where, "In the Land of Luck," the boys aided Dick Rover in his efforts to locate some valuable oil wells.

In the present volume the scene is shifted back to Colby Hall and then to a ranch in the West where some remarkable happenings await our young heroes.

From reports received I am assured that the sale of this line of books has now passed the *three million* mark! This is as astonishing as it is gratifying. I sincerely trust that the reading of the volumes will do all of the boys and girls good.

*Affectionately and sincerely yours,
Edward Stratemeyer.*

CHAPTER I

SNOW AND SNOWBALLS

“Line up, fellows! No crowding ahead in this contest.”

“Here, Jack, give me some elbow room if you want me to do any real snowball throwing!” cried Fred Rover.

“All the elbow room you want,” returned his cousin gayly.

“Remember the prize!” shouted Andy Rover to the cadets who were stringing themselves out in a ragged line. “The first fellow to throw a snowball over the top of the barn gets a sock doughnut.”

“For gracious sake! what do you call a sock doughnut?” demanded Phil Franklin, another cadet, as he paused in the act of rounding up a snowball he was making.

“A sock doughnut is one with a big hole in it,” answered Andy, with a grin.

“Then my socks must be all of the doughnut variety,” put in one of the cadets dolefully. “They are always full of holes.”

“Never mind the socks now!” cried Randy Rover. “Let’s see who can put the first snowball over the barn.”

It was late in the afternoon of a day in January and a number of the cadets of Colby Hall had been amusing themselves in the snow which covered the ground to a depth of nearly a foot. They had started in to snowballing each other, but had then grown more serious and had built several snow forts and likewise two or three snowmen which later they had taken great sport in knocking apart. Then some one had suggested that they try their skill at seeing who could throw, the highest and farthest, and this had led to the present contest.

“We’ll mark off a line about a hundred feet from the main barn,” Jack Rover had announced. “And then we’ll see who can throw highest over the roof.”

The four Rovers were accompanied by half a dozen of their chums and six or eight others, and at the word from Jack the snowballs began to fly at a lively rate, a few landing on the roof of the big barn and the majority hitting the side.

“Say, look out that you don’t break a window,” warned Gif Garrison. “If you do, you’ll have an account to settle with Captain Dale.”

“Here she goes!” yelled Dan Soppinger, and let fly with so much strength that the snowball sailed up to the very ridgepole of the barn and disappeared on the other side.

“Hurrah! Dan draws first blood!” shouted Jack.

“Huh! Dan didn’t throw over the barn, he just slid over it,” snickered Randy.

Jack was hard at work making a small and perfectly round ball. Now, taking careful aim, he let fly with all his might.

“There she goes fair and square,” he announced with pardonable pride, as the snowball cleared the top of the barn by several feet and disappeared beyond.

The snowball had scarcely been thrown when two other balls thrown by Fred and another cadet went sailing over the barn. Then those in the contest seemed to acquire better skill, and soon nearly every one of them was topping the barn with the missiles.

“Phew! some hot work, I’ll say,” panted Will Hendry, usually called Fatty because he was the stoutest boy in the school.

“This exercise will do you good, Fatty,” returned Fred. “You need to reduce.”

“If Fatty keeps on he’ll be eating Colby Hall poor,” announced Spouter Powell.

“Huh! I don’t eat any more than any of you,” grumbled Fatty. “Fact is, I hold myself down.”

“Gee! listen to that, will you?” exclaimed Andy. “Fatty says he holds himself down! And this morning I saw him storing away three helpings of sausages and about ’steen dozen buckwheat cakes.”

“Nothing of the kind! I didn’t have a bit more than you had,” growled Hendry. He broke off suddenly. “Hello! what’s up now?”

“Hi! Hi! What’s the meaning o’ this?” cried a voice from around one end of the big barn, and a man, dressed in overalls and a heavy cap and carrying a broom, appeared.

“Hello there, Bob Nixon!” cried Jack. “What’s wrong?”

“There’ll be a whole lot wrong if you fellows keep on throwing those snowballs much farther,” answered Bob Nixon, who was a chauffeur for the Hall and who did all sorts of odd jobs in the winter time.

“Did we hit you?” questioned Phil Franklin.

“You sure did – on the back and on my hand,” answered Nixon.

“We didn’t know anybody was around on that side of the barn,” announced Andy.

“I don’t suppose you did. But never mind me. What I want to know is, do you fellows intend to smash all the glass in those hotbed frames out yonder?”

“Great salt mackerel!” ejaculated Fred. “I forgot those hotbed frames were there.”

“Why, the glass is out of ’em, anyway, isn’t it?” questioned Gif.

“It was out. But they’ve been setting some of ’em in again, getting ready for some early stuff. You’ve sent those snowballs up to within ten or fifteen feet of where the frames are located.”

“Gosh! it’s a good thing you told us of this,” burst out Fatty Hendry. “We might have had a nice lot of glassware to pay for.”

“Not you, Fatty,” grinned Andy. “You never even hit the top of the barn. If you break any glass it will be in some of those basement windows.”

“Come on up to the other end of the barn,” suggested Gif. “Then the snowballs will fly right out into the open field and do no harm.”

“Well, I don’t care where you throw ’em as long as you don’t get into mischief,” answered Bob Nixon, and disappeared into the barn.

After that the cadets continued to throw over the structure for some time. But then they gradually lost interest, and as the short winter day was coming rapidly to an end some hurried into the Hall to do a little extra school work before the bell should ring for supper.

“Well, what next?” questioned Fred Rover, when he and his three cousins and Gif, Phil and Spouter found themselves left alone.

“I’ve got a great scheme for to-night if you fellows will help,” announced Randy. He and his twin brother were always ready for a joke.

“What is it?” questioned Jack quickly.

“This snow is just soft enough for rolling some big balls, as we found out this afternoon,” answered his cousin. “What’s the matter with making a whole lot of big snowballs and placing ’em in some of the bedrooms to-night?”

“Gee, that’s the talk!” cried his twin merrily. “I’d like to place a couple in Codfish’s room.”

“He certainly deserves ’em,” added Fred. “He’s getting to be just as big a sneak as he ever was. All of our kindness to him seems to have been useless.”

“And I thought he was going to turn over a new leaf,” declared Jack. “I wonder if some of the other fellows haven’t been teasing him and that has made him go back to his old tricks.”

“I know one person I’d like to treat to some big snowballs!” broke out Fred. “That’s Professor Duke.”

“Oh, say! I’d like to square up with him myself,” burst out Andy. “Gee! he certainly did have it in for us yesterday.”

“Professor Duke is certainly a sour one – much worse than Asa Lemm ever dared to be,” came from Gif.

“I was thinking of Duke when I mentioned it,” said Randy. “You know he has his room in our building instead of with the other professors in Colonel Colby’s residence.”

“We don’t want to get in bad with the colonel,” remarked Fred seriously.

“Oh, I think we can fix it so that nobody will know who did it,” returned his cousin.

The matter was talked over for several minutes, and then, having agreed on their plan for more fun, the Rover boys and their chums set to work rolling a number of snowballs which were two feet or more in diameter. These they placed close to the school building at a point where there was a series of fire-escapes leading down from the upper halls of the institution.

“We can let down the ladder just as soon as we’re ready to turn the trick,” announced Randy. “I don’t believe anybody will notice it, for it will be dark and so cold that most everybody will be indoors.”

“We’ve got to be on our guard to make certain that Codfish or Duke or somebody else doesn’t spot us,” said Spouter Powell. “Of course it wouldn’t hurt if some of the regular fellows found us out, because they’d keep it to themselves.”

It must be confessed that the Rover boys were rather preoccupied in mind during supper that evening. In fact, Andy grew so thoughtless that he salted some eggs he was eating three times, so that when he finally came to his senses the food had to be pushed aside. This happened just as Professor Snopper Duke was passing, and the new teacher eyed the young cadet suspiciously.

“What is the matter with that omelet, Rover?” he demanded, in his high-pitched, nervous tone of voice.

“Nothing the matter with it, sir,” answered Andy. “Only I somehow forgot and salted it too much.”

“Really!” returned Snopper Duke sarcastically. “Is that the way you waste food?”

“No, sir. It was only a mistake,” answered Andy meekly.

“You ought to be made to eat that omelet,” continued the professor severely. “Don’t let such a thing happen again.” And then, with his eyes rolling around among the other cadets to see if anything else might be wrong, he passed slowly down among the tables of the mess hall.

“Oh, isn’t he a perfect little lamb!” murmured Randy. “So awfully tender-hearted!”

“Somebody ought to wring his neck,” grumbled his twin.

“Just the same, Andy, you’d better be careful how you handle the salt-shaker after this,” put in Jack.

After the meal the Rovers and their chums mingled with the other cadets and informed two or three of what was in the wind, and as a consequence there was quite some excitement noticeable when a little later the crowd, with the exception of Randy, slipped out of the school building by a side door. Randy ran upstairs, to appear presently on the lower landing of the fire-escape. Here was suspended a heavy iron ladder in such a fashion that it could be easily shoved out so that one end would drop to the ground.

Soon the crowd of cadets appeared in the snow below him, and then, with a warning to them to get out of the way, Randy let down the ladder and then came down himself.

“All clear upstairs,” he announced. “Not a soul in sight.”

“One of us ought to stay on guard up there to give warning in case it’s necessary,” announced Spouter.

“Well, suppose you go up,” returned Jack.

“I’d just as soon help with the snowballs,” returned Spouter. “But if you want me to go I’ll do so.” And a moment later he disappeared up the ladder and into the school building through a window which had been thrown open.

The cadets on the ground found it no easy task to raise the big snowballs up the ladder. They tried it first with nothing but their hands, but soon found they could do much better by dumping a snowball into a big overcoat and then hauling it up by the sleeves and the tail of the garment. They worked as rapidly as possible, and soon had eight of the snowballs raised to the platform of the fire-escape.

“How about it? Everything clear?” questioned Randy, as he came into the corridor where Spouter was on guard.

“All clear so far,” was the reply. “A few of the fellows are in their rooms, but no one that we are going to bother.”

“Then let’s get those snowballs inside and distribute ’em.”

In a few minutes the snowballs were gotten inside the building, and then two were rolled and pushed over to the room occupied by Henry Stowell, a cadet commonly called Codfish on account of the broadness of his mouth. Luck was with them, for the door was unlocked, so that they had little trouble in rolling the snowballs inside, where they were placed one on either side of the single bed the cadet occupied.

After this the cadets rolled several of the balls to various other rooms, one being placed in the tub of a bathroom.

“I’ve saved the biggest of the snowballs,” whispered Randy. “That’s the one we must place in Professor Duke’s room.”

The professor’s room was around in another corridor, and to get to this the cadets had to roll the big snowball directly past the top of the broad stairs leading to the hall below. They had the snowball in a position right at the head of the stairs when Spouter, who was leaning over the upper railing on guard, gave a sudden hiss of warning.

“Somebody coming!” he announced in a whisper. “And unless I’m mistaken, it’s Professor Duke!”

“Gosh! I hope he doesn’t catch us,” returned Gif Garrison. “Maybe we had better run for it.”

“Here he comes right for the stairs!” put in Jack, as he saw the familiar form pass a light in the lower hall.

The cadets did not know just what to do, and while they paused to consider, Professor Duke started up the long, straight stairs. He was evidently in deep thought and did not look above him.

“Run, fellows! Run!” whispered Andy excitedly, and then, as the others started away he attempted to follow. But the floor was wet from the melting snow, and down he came flat on his back, both feet hitting the big snowball squarely.

The movement was sufficient to send the snowball directly to the edge of the top step. Here, as Andy scrambled to his feet, it hovered for a moment, then began to slide down the stairs, gathering speed from step to step.

“Hi! Hi! What is this?” those above heard Snopper Duke ejaculate. And the next instant the teacher set up a yell of alarm as the big snowball hit him in the stomach and hurled him to one side. Then the snowball passed on down the stairs, slid across the lower hallway, and shot directly through the open door leading to Colonel Colby’s private office!

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING ABOUT THE ROVER BOYS

“Gee, we’ve done it now!”

“The snowball knocked Professor Duke over!”

“Hi! Stop that! What do you mean? Who did that?” came in smothered tones from Snopper Duke, who now sat on one of the lower steps of the stairs, holding both hands over the spot where the big snowball had struck him.

“Gosh! it struck him, all right,” whispered Gif Garrison.

“Yes. And it went across the hallway into Colonel Colby’s office!” gasped Andy, who had scrambled to his feet and given a glance downward.

“Skip for it!” put in his twin brother quickly. “We mustn’t be caught at this.”

The warning was not needed, for all of the cadets were already scrambling through the corridor and away from the stairs as rapidly as possible. They came to a halt in front of Room 18, that which Jack occupied.

“Skip inside and pretend to be reading or studying,” said the oldest of the Rover boys.

“I think we had better go to our own rooms,” said Gif to Phil and Spouter. “And remember, mum is the word,” he added for the benefit of the others.

“There’ll be some fun sooner or later, believe me,” remarked Fred. “Andy, why did you push that snowball downstairs on top of old Duke?”

“I didn’t do it on purpose. I slipped,” was the answer. “But come before they start to investigate.” And then he slipped into Jack’s room, followed by his cousins.

And here let me pause for a moment to tell something about the Rover boys and how it was that they came to be at Colby Hall. My old readers will not need this introduction, and, therefore, I shall not feel hurt if they skip my words on the subject.

In the first volume of this line, entitled “The Rover Boys at School,” I introduced three brothers, Dick, Tom, and Sam Rover, and told how they were sent to Putnam Hall Military Academy where they made a number of chums, including a cadet named Lawrence Colby.

Passing through Putnam Hall successfully, the three brothers next attended Brill College, and then went into business in New York City, where they organized The Rover Company, with offices on Wall Street.

During their school days the Rover brothers had fallen in with three very nice girls, Dora Stanhope and her cousins, Nellie and Grace Laning. The three young couples became married and settled down in connecting houses on Riverside Drive, New York City.

About a year following their marriage Dick and his wife Dora became the parents of a son, who was named John, and this son was followed by a daughter Martha. The boy Jack, as he was usually called, was a sturdy youth with many of the independent qualities which had made his father so successful.

Shortly after the birth of Jack, Tom Rover and his wife Nellie came forward with a great surprise in the form of a pair of lively twin boys, one of whom was named Anderson and the other Randolph. Andy and Randy, as they were invariably called, were exceedingly active lads, in that particular being a second edition of their fun-loving father, Tom.

About the time Tom’s twins came upon the scene, Sam Rover and his wife Grace became the parents of a little girl, called Mary. Then, a year later, the girl was followed by a boy who was christened Fred.

Residing side by side, the younger generation of Rover boys, as well as their sisters, were brought up very much as one large family. At first they were sent to private schools in the Metropolis,

but the boys, led by Andy and Randy, showed such an aptitude for fun and horseplay that their parents were compelled to hold a consultation.

“We’ll have to send those kids to some strict boarding school – some military academy,” said Dick Rover.

“I guess that’s right,” his brother Tom had answered. “Although how my wife is going to get along without having the twins around is more than I know.”

At that time Lawrence Colby, the Rovers’ former Putnam Hall chum, was at the head of a military academy called Colby Hall. To this institution Jack, Fred, and the twins were sent. And what they did upon their arrival there is told in detail in the first volume of my second series, entitled “The Rover Boys at Colby Hall.”

The military school was located about half a mile from the town of Haven Point on Clearwater Lake. At the head of the lake was the Rick Rack River, running down from the hills and forests beyond. The school consisted of a large stone building facing the river, and close by was a smaller building occupied by Colonel Colby and his family and some of the professors, and at a short distance were a gymnasium, a boathouse, and likewise bathing pavilions.

On arriving at Colby Hall the younger Rovers found several of their friends awaiting them, including Dick Powell, usually called Spouter because of his occasional desire to make long speeches, and Gifford Garrison. Spouter and Gif were the sons of Songbird Powell and Fred Garrison, men who in their boyhood days had been close chums of the older Rovers while at Putnam Hall. The Rovers made a number of other friends, and, likewise, a few enemies, many of whom will be heard of later.

As mentioned, Colby Hall was located about half a mile beyond Haven Point, and on the opposite side of the town was Clearwater Hall, a boarding school for girls. During a panic in a motion picture house the Rover boys became acquainted with several girls from Clearwater Hall, including Ruth Stevenson, May Powell, Alice Stobell, and Annie Larkins. They discovered that May was Spouter Powell’s cousin, and the whole crowd of young people soon became friends. Later on Mary and Martha Rover became pupils at the girls’ school.

Ruth Stevenson had an old uncle, Barney, and one day, while out hunting, the Rover boys did the old man a great service. For this he invited them to spend some winter holidays with him, which they did, as related in another volume, called “The Rover Boys on Snowshoe Island.”

On this island the boys met two of their former enemies, Nappy Martell and Slugger Brown, as well as Asa Lemm, a discharged teacher of Colby Hall. The Rovers exposed a plot against old Uncle Barney and caused the hunter’s enemies to leave Snowshoe Island in disgust.

Some of the boys hoped they had seen the last of Nappy and Slugger, but Jack was doubtful; and how those two unworthies turned up again to cause more trouble is related in the book entitled “The Rover Boys Under Canvas.”

This was at the time of the annual encampment, and at an election of officers Jack was made captain of Company C and Fred made first lieutenant.

While the Rover boys were at Colby Hall the great war in Europe opened. When the call for army volunteers came Dick Rover and his brother Sam lost no time in enlisting, and as soon as he could get away Tom Rover followed; and the three fathers of the boys went into the trenches in Europe to do their duty for Uncle Sam.

During the following winter at Colby Hall Gif Garrison received a letter from an uncle, stating that he and his chums might use a bungalow up in the woods. Gif at once invited the Rover boys and Spouter to become his guests, and what a glorious time the lads had is related in a volume entitled “The Rover Boys on a Hunt.”

The return of the older Rovers from Europe at the conclusion of the great war in which they had served gallantly brought something of a surprise. Dick Rover had saved the life of a man from Texas, and in return had been given the deed to some property located between Texas and Oklahoma and said to be in a region containing oil. He decided to go to Texas and Oklahoma to investigate, and the

four boys begged to go along. How they went to the oil fields and what stirring adventures they had there are related in detail in the volume preceding this, called “The Rover Boys in the Land of Luck.”

Here they fell in again with Nappy Martell, Slugger Brown, and another good-for-nothing lad named Gabe Werner, and also with a man named Carson Davenport, who did his best to do Dick Rover great harm. Davenport and some of his cohorts were finally placed under arrest. As a result of this Gabe Werner’s father took hold of some wells that were being sunk by the Davenport crowd. But in the end he and the Martells and the Browns lost a great deal of their money, so that they were left almost penniless.

“It’s a terrible blow for those three families,” said Dick Rover, when this occurred. “It will make Mr. Werner quite a poor man.”

“Well, I don’t particularly wish them any hard luck,” remarked Andy. “Just the same, I guess Nappy, Slugger, and Gabe got what was coming to them.”

Before going down to Texas and Oklahoma the Rover boys, while along the Rick Rack River during a violent storm, had succeeded in rescuing a man and his son who were caught between some rocks and a drifting tree in the middle of the swiftly flowing stream.

The man, John Franklin, was exceedingly thankful for what had been done for him, and so was his son Philip. It developed later that the Franklins owned a tract of land in Texas. And when it was discovered that the tract inherited by Dick Rover from the soldier in France was practically worthless, Jack’s father made an arrangement to work the Franklin place on shares. Two oil wells were bored, and both of these paid handsomely, making the Rovers richer than ever and also placing a substantial amount in the bank to John Franklin’s account.

“Do you know I can scarcely believe it’s true,” Phil Franklin had said to the Rover boys. “Why, my father will have more money than he ever dreamed of.”

“We’re as glad as you are, Phil,” Jack had answered. “Glad on your account as well as our own. Now maybe you can go to Colby Hall with us.”

“Say, that would be immense!” Phil had returned with pleasure. And that fall he had joined the crowd at the military academy and soon made for himself a host of friends.

“Gee, I never thought going to school could be so nice,” declared Phil Franklin to the Rover boys one day. “I always considered going to school a hardship. But this is bang-up in every way.”

“I guess you haven’t made any enemies yet, Phil,” remarked Fred. “Don’t forget that Nappy Martell, Slugger Brown, and Gabe Werner all hailed from here.”

“I’ve met only one fellow that I don’t like,” returned Phil Franklin. “That’s a fellow who came in the day I did, a big, tall, lanky chap named Lester Bangs.”

“Oh, you mean Brassy Bangs,” broke in Randy. “I know that fellow only too well. I had quite a set-to with him one day in the gym.”

“For a new cadet he’s certainly pretty forward,” answered Jack. “I’m glad he isn’t a member of my company. If he was I think I’d have to call him down more than once.”

“I guess Colby Hall is bound to have its bullies,” Andy had remarked on hearing this. “No sooner do we get rid of one group than another appears. They seem to grow like weeds.”

During the fall there had been the usual football season at the military academy, and the boys had acquitted themselves quite creditably, winning seven games out of twelve. Then had come the brief Christmas holidays. And following this the lads had settled down once more into the grind, resolved to do their best at their lessons. But, of course, they were only boys, and they had to have their fun, and occasionally the fun went a little too far and brought forth rather disastrous results, as we have just seen.

CHAPTER III

WHAT THE SNEAK TOLD

“I certainly didn’t think that snowball would go down the stairs so easily,” remarked Andy, when he and the other Rovers were alone.

“Keep quiet,” warned Jack, who had remained at the partly-opened door. “I want to hear what takes place.”

“This is outrageous, simply outrageous!” they heard in Snopper Duke’s high-pitched voice. “How dared you roll such a snowball down these stairs? And how came you to get that snowball up there anyway?”

“Excuse me, Professor, but I don’t know what you’re talking about,” answered another voice; and at this Jack gave a slight start, for he recognized the words as coming from Brassy Bangs.

“What is that? You do not know anything about the big snowball that just came hurtling down these stairs?” stormed Professor Duke.

“No, sir. I just reached the top of the stairs,” answered Brassy Bangs. “I came out of my room not ten seconds ago.”

“What do you know about this, Stowell?” went on the professor, who had now come slowly to the top of the stairs, followed by Professor Grawson, who had come out of Colonel Colby’s private office where he had been looking over some reports when the big snowball had landed with a thump against the desk at which he had been seated.

“Me? What do you mean?” stammered the youth who was known to the cadets as Codfish and who had always been more or less of a sneak.

“Somebody just rolled a big snowball down the stairs. It struck me and nearly knocked me flat,” returned the irate teacher.

“Yes, and it rolled all the way into the private office,” added Professor Grawson.

“I don’t know anything about any snowballs,” said Codfish. “I noticed the floor was all wet and I wondered what it meant.”

“I saw some fellows rushing around the corner,” came from Brassy Bangs.

“Who were they?” demanded Snopper Duke.

“I don’t know.”

“Which way did they go?”

“That way,” and Brassy pointed out the direction.

By this time the two professors had reached the top of the stairs and Grawson was looking at the water marks on the polished floor.

“Here is where they brought that big snowball in,” he remarked, pointing to the track that led to one of the windows. “They must have brought it up on the fire-escape.”

“Here are several other tracks. I think we had better follow them,” returned Snopper Duke quickly.

The track leading to the bathroom was most in evidence, and the two professors quickly discovered the big snowball resting in the bathtub.

“Evidently they put this here to have some more fun with,” announced Professor Grawson grimly. “Well, it won’t do much harm here. I’ll turn on a little hot water and it will soon melt and run off,” and he turned on the faucet as he spoke.

From the bathroom the two professors, followed by Codfish and Brassy, followed the water trail into a room occupied by several students who were particularly uppish and whom the Rovers did not like, and here some more of the snowballs were found.

“Here is another trail,” announced Professor Duke, and in a moment more had thrown open the door leading to Stowell’s bedroom.

“Here! what does this mean?” stammered Codfish, as, after the light had been turned on, he and the others saw the two big snowballs resting on either side of the bed.

“Stowell, you must have had something to do with this,” cried Snopper Duke savagely.

“No, sir. Not at all, sir,” answered the sneak in a trembling voice. “I don’t know a thing about it.”

“Where did you come from just now?”

“I – I came up the back stairs. I was just coming through the corridor when I heard the noise and came to see what it meant.”

“The back stairs, eh?” put in Professor Grawson. “What were you doing on the back stairs this time in the evening?”

“I – I was down in the kitchen.” And now Codfish grew pale.

“And what called you to the kitchen?”

“I – I was hungry, and so I asked one of the servants for something to eat.” And now Codfish was fairly whining.

“Humph! didn’t you have any supper?”

“Yes, sir. But I wasn’t feeling extra well just then and I didn’t eat very much, and that made me hungry afterwards. And, oh, say! I guess I can tell you something about those snowballs,” and Codfish’s face lit up suddenly.

“What do you know?”

“When I was passing through the little entryway that leads into the kitchen I happened to glance out of the window and I saw four or five fellows down at the foot of the fire-escape.”

“What were they doing?”

“When I looked at them they were just talking among themselves. I only looked for a moment because I was in a hurry to get to the kitchen and get back again.”

“Did you recognize any of the cadets?”

At this direct question, Codfish hesitated and showed that he felt far from comfortable.

“I don’t like to tell on anybody,” he whined. “If I do that they’ll be sure to lick me later on – I know they will!”

“You tell me who they were and I’ll see to it that they do not harm you,” put in Professor Duke quickly.

“I only saw two of the fellows real plainly,” answered Stowell. “They were standing in the light from one of the windows.”

“And who were they? Tell me! I want no nonsense now,” and Snopper Duke caught the sneak firmly by the shoulder.

“Ouch! Please don’t hurt me!” cried Codfish, in added alarm.

“Then answer me!”

“The two fellows I recognized were Captain Jack Rover and his cousin, Lieutenant Fred Rover.”

“You didn’t know the others?” put in Professor Grawson.

“No, sir. I didn’t see them well enough. They were all in the shadows.”

“I’ll investigate this,” cried Professor Duke. “Stowell, you come with me.”

“Oh, please don’t make me come!” cried the sneak. “They’ll almost kill me if they find I gave them away!”

“They sha’n’t touch you.”

“Oh, I know what they’ll do,” moaned Codfish. He had not forgotten how the Rover boys had sided with him on more than one perilous occasion, and it scared him half to death to think what they might do when they discovered how meanly he was acting.

But there was no help for it, and Codfish was marched along between the two professors, with Brassy and a number of other cadets, who had been attracted by the noise and the talk, following.

Meanwhile the four Rover boys had listened to as much of the conversation as they could catch. “They went into Codfish’s room – they are following the trail of the water on the floor,” announced Jack.

“Some of the other fellows are coming out and coming upstairs,” announced Fred. “Let us go out too and see what happens.”

“Maybe they’ll accuse Codfish of this,” remarked Randy, with a grin.

The four Rovers had just come out in the corridor and been joined by Gif, Phil, and Spouter when they found themselves suddenly confronted by Professor Duke, with Professor Grawson and poor Codfish directly behind him.

“So this is your work, is it?” demanded Snopper Duke, glaring angrily at Jack and Fred in turn.

“To what do you refer, Professor?” asked Jack, as calmly as he could.

“You know well enough, Captain Rover. It is useless for you to deny it,” stormed the angry teacher. “You and your cousins here are responsible for bringing those big snowballs into the school.”

“Who says so?” questioned Fred. At the same time he gave Codfish a look that made the sneak want to hide himself.

“Never mind who says so. We know it to be a fact,” stormed Snopper Duke. “Will you kindly let me know what you mean by such outrageous conduct?”

“Is it so very outrageous, Professor, to bring a few snowballs into the school?” questioned Randy innocently.

“We’ve often brought snow into the school,” put in Andy. “We used to use it for making a sort of home-made ice-cream – with milk and sugar and a little flavoring, you know.”

“Colonel Colby or Captain Dale never ordered us to leave the snow outdoors,” added Fred, and at this there was a snicker from among a number of the cadets who were gathered.

“I will not listen to such nonsense,” stormed Snopper Duke. “You four brought those snowballs into this school, and some of you kicked that snowball down the stairs on top of me,” he added, glaring at them.

“I want to say right now, Professor Duke, that that big snowball went downstairs by accident,” answered Andy, feeling that there was no help for it and that he must make a clean breast of the matter. “We were rolling it down the corridor when all at once I slipped in a puddle of water and both my feet struck the snowball and sent it on its way down the stairs. But we didn’t mean to send it down; I can give you my word on that.”

“I don’t believe it,” stormed Snopper Duke.

“I’m telling you the truth, sir.”

“Perhaps Rover didn’t mean to send the snowball downstairs,” put in Professor Grawson mildly. As a general thing he sided with the cadets and they had little difficulty in getting along with him.

“Mr. Grawson, I was the one to suffer through this outrageous trick,” fumed Snopper Duke. “And you will kindly permit me to handle the affair. These four cadets are guilty and must be punished.”

“I agree it is more your affair than mine, Mr. Duke,” returned the other teacher. “But don’t you think it would be wise to let the matter rest until Colonel Colby comes back from the city?”

“Not at all! Not at all! These young rascals must be taken in hand, and at once. Otherwise our authority in this institution will go to pieces.”

At this moment there was a movement among the students who had collected in the corridor, and Gif and Spouter stepped forward.

“Excuse me, Professor Duke,” said Gif. “But I had as much to do with bringing those snowballs upstairs as anybody.”

“And so did I,” added Spouter.

“And I was in on the deal, too,” came from Phil Franklin, as he too stepped forward.

“What? All of you?” demanded Snopper Duke, eyeing them coldly.

“I can assure you we meant no great harm,” continued Spouter. “We were only going to have a little fun among ourselves and with our fellow-cadets – that is, mostly,” he added somewhat lamely, as he remembered what had been said about placing some of the snowballs in the teacher’s room.

“Were any others implicated in this despicable piece of business?” demanded Professor Duke, looking around at the assembled cadets. “Answer me at once!”

There was no reply to this, the cadets simply looking at each other questioningly.

“We’re all here, sir,” said Jack. “There were no others.” And he and his cousins gave their chums a warm look to show they appreciated their coming forward to take a share of the blame.

“Seven of you, eh?” was the teacher’s sour comment. “A fine piece of business, truly.” He thought for a moment. “Come with me, all of you, and we’ll see what damage has been done down in the office.”

The assembled cadets made a passageway, and through this filed the Rovers and their chums with Professor Duke following close on their heels. Professor Grawson remained behind to talk to Stowell.

“They’ll kill me for this – I know they will!” whined Codfish. And now he was on the verge of tears.

“I don’t think the Rovers will touch you, Stowell – I don’t think they’re that class of boys,” answered Professor Grawson. “Come. I’ll go to your room with you and help you throw those snowballs out of the window.” He had not forgotten that he had been a schoolboy himself once, and he had small sympathy for such a sneak as Henry Stowell.

Down in Colonel Colby’s private office it was found that the big snowball had done little damage outside of wetting a couple of the rugs. What was left of the snowball had been gathered up by Pud Hicks, the janitor’s assistant, and now he was mopping up the floor.

“I’ll take the rugs and dry ’em in the laundry,” said Hicks. “I think they’ll be all right by morning.”

“You cadets remain here until I return,” said Professor Duke, when Hicks was ready to depart. And then he went outside and in the hallway held a whispered conversation with the janitor’s assistant.

“I guess we’re in for it,” said Jack to his cousins and his chums.

“What do you suppose they’ll do with us?” questioned Phil.

“I’m sure I don’t know.”

In a few minutes Snopper Duke returned, and there was a grin of satisfaction in his eyes as he faced the cadets.

“You will all follow me,” he declared, “and I’ll show you what can be done in this school to cadets who act as outrageously as you have acted. Come! March!” and he led the way out of the private office.

CHAPTER IV

PRISONERS

In one of the wings of the school building there was located a room about twelve feet square with one window which was barred, and this, as my old readers know, was known officially as the school guardroom or prison. Jack and Fred had once been prisoners in this guardroom on a charge that was afterwards proved to be false.

“Gee! I wonder if he’s going to take us to the guardroom?” whispered the youngest of the Rovers.

“I don’t see how he can crowd seven of us into that small room,” answered Randy. “Why, it’s only got one cot in it!”

Professor Duke led the way through the corridor and up the broad stairs. In the meanwhile Professor Grawson had ordered the other cadets to their rooms, so there was no one at hand to witness what was taking place.

Arriving on the second floor, Snopper Duke led the way into another corridor and then up a somewhat narrow stairway leading to the third floor.

“Hello! I wonder where he’s going to take us now?” questioned Fred in wonder.

“This is certainly a new wrinkle,” declared Gif.

The third floor was but dimly lit until the professor turned on more light. Then he turned into a little side corridor at the end of which was located a long, narrow room which, during the previous year, had been used by some of the hired help but which was now unoccupied.

“You will remain in this room until I have a chance to communicate with Colonel Colby,” said Professor Duke, as he marched the cadets in. “And remember! I want no cutting up here. I want you to remain perfectly quiet.”

“How long shall we have to stay here?” questioned Jack.

“That will depend on what Colonel Colby has to say about it,” was the sharp answer.

“Do you expect us to stay here all night?” demanded Randy.

“You will have to stay here unless Colonel Colby gets back from the city, and I think that hardly likely to-night,” answered the teacher. “Now remember! No noise and no horseplay or I’ll do something that you won’t forget in a hurry,” and with this admonition he walked out of the room, closing and locking the door after him.

“Listen!” cried Fred, as all of the others started to talk at once. And going to the door, he listened intently, and so did the others, and they heard Snopper Duke pass through the little corridor and down the stairs.

“He’s gone, all right enough,” remarked Phil Franklin.

“Well, what do you know about this, anyhow!” cried Gif.

“I think he’s treating us like a lot of children,” declared Andy angrily.

“I don’t believe he has any right to keep us out of our regular rooms,” came from his brother.

“Well, anyway, he took the right,” answered Jack grimly. “And what is more, he seems to have the best of us.”

“He won’t have if we break down that door.”

“I don’t think you’ll have an easy job of it breaking down that door,” put in Spouter. “I happened to notice that there was not only a regular lock on it, but also a top bolt. You’d have to smash the whole door to get out. But it certainly is a despicable piece of business,” Spouter continued. “And at the first opportunity we have we’ll have to lay the whole case before Colonel Colby. I’m sure when he has verified our report, and gone into the various merits of the case, he will make a finding that will be in accordance with – ”

“Gee! Spouter can spout even if he is a prisoner,” burst out Randy. “Better get up on a chair, Spouter, and make a regular speech about it,” he continued, grinning.

“This is a new experience for me,” remarked Phil, with a smile. “I never thought I was going to be put in jail.”

“You can hardly call it being put in jail, Phil,” answered Jack. “In a military academy it is quite common for a cadet, when he has broken the rules and regulations, to be placed in the guardhouse, just the same as he is placed in the guardhouse in the regular army.”

“I thought maybe they’d make us do what they call police duty,” said the boy from Texas. “One fellow told me that while he was in the training camp he overstepped the regulations and they made him peel potatoes until he was sick and tired of seeing them.”

“Well, they do that too,” put in Fred. “You might have to do something like that if we were at the annual encampment. But while the school session is on all they do is to lock you up.”

The boys found that the long narrow room contained two double beds and two cots, as well as a couple of bureaus, several stools, and a table. At one end was a small bathroom and a clothing closet. There were three small windows in a row, all looking out on the snow-covered fields behind the school.

“Well, we’ve got a place to sleep, anyhow,” announced Jack. “Although three of us will have to sleep in one of the beds.”

“Not much in the way of covering,” remarked Gif, who had been making an investigation. “Just one thin blanket on each bed. And that radiator is not letting out heat enough to warm a cat,” he added, as he placed his hand on the one small radiator of which the long bedroom boasted.

“Never mind, we can keep on our uniforms if we want to,” declared Randy. “And who knows but what Colonel Colby may come back at any minute, and then I’m almost certain that he’ll let us go back to our own rooms.”

“He will unless old Duke cooks up some dreadful story against us,” came from his brother. “You can bet he’ll make out as black a case against us as he can.”

“Yes. But I think Professor Grawson will have something to say too,” said Jack. “And he has always been a very fair-minded man.”

“I don’t see why Colonel Colby took on such a man as Snopper Duke,” declared Spouter. “He’s every bit as bad as Asa Lemm was.”

“But you’ve got to hand it to him for being a very well educated man,” said Jack. “And he certainly knows how to teach when he’s in the humor for it.”

“I don’t think a man who is as harsh-minded as he is ought to be a teacher,” was Gif’s comment. “He can’t get a cadet to do his best if he’s forever nagging at him. Now, if I was a teacher, I’d do my best to gain my pupils’ confidence.”

There was a pause, and presently Andy began to chuckle.

“Say, he certainly did look funny when that big snowball hit him in the stomach and nearly knocked him over,” he cried.

“How could you see that when you were on your back?” questioned Fred.

“Oh, I managed to flop over and look down the stairs just in time. He was some sight, believe me. It’s a wonder he didn’t go over backward to the floor below. I don’t know what saved him. He must have grabbed the banisters just in time.”

“You can’t really blame him for being mad. I think maybe I’d be mad myself,” said Gif. “However, let’s drop that. What are we going to do? Go to bed?”

“I don’t see that there is anything else to do,” answered Jack.

“I’ve got to do something to keep warm,” declared Andy, and suddenly turned a somersault over one of the beds. Then he began to box with his brother, and the two spun around from one end of the room to the other.

“Here! you stop that,” warned Fred. “You know what Duke said. You keep on and he’ll put us down in the cellar or some other worse place.”

After this the seven cadets became more quiet, and, sitting as close as possible to the little radiator which gave forth only a mite of warmth, they discussed the situation for half an hour longer.

“That’s another one against Codfish,” declared Randy. “I’m sure he’s guilty.”

“Well, he had some reason for saying what he did,” said Jack. “He had to clear his own skirts after they found those two big snowballs in his room.”

“Just the same, Jack, you know well enough hardly any other fellow in the school would have squealed,” cried Randy. “Codfish always was a sneak, and I guess he always will be, no matter what some of the other fellows do for him.”

“Say, look here! I thought you fellows told me that Captain Dale was in charge of this school whenever Colonel Colby was absent,” burst out Phil suddenly.

“That’s true,” answered Jack. “He was in charge all the time the colonel was in the regular army.”

“Then why didn’t Professor Duke put this up to the captain?”

“Because Captain Dale is away on a little vacation,” announced Gif. “He won’t be back until some time next week.”

“And where did Colonel Colby go?”

“They said he had gone to the city,” answered Fred. “But I don’t know what they mean by that. They may mean Boston, or New York, or some smaller place.”

“The radiator is growing stone cold,” declared Gif, who had his hands on it.

“What’ll you bet old Duke didn’t turn the heat off?” broke in Andy quickly. “It would be just like him to do it.”

“I guess about the only thing we can do is to go to bed,” announced Jack.

“Well, you had better do it with your uniform on, then,” said Spouter. “Because I’m not going to bed with the windows closed, and it’s going to be beautifully cold by and by.”

All of the cadets had been accustomed to sleeping with the windows of their bedrooms open. But they had also been accustomed to plenty of bed clothing, and knew they would probably suffer with the scant quantity of quilts now provided.

However, they had to make the best of it, and in the end did little else but take off their shoes and coats and then wrap themselves in the blankets as best they could. Of course, there was some horseplay in which even Phil Franklin indulged. But on the whole the cadets kept rather quiet, for they did not want to make matters worse than they were.

“The last time Randy and I were home our dad laid down the law good and plenty,” announced Andy. “So we’ve got to do something towards toeing the mark.”

“I’m afraid Brassy Bangs and a lot of the other fellows will have the laugh on us for this,” remarked Fred, as he turned in.

“Oh, well, you can’t have fun without paying the piper once in a while,” was Jack’s comment.

It grew colder during the night, and on rising to cut off some of the air that was blowing over him, Fred noticed that it had begun to snow. The fine hard particles were drifting into the room, and he called the attention of some of the others to this.

“I don’t care. Let it snow in if it wants to,” grumbled Randy sleepily.

But some of the others demurred to this, and presently one of the windows was closed entirely and the others left open only a few inches.

“Gee, talk about Greenland’s icy mountains!” exclaimed Gif, on arising a little after seven o’clock. “Some coldness, if you ask me!”

“You said it!” declared Jack, as he got up and walked across the floor to where the radiator was located. “Cold as ice!” he announced.

“Did you leave it turned on?” questioned Randy quickly.

“I certainly did.”

“Then old Duke must intend to freeze us out!” exclaimed Fred. “What do you know about that!”

“I know it’s a mean piece of business,” answered Andy. “Gee! why, we might all catch our death of cold.”

Having washed themselves, the cadets lost no time in donning the clothing they had taken off on retiring. Then they continued to walk around the narrow room in order to keep their blood in circulation. It was now about eight o’clock, and they wondered if they would get any breakfast.

“A hot cup of cocoa or coffee wouldn’t go bad,” remarked Spouter. “Not to say anything about ham and eggs, hot muffins, or a few other things on the side.”

“Yum, yum! don’t mention them,” groaned Andy. “I feel hollow clean down to my shoes. I didn’t have any too much supper, and I was depending on having a few crackers I had in my closet.”

“And I left an apple on my bureau,” declared Phil.

“And I had two doughnuts stored away to take to bed with me,” came from Fred.

The boys heard the cadets below assembling for roll call and the short morning parade, and then heard them march into the mess room of the Hall for breakfast.

“My! but I wish I was downstairs right now,” declared Randy. “I wouldn’t do a thing to that breakfast table!”

“Maybe they’ll bring our breakfast to us,” suggested Jack.

“If they do you can bet there won’t be any too much of it – if old Duke has anything to do with it,” returned Gif grimly.

CHAPTER V

BY THE FISHING-POLE ROUTE

Another half hour went by, and the boys confined in the room on the third floor of the school building became more and more impatient.

“Perhaps they won’t give us any breakfast at all,” said Phil Franklin presently.

“If they don’t there’ll be war,” declared Andy. “I won’t stand for being starved.”

“None of us will stand for that,” put in Gif grimly. “But I don’t believe Duke will dare do it. You must remember he will have all the other teachers to contend with. They have the same rights here as he has.”

“Yes, but Professor Grawson turned this affair over to Duke,” was Fred’s comment.

“That was because old Duke was the only one to really suffer through what we did,” answered Jack.

Another fifteen minutes passed, and then those in the room heard footsteps outside. The door was unlocked and Professor Duke appeared, followed by Pud Hicks and Bob Nixon and two of the mess-room waiters.

“Well, did you behave yourselves during the night?” demanded the teacher, as he glanced sharply from one to another of the cadets, all of whom eyed him curiously.

“We did, sir,” answered Phil, who was nearest to the door.

Leaving those who had accompanied him at the door so that none of the cadets present might escape, Snopper Duke strode into the room and looked around suspiciously, even going so far as to glance into the bathroom and the clothing closet. As was the custom during the school term, the cadets had put the beds and the cots in order, and also arranged the chairs and other furniture.

“Professor Duke, I’d like to ask something. Do you know we have no heat in here?” questioned Jack.

“Growing boys like you don’t need too much heat – it makes them lazy,” responded the teacher tartly. “You will be warm enough after you have had your breakfast.”

“Can we go downstairs now and get it?” asked Andy quickly.

“No. You are to have it up here. I have had it brought up for you,” was the answer. And then Professor Duke motioned for the two waiters to come in.

They carried two trays covered with napkins, and these they deposited on the table.

“Has Colonel Colby come back yet?” questioned Spouter.

“You will know quickly enough when he comes,” was the teacher’s reply. And then he motioned the waiters out of the room.

“Professor, do you think – ” began Bob Nixon. But the teacher caught the Hall chauffeur by the arm and pushed him out into the hallway.

“Never mind now, Nixon,” he broke in hastily. “We’ll talk matters over downstairs.” And thereupon he closed and locked the door once again, and the cadets heard him and all of the others go below.

“What do you suppose he brought Hicks and Nixon up here for?” questioned Randy, when they were left alone.

“I don’t know, unless he thought we might try to break out, and if so he would have them along to stop us,” answered Jack.

“Maybe he thought the cold and waiting for breakfast would make us desperate,” suggested Gif. “However, now they’ve gone, let’s see what they have brought us to eat.”

Eagerly the seven cadets whipped away the napkins that covered the two trays. They gave one look, and then a cry of disappointment arose.

“What do you know about this!”

“Isn’t this the limit!”

“Black coffee and bread without butter!”

“And mush with nothing but a little molasses on it!”

“And no sugar in the coffee, either!”

“Talk about your prison fare!” groaned Andy. “I think this takes the cake!”

“You mention cake and I’ll murder you!” burst out Fred. “Why don’t you speak of ham and eggs, lamb chops, fried potatoes, coffee cake with raisins in it, and things like that while you’re at it?”

“Wow! Fred for the water faucet!” exclaimed Jack, and got his cousin by the arm and made as if to run him into the bathroom.

“Hold up! I’ll be good!” pleaded the youngest Rover. “But, say! doesn’t looking at these two trays make you weary in the bones?”

“Well, anyway, the coffee is hot,” declared Spouter, as he tasted it. “And we might as well drink it before it gets cold. It will help to warm us up.”

Thereupon the seven cadets fell to eating, and soon every particle of the scanty breakfast furnished to them had disappeared. They grumbled, however, as they ate, and continued to grumble after the repast was finished.

“I’m quite sure Colonel Colby wouldn’t treat us like this,” declared Gif.

“He certainly did much better by Fred and me when we were placed in the guardroom,” declared Jack. “We got as good a meal as we ever had served to us in the mess hall.”

“It’s nothing short of a crime not to turn the heat on,” said Fred, who was examining the radiator again. “Just as cold as ever.”

“Listen!” cried Randy suddenly.

All did so, and heard a faint knocking on the door.

“Who is that?” questioned Jack, moving to the portal.

“Is that you, Jack?” came in Fatty Hendry’s voice. The stout youth was whispering through the keyhole.

“Yes, Fatty. What brought you up here?”

“I got wind that you fellows were being fed scanty rations,” answered Fatty. “How about it?”

“It’s true, all right enough.”

“Well, Dan Soppinger, Walt Baxter and myself got our heads together and we managed to make up a bundle of food for you. Just watch the window on your right,” continued the stout youth, and then tiptoed away.

Wondering what their friends intended to do, the seven cadets crowded to the window in question and opened it wide. It was still snowing, and through the thickly-flying flakes they presently saw the end of a fishing pole on which was tied a bundle done up in a pillow case.

“Hurrah! Our friends are on the job,” cried Fred delightedly, as the bundle was slipped from the end of the fishing pole and hauled into the room. Then he looked out of the window and saw at a little distance the face of Dan Soppinger at another window.

“Got it all right, did you?” demanded Dan, as he hauled in the fishing pole.

“We sure did, Dan; and much obliged to you.”

“Has Colonel Colby come back yet?” questioned Jack, looking over his cousin’s shoulder.

“No. And there is no telling when he’ll come back,” answered Dan. “He sent word that his business might keep him away for several days.” Then Dan spoke to some one behind him, and continued in a low voice, “I’ve got to go now, or they’ll catch us. Good-bye.”

The imprisoned cadets closed the window again and then placed the bundle on the table and opened it. They found it contained a rather jumbled collection of buttered bread, cheese, the knuckle of a boiled ham, a small glass full of jelly, a square of pound cake, three bananas, a couple of oranges, several apples, a small bag of lump sugar, and a can of condensed milk.

“Some collection, all right enough,” declared Spouter, as they surveyed it. “I guess they grabbed up anything they could lay their hands on.”

“They must have heard we had black coffee without sugar,” put in Fred. “Too bad we were in such a hurry. We might have feasted in great shape off of this collection.”

“Never mind. The sugar and condensed milk may come in handy later,” answered Jack.

The boys divided some of the fruit, and then made themselves a few sandwiches, and with this topped off the scanty breakfast they had previously consumed. They placed the rest of the things on the top shelf of the closet and folded up the pillow case carefully.

“We’ll have to send that back the first chance we get,” declared Fred. “Otherwise some cadet is going to catch it when his room is inspected.”

With nothing to do, the cadets found the time drag heavily. They looked around the room for some reading matter, but found nothing outside of some newspapers which had been placed on the shelves of the closet. These were old sheets, and contained nothing which they cared to peruse.

“Hurrah! we’re going to have some heat, anyhow,” cried Randy, about eleven o’clock. “Hear the radiator cracking?”

He was right, and soon the radiator became moderately warm. This did not, of course, warm the room very thoroughly, but it took the chill off and made it more comfortable than it had been.

“I’ll bet a cooky that some of the others made old Duke turn the heat on,” declared Gif.

“Either that or else some of our chums turned it on when he wasn’t watching,” answered Jack. Some time later they found out that Bob Nixon had turned on the heat unbeknown to Snopper Duke. It was also learned that Professor Grawson and Professor Brice knew nothing about the heat having been turned off.

About half-past twelve Snopper Duke appeared again, this time with one of the under teachers and two of the waiters. The under teacher had his arms full of books.

“I have had some of your text books brought up here,” explained Professor Duke. “There is no sense in your wasting your time here doing nothing. I want you to study the same as if you were attending your classes. I have also had your dinner brought up.”

“Do you expect us to study in a cold room?” questioned Jack. He had thrown one of the small bed covers over the radiator and added a book or two so that the teacher might not notice that it was warm.

“I’ll not discuss that point with you, Rover,” was Snopper Duke’s sharp reply. “You can eat your dinner, and then go at your studies.” And thereupon he directed the two waiters to deposit the fresh trays on the table and take the old ones away. Then the seven cadets were locked up as before.

In comparison, the dinner was just as scanty as the breakfast had been. For each pupil there was a small boiled potato, almost cold, a few lima beans, a small slice of roast beef, and one slice of unbuttered bread. There were also several paper drinking cups, to indicate that the cadets might drink all the water they cared to draw from the faucet in the bathroom.

“Regular miser’s lunch,” was Andy’s comment, as he surveyed it.

“Exactly!” answered Fred. And then he added dryly: “What are we going to use that sugar and condensed milk on?”

“Oh, the condensed milk will go fine on the bread,” put in Spouter. “I used to like condensed milk sandwiches.”

“And you can eat the lump sugar for dessert if you want to,” put in Jack.

All began to eat, and in the midst of the meal they heard another knock on the door. This time Ned Lowe was there, one of their chums who was a great singer and banjo player.

“Be on the watch for the beautiful fishing pole,” sang Ned in a low voice. “Hurry up. We can’t stay up here very long.”

All leaped for the window, and a few minutes later the fishing rod came once more into view, this time with another bundle attached to it. They held the end of the pole while they detached the bundle and fastened upon it the empty pillow case. The new bundle was in a large paper flour bag.

“Here is where we are going to have a regular feast!” cried Jack with satisfaction. “Just look! Almost half a boiled tongue, a quart jar of hot coffee, some boiled sweet potatoes, and half an apple pie. I declare I don’t see how they managed to get hold of it.”

“They’re certainly looking out for us,” answered Spouter.

With this addition to the food already on hand, the boys started in to have a real good dinner. They were enjoying it thoroughly and cracking all kinds of jokes when they suddenly heard a commotion in the corridor outside.

“I’ve caught you, have I?” they heard Snopper Duke exclaim. “What business have you up here, anyway?”

“I wasn’t doing any harm, Professor,” came in the voice of Dan Soppinger.

“What is that you have behind your back? Give it to me this instant,” went on the teacher.

“Gee! that’s Dan Soppinger, and he’s got himself into trouble!” exclaimed Jack, in alarm.

“I really didn’t mean to do any harm,” the imprisoned cadets heard Dan answer.

“What is that you are trying to hide? Give it to me!” There was a brief silence, and then those in the room heard the teacher continue: “A pumpkin pie and almost a pound of cheese! Where did you get those things, Soppinger? And what were you going to do with them? Come, answer me!”

“If you want to know, I was going to try to get them to those fellows you locked up,” answered Dan Soppinger, in desperation. “I heard you were just about starving them to death.”

“What’s that? Starving them to death? Stuff and nonsense! They are getting all that they need, and it’s not for you to interfere in my business,” went on Snopper Duke, his high-pitched voice rising still higher in anger. “You should be down in your classroom. Give me those things and go downstairs at once. I’ll attend to your case later.”

“Gee! poor Dan is certainly in hot water,” whispered Jack.

“Old Duke must have been spying on him,” said Randy.

“Maybe he’ll come in here and see how matters are going!” cried Spouter excitedly. “It might not be a bad thing to get all that extra food out of sight.”

He had scarcely spoken when they heard Professor Duke at the door. An instant later the portal was thrown open and the teacher stepped in. His eyes swept the trays and the plates of food the cadets were holding.

“Ha! So this is what is going on, eh?” he stormed. “Having food brought in on the sly, eh? Well, I’ll see that that is stopped! You’ll go without your supper for this!” And then, after a few more words, he stormed out of the room, banging the door behind him and locking it.

CHAPTER VI

A TOUCH OF MYSTERY

“Now I reckon we are worse off than we were before,” remarked Jack, as the assembled cadets looked at each other in consternation.

“If he cuts off our supper the best thing we can do is to save this grub,” declared Randy. “We’ll have to go on short rations.”

“And when we feel real hungry we can turn to our school books for consolation,” added his twin brother. “Gee! but doesn’t this take the cake?” And picking up his algebra he threw it at Phil. The boy from Texas dodged, and the algebra hit the wall behind him.

“Don’t start a rough-house, Andy,” remonstrated Jack quickly. “We’re in deep enough as it is. Please don’t forget that Fred and I are worse off than any of you.”

“How do you make that out?” demanded Gif.

“Because we are officers, and are supposed to be models for the rest of the cadets.”

“Huh! I forgot that,” said Gif. “That’s too bad.”

It must be admitted that the cadets were far less cheerful while finishing their meal than they had been a few minutes before. They ate somewhat sparingly, and placed what was left of the food in an out-of-the-way corner under one of the cots.

“No use of taking chances,” said Jack. “Duke may come in here and search the closet for rations when he gets the dirty dishes.”

“Well, I suppose we might as well spend our time studying,” came from Spouter presently. “We’ve got to learn our lessons, no matter if we are prisoners. Otherwise later on we’ll be marked down for that, too.”

“Too bad that poor Dan had to be caught with that pumpkin pie and cheese,” groaned Randy. He was particularly fond of the pies turned out by the Hall cooks.

Making themselves as comfortable as they could around the radiator, the seven cadets began to study. Thus an hour passed, and then came more footsteps in the hall.

“Another visitor,” said Jack, looking up.

When the door was thrown open they expected to see Snopper Duke or one of the other professors, and they were, therefore, much surprised when Colonel Colby stepped into the room. The master of the Hall was alone.

“Attention!” called Jack sharply – for this had been arranged between the cadets earlier in the day – and thereupon all of the cadets leaped to their feet and saluted.

This action came somewhat as a surprise to the master of the school, and just the faintest flicker of a smile passed over his features. Then he closed the door behind him and came forward.

“I am very sorry to learn that all of you have been breaking the rules of this institution,” said Colonel Colby, in an even tone of voice. “Captain Rover, I would like to have your version of the affair if you care to make a report.”

“I don’t know that I can make much of a report, Colonel,” answered the young captain, his face flushing. “We brought the snowballs into the school, and that is all there is to it.”

“Well, what about sending that big snowball down the stairs on top of Professor Duke?”

“That was an accident, sir, and I was responsible for it,” broke in Andy.

“An accident? Professor Duke is quite certain it was done by design.”

“He is mistaken, sir,” continued Andy, and then in a few words related exactly how the accident had occurred.

“Well, what about the snowballs that were placed in the rooms of Stowell, Besser, Lunn and in the bathroom?”

“We only meant it for a little fun, Colonel,” pleaded Fred. “Of course, I realize now that maybe we went a little too far.”

“You certainly did go too far, Lieutenant Rover. And I am especially surprised to find you and Captain Rover mixed up in anything of this sort. I expect the officers of the cadets to set a good example.”

“I was thinking you might say that, Colonel Colby,” put in Jack quickly. “And I should have thought of it before I went into the affair. But we were having such fun outside snowballing, and like that, that we got deeper into it before we gave it a second thought.”

“And we really didn’t know that we couldn’t bring any snow into the school,” put in Phil rather lamely.

“Such an explanation won’t go here, Franklin. I expect my students to have more common sense than that. Of course, it may have been nothing but a boyish prank, and if you can give me your word that the snowball which went down the stairs and hit Professor Duke was not aimed at him deliberately, I shall feel inclined to let the matter pass.”

“Oh, Colonel Colby, will you really do that?” questioned Fred eagerly.

“Please remember we’ve been punished already,” put in Spouter. “Locked up like a lot of criminals, and the radiator turned off until we almost froze to death!”

“The radiator turned off?” questioned the owner of the school. “It is hot enough now,” he added, as he placed his hand upon it.

“But it wasn’t before,” answered Gif, and gave the particulars. As he did this Colonel Colby’s face became a study.

“I will look into that,” he said, and then walked over to one of the cots and also to one of the beds and inspected the thin coverings. “I trust none of you caught cold?”

“Well, I did catch a little cold,” answered Spouter, and began to cough, for what he said was true.

After this Colonel Colby talked to the cadets for fully ten minutes, trying to show them that what they had done was not what he expected of them. He was kind almost to the point of being fatherly, and made several remarks which caused the boys to do considerable thinking.

“I am afraid some of you lads do not like Professor Duke,” said he. “I am afraid you consider him rather quick-tempered and irritable.”

“Well, he certainly isn’t as nice as most of the other teachers,” declared Randy flatly.

“He always seems to be waiting for a chance to get in on a fellow,” broke out Fred. “In some ways he’s even worse than Asa Lemm was.”

“But he’s a splendid teacher, I will say that for him,” declared Jack. “Only, the way he sometimes jumps on a fellow is terrible.”

“I shouldn’t like to have you boys compare Professor Duke with that scalawag, Asa Lemm,” declared Colonel Colby. “Lemm had a good education – if he hadn’t had I should not have engaged him to teach here – but he was not the honest and upright man Snopper Duke is. I will admit that at times he is quick-tempered, but, believe me, boys, he has good reasons for it – or, at least, there is quite some excuse for his acting that way at times. I do not feel like discussing his personal affairs with you, but you will be doing a real act of kindness if at times you don’t notice his actions when he seems rather sharp. I am quite sure he doesn’t always mean it.”

“Well, of course, if there’s some reason – ” began Jack.

“There is quite a reason, Captain Rover. But, as I said before, I do not care to discuss Professor Duke’s personal affairs further. Only, if I were one of you boys, I should go very slow in judging him. And now to come back to this present affair: I have had a talk with Professor Duke and I will have another talk this evening, and, all told, I think you have been punished enough. So we will call the matter off and you can return to your classrooms.”

“Thank you very much, Colonel Colby,” cried Jack, and, starting forward, he offered his hand, and the master of the school shook it warmly. Then all of the other cadets came forward to do likewise.

“I hope you won’t punish those other fellows for getting some extra food up to us,” said Fred, as he and Andy brought out the hidden things and placed them on one of the trays. “They only tried to do us a good turn.”

“You may rest assured, Rover, that I shall treat them only as they deserve,” answered Colonel Colby, and led the way downstairs. Here the cadets separated, each to pay a brief visit to his own room before going down to the classrooms on the lower floor.

“I wonder what Colonel Colby meant when he said Duke had reasons for being irritable?” remarked Randy.

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” answered Jack thoughtfully.

“Maybe he’s suffering from some sickness,” suggested Fred. “Perhaps he ought to have an operation and hates to have it done.”

“Maybe he’s worried about money matters,” came from Randy.

“It was certainly something worth while or Colonel Colby wouldn’t have been so serious about it,” said Fred. “Gee! I’m sorry if I misjudged him, if there is really something wrong.”

“I don’t believe Colonel Colby would caution us if it wasn’t so,” said Jack. “And after this I’m going to give Duke as much consideration as I possibly can.”

The boys had been told to go to their classrooms, but this was hardly necessary, for they had just about presented themselves when the afternoon session of the school came to an end. Then they followed some of their friends down to the gymnasium, where they were at once surrounded and asked to give the particulars of what had happened to them.

“It wasn’t a great deal,” said Jack. “And first of all I want to know what was done to Dan and the others.”

“Oh, Colonel Colby read us a little lecture, that’s all,” answered Walt Baxter, one of the cadets. “He told us we had no right to take any of the food without asking for it.”

“I offered to pay for it,” put in Ned Lowe, “and so did Dan. But the colonel said that wasn’t the point. That he wanted the discipline of the Hall maintained.”

“Did he say anything about Professor Duke?” questioned Fred.

“Not a word.”

“Well, he told us something,” continued the youngest Rover, and then related what had been said on the subject.

“Say, that squares with something I once heard,” cried Walt Baxter. “I met Professor Duke down at the barn one day where he was waiting to have Nixon drive him down to town. The professor was walking around, wringing his hands and muttering to himself. He looked all out of sorts, and he said something that sounded to me like ‘I don’t see how I can do it! I don’t see how I can really attempt it!’”

“And what do you suppose it was that bothered him, Walt?” questioned Jack curiously.

“I’m sure I don’t know. I watched him walk up and down and wring his hands. And then he took a notebook out of his pocket and began to study some of the figures in it. Then Nixon came along with the auto, and he jumped in and rode off.”

“Well, that sure is a mystery,” declared Randy.

This news concerning Snopper Duke gradually spread throughout the school, and many of the boys watched the teacher curiously. In the meantime Colonel Colby had a conference, not only with Duke, but also with Professor Grawson; and when the classes opened the next day Jack and the others found themselves treated just as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

“Colonel Colby said he would let the matter pass, and I guess he’s going to keep his word,” remarked Fred.

There was only one boy who remained troubled, and that was Codfish. He avoided the Rovers and the others as much as possible, often running away at the sight of them.

“Codfish is just about scared stiff,” remarked Randy. “He knows he got himself in wrong.”

“What a poor fish he is,” answered his twin.

On Saturday afternoon a number of the boys obtained permission to visit the town and attend the moving picture performance if they so desired. Jack had telephoned to his sister, and Martha had answered that probably a number of girls from Clearwater Hall would be in town at the same time.

“And I’ve got something to tell you, too, Jack,” said Martha over the wire. “Something I’m sure you’ll be interested in hearing.”

“Why don’t you tell me now?” he replied.

“Oh, this isn’t something to tell over a public telephone,” his sister answered.

The snowstorm had come to an end, and it was clear and bright overhead when the four Rovers and some of the others tramped to Haven Point. Here, at the railroad station, they met Martha and Mary, and also Ruth Stevenson, May Powell, and several other girls from the academy.

“How are your eyes feeling, Ruth?” questioned Jack anxiously, as he walked side by side with the girl on the way to the moving picture theater. As my old readers know, Ruth had once suffered dreadfully through getting some pepper into her eyes, and it had been feared that she might go blind.

“Oh, my eyes are quite all right again, Jack,” answered the girl. “Sometimes they feel the least bit scratchy. But I bathe them with a solution the doctor gave me and then they feel quite natural.”

“I’m mighty glad to hear that,” Jack returned warmly. For of all the girls who were friends of his sister he liked Ruth the best.

As luck would have it, there was a very good show on that afternoon, and as a consequence a crowd had assembled to obtain tickets of admission. Randy went ahead to get all the tickets needed, and while he did this Martha plucked her brother by the coat sleeve and drew him a little to one side.

“What’s this you’ve got to tell me, Martha?” questioned the young captain in a whisper.

“It’s about a fellow at your school – a chap named Lester Bangs,” replied the girl.

“Oh, you mean the fellow we call Brassy Bangs! What about him?”

“He and one or two of his particular chums have been up to Clearwater Hall three times. They took some of the girls out in a sleigh they hired, and that Bangs did his level best to get Ruth to go along. And now he has invited her to attend some kind of a party next week,” was Martha’s reply, words which for some reason he could not explain even to himself cut Jack to the heart.

CHAPTER VII

SOMETHING ABOUT A SLEIGHRIDE PARTY

“What kind of a party is it, Martha?”

“I don’t know, except that it’s somewhere out of town and some of the girls and fellows are going to the place in sleighs. I wasn’t asked to go, and I got the information in a roundabout way.”

“Then Ruth hasn’t said anything to you about it?”

“Not a word. But I’m sure she received this Lester Bangs’ invitation.”

“And you think she may accept it?”

“I hope not, Jack. Because I don’t like Bangs. He wears such showy clothing and jewelry.”

“That’s the reason we call him Brassy – he is brassy in looks and brassy in manner. He’s just as much of a hot-air bag as Tommy Flanders,” went on the young captain, referring to an arrogant youth who the summer before had pitched for Longley Academy and been knocked out of the box.

“Isn’t it queer, he put me in mind of Flanders?” whispered Martha. “I hope you don’t have any trouble with him, Jack.” And then, as some of the others came closer, the private conversation had to come to an end.

While in the moving picture theater Jack sat with Ruth beside him. They occasionally spoke about the scenes presented to them and also about school matters in general, but not one word was said by either about the party Martha had mentioned.

“Mr. Falstein certainly gets good pictures,” remarked the girl, when the performance had come to an end and the crowd of young people was moving out of the theater. “They’re just as good as one can see in the big cities.”

“They’re the same thing, only he gets them a little later,” answered Jack.

“I like the comic pictures better than anything,” declared Andy. “I hate those serious ones. They’re generally so awfully mushy.”

“Why, Andy Rover, how you talk!” cried Alice Strobell. “I think that picture they showed today of Life in a Big City was perfectly grand.”

“Especially where the heroine sobbed herself to sleep over the sewing machine in her garret room,” went on Andy, with a snicker. “Wasn’t that just the tear-bringer?”

“I don’t care! It was just as true to life as it could be,” answered Alice sturdily.

“Well, maybe,” was the airy return of the fun-loving Rover. “Come to think of it, I never did run a sewing machine in a garret room with the snow blowing through a busted window. I’d rather sit in the shade of the old apple tree reading a good book and getting on the outside of some ripe pears,” he continued, and at this there was general laughter.

As was their custom, the young folks drifted from the theater to a nearby candy and ice-cream establishment. Here they split up into various groups at some tables in the rear. Of course, the boys insisted on treating the girls, and there was quite a discussion over what each would have. Martha and Mary had paired off with Gif and Spouter, and Fred and the twins were with some of the other girls, and this left Ruth and Jack by themselves.

Several times the young captain wanted to bring the conversation around to the question of the party that had been mentioned. But every time he checked himself.

“What were you going to say?” questioned Ruth, when he caught himself once. “You act as if you had something on your mind of special importance, Jack.”

“Not at all! Not at all!” he returned hastily. “How are you getting along with your studies, Ruth? Do your eyes interfere much with them?”

“Not a great deal. But, of course, I have to be more or less careful. But I’m doing finely, so the teachers say.”

“We’re going to have an election of officers soon,” continued the young captain. “Some of the fellows are urging me to run for major of the battalion. Ralph Mason is going to drop out, you know.”

“Oh, Jack! why don’t you run?”

“Do you want me to run, Ruth?”

“Why, of course! if there’s any chance of getting it, and I don’t see why there shouldn’t be,” she returned quickly.

Her manner was so intimate that once again he was on the point of mentioning the party. But then he shut his teeth hard and pretended to be interested in something taking place at the other tables.

“Don’t you think you could win the election if you tried?” Ruth continued, after looking at him questioningly for a moment.

“Oh, I guess I’d have as good a chance as any one in command. Of course, there are a number of other officers who would have as good a chance as I’d have. But I’m not altogether sure that I want to be major. If I held that office Colonel Colby would expect me to toe the mark all the time just as an example to the others. Even as it was, he didn’t like to have me as a captain and Fred as a lieutenant mixed up in that snowball affair.”

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