

Stratemeyer Edward

**Dave Porter and the Runaways:
or, Last Days at Oak
Hall**



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Dave Porter and the Runaways Or Last Days at Oak Hall:*

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Or Last Days at Oak Hall

PREFACE

“Dave Porter and the Runaways” is a complete story in itself, but forms the ninth volume of a line issued under the general title of “Dave Porter Series.”

In the first volume of this series, entitled “Dave Porter at Oak Hall,” the reader was introduced to a typical American lad, and the particulars were given of his doings at an up-to-date boarding school.

There was a cloud over Dave’s parentage, and in order to solve the mystery of his identity he took a long voyage over the ocean, as related in the second volume, called “Dave Porter in the South Seas.” Then he came back to his schoolmates, as told of in “Dave Porter’s Return to School,” and then took a long trip to Norway, to hunt up his father, the particulars of which are given in “Dave Porter in the Far North.”

Having settled the matter of his identity to his satisfaction, our hero came back to Oak Hall and had a number of strenuous contests, related in detail in “Dave Porter and His Classmates.”

Following this came the summer vacation, and the youth made a trip West, the happenings of which are set down in "Dave Porter at Star Ranch."

When Dave returned to Oak Hall once more he found the school rivalries as bitter as ever, and what these led to has been related in "Dave Porter and His Rivals." His enemies tried hard to do our hero much injury, but he exposed them and they were forced to flee, to escape the consequences of their actions.

The winter holidays found Dave homeward bound. He had anticipated some jolly times among his relatives and friends, but a robbery upset all his plans, and, almost before he knew it, he found himself bound southward, as related in "Dave Porter on Cave Island." On the island he had many adventures out of the ordinary, and he came home more of a hero than ever, having saved Mr. Wadsworth, his benefactor, from ruin.

In the present story Dave is back once again at school. There are some queer happenings, and then some lads run away. How Dave proved his common sense, and brought the runaways back, I leave for the pages which follow to tell. I trust the reading of this volume will do all my young friends good.

Edward Stratemeyer.

February 1, 1913.

CHAPTER I

DAVE AND HIS CHUMS

“I say, Dave, here’s an odd piece of news.”

“An odd piece of news, Roger? What about?”

“A wild man in the woods back of Oak Hall,” answered Roger Morr, who held a letter in his hand. “Queerest thing you ever heard of.”

“I should say it was, if it’s about a wild man,” returned Dave Porter. “Who sent that letter?”

“Shadow Hamilton.”

“Maybe it’s another one of Shadow’s innumerable yarns,” suggested Dave, with a faint smile. “If he can’t tell them by word of mouth, he writes them down.”

“What has Shadow got to say about the wild man?” asked Phil Lawrence, looking up from the suit-case he was packing. “Has he been trying to clean out Oak Hall, or anything like that?”

“No, not exactly,” returned Roger, turning back to the letter, which he had not yet finished. “He keeps in the woods, so Shadow says, and scares everybody who comes that way.”

“How does he scare them?” asked Dave, pausing in the act of stowing a suit of clothing in a trunk.

“Shadow writes that he and Lazy were out walking one day and the wild man came after them with a big club. He wears long

hair and a long beard, and his clothes are in tatters.”

“What did they do?” questioned Phil.

“They ran back towards the school. The wild man followed ’em as far as the bridge over the brook, and then jumped into the bushes and disappeared.”

“Humph!” muttered Phil. “Is that all?”

“Oh, no! The day before that, Chip Macklin and two other of the smaller boys went out, along the river, and the wild man came after them and shoved Chip into the water. He yelled to them never to come near him again. The other fellows ran away, and as soon as Chip could get out of the water he went after ’em. Then, three days later, Doctor Clay sent out Mr. Dale and Horsehair, the driver, to look into the matter, and the wild man met them at the bridge and threw mud balls at ’em. One mud ball hit the teacher in the arm, and one struck Horsehair in the nose and made it bleed. Horsehair was afraid to go on, because the wild man jumped around and shouted so furiously. Mr. Dale tried to catch him, but he ran away.”

“Poor chap! He must be crazy,” was Dave’s comment. “He ought to be taken care of by the authorities.”

“Yes, but they can’t catch him,” continued Roger. “They have tried half a dozen ways, but he slips ’em every time.”

“Who is he?” asked Dave, as he continued to pack his trunk.

“Nobody has the least idea, so Shadow writes.”

“Say, that will give us something to do – when we get back to Oak Hall!” cried Phil. “We’ll organize a posse to round up the

wild man!”

“I think we’ll have plenty of other things to do when we get to school, Phil,” remarked Dave. “Just remember that we have lost a lot of time from our lessons, and if we want to make up what we have missed, and graduate from Oak Hall with honor, we’ve got to buckle down and study.”

“Oh, I know that,” answered Phil, and gave a little sigh. “Just the same, I’m going to have a try at the wild man – if he comes my way.”

“So am I,” cried Roger. “And Dave will try with us; won’t you, old man?” And Roger caught his chum affectionately by the shoulder. “You are the fellow to solve mysteries!”

Dave was about to answer when there came a knock on the bedroom door. He opened it to find himself confronted by a middle-aged lady, who was smiling but anxious.

“How are you getting along, boys?” she asked.

“First-rate, Mrs. Wadsworth,” answered Roger. “We’ll soon be finished now.”

“Are the girls getting anxious?” questioned Dave.

“Say, what do you think?” burst out Phil. “We are going back to Oak Hall to capture a wild man who—”

“Phil!” burst out both Dave and Roger, and the other youth stopped short in confusion.

“A wild man?” cried the lady of the house, in consternation. “Oh, Dave, I hope—”

“Oh, don’t let him worry you, Mrs. Wadsworth,” responded

Dave, quickly. "There is a wild man up there, but I don't think he will bother us any, and we've got too much to do to hunt for him." And the lad gave his chum a look that said as plainly as words: "What did you want to mention it for?"

"Oh – I – er – I was only fooling," stammered Phil. "Of course, if there is a wild man he won't come near us. Tell the girls we'll be ready in five minutes – at least I will," he added, and resumed his packing.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked the lady.

"You might try to find my striped cap," answered Dave. "I can't seem to locate it."

"It is in the library – I saw it a while ago, Dave."

"And my baseball bat – the new one with the black handle."

"That is in the back hall, in a corner. How about your books?"

"I've got all of them. Send Laura with the bat and cap, will you, please?"

"Yes;" and Mrs. Wadsworth hurried off, anxious to be of all the assistance possible.

"Say, that was a bad break for me," murmured Phil, as the door closed, and before Dave or Roger could speak. "I didn't want to worry her, Dave. I'm sorry I mentioned the wild man."

"And the man may be caught before we get back to Oak Hall," said Roger. He crossed the room and peered into a closet. "Has anybody seen my baseball shoes?"

"You left those at the Hall, Roger," answered Dave.

"Did I? All right, then. I came away in such a hurry I can't

remember what I took and what I didn't."

"I guess we've got about everything now," resumed Dave, looking around the bedroom. He glanced at his watch. "Ten minutes to twelve. We are to have lunch at a quarter past, and start at one, sharp."

"Provided the auto is ready," interposed Phil.

"It will be – trust my Uncle Dunston for that," answered Dave. "My, but isn't it jolly to think we are going back to school in the auto instead of by train!"

"Yes, and to think that the girls and your uncle are going with us!" added Roger.

"Dave, look out for Roger, he's got his eye on Laura!" said Phil, slyly.

"Oh, you give us a rest, Phil Lawrence!" burst out Roger, growing red. "I guess you've got an eye on her yourself."

"Poor me! Poor me!" murmured Phil, as if talking to himself. "Roger will talk to nobody but Laura, and Dave will see and hear and think of nobody but Jessie, and I'll be left in the cold! Oh, what a cruel world this is! If only – wow!" and Phil's pretended musings came to a sudden end, as Dave shied a pair of rolled-up socks at him and Roger followed with a pillow. In another instant a mimic battle was on, with pillows and various articles of clothing for ammunition. Then came another knock on the door and Laura Porter appeared, with a baseball bat in one hand and her brother's cap in the other.

"Oh dear me!" she cried, and then stopped short, for a red

sweater, thrown by Roger at Phil, had missed its aim and landed on her head.

“I beg your pardon, Laura, really I do!” gasped Roger, as he sprang forward and took the sweater from its resting-place. “I – I didn’t mean that for you.”

“Oh, Roger, of course you did!” cried Phil, with a twinkle in his eye. “That’s the way he salutes girls always, Laura.”

“Is this the way you are packing up?” demanded Dave’s sister, with a little smile, while poor Roger grew redder than ever.

“Oh, we were only waiting for you to bring my things, Laura,” answered her brother, coolly. “We’ll be ready in three minutes and a half by the factory whistles.”

“Say, what is this I hear about a wild man?” continued Laura, as she sat down on a chair Roger shoved towards her. “You’ve made Mrs. Wadsworth and Jessie all excited over it.”

“Oh, it isn’t anything,” burst out Phil, quickly. “I made a mistake even to mention it.”

“She came down and told Jessie and me that she was afraid you’d have more trouble, when you got back to school. As if you haven’t had troubles enough already!” And Laura looked affectionately at her brother, and then at his chums.

“Oh, this won’t amount to anything, Laura,” said Dave. “So tell Mrs. Wadsworth and Jessie not to worry about it.”

“But I want to know what it means?” demanded the sister; and in the end Dave and his chums had to relate what they knew about the wild man. As they finished the girl shook her head doubtfully.

“I don’t like that a bit,” she said. “I am sure you’ll get mixed up with that wild man somehow. Why, he might attack you and try to kill you!”

“We’ll be on our guard – when we go near the woods,” answered Roger.

“You had better not go alone,” insisted the girl.

“We seldom travel alone,” said her brother. “Generally Roger, Phil, and I are together, and very often some of the other fellows are with us. But don’t you worry, Laura, and tell Jessie and her mother it will be all right.”

“And there is another thing to be careful about, Dave,” went on Laura, as she prepared to leave.

“What is that?”

“Be careful of how you treat Nat Poole.”

“Why, what do you mean?” cried Dave, and then he added quickly, as he saw that his sister had something on her mind: “What has happened now?”

“I don’t know exactly, Dave. But I got word through Ben Basswood’s cousin that Nat had told Ben he wasn’t going to let you ride over him this term. I think Nat is jealous because you were so successful in that trip to Cave Island.”

“Did you learn of anything Nat intended to do?” questioned Roger, curiously.

“No, excepting that he said he wasn’t going to play second fiddle to your crowd any longer. He tried to get into a quarrel with Ben, but Ben would have nothing to do with him.”

“Did Nat go back to the Hall when it opened?” asked Phil.

“Yes, the same day Ben went back.”

“I am not afraid of Nat Poole,” declared Dave, stoutly. “He is a bully, always was, and I suppose he always will be. I tried to do him a favor the last time I saw him – but he doesn’t seem to have appreciated it.”

“Laura!” called a musical voice, from the stair landing.

“Coming, Jessie!” answered Laura. “Now you boys, hurry – lunch will be served in a few minutes;” and she left the room.

“So Nat Poole wants to make more trouble, eh?” mused Dave, as he resumed packing. “What a chap he is! Why can’t he be decent and mind his own business?”

“Because he isn’t that breed, that’s why,” answered Phil. “He hates to see another fellow become popular. Dave, you take my advice and watch him, when we get back to school.”

“I’ll do it,” answered Dave, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER II

A GLIMPSE AT THE PAST

“Everything ready?”

“Yes, so far as I know.”

“Then we are off! Good-bye, everybody!”

“Good-bye! Take care of yourself, Dave!”

“I will!”

There was a tooting of an automobile horn, a chorus of cries and cheers, a waving of caps, and then the big touring car that had been drawn up in front of the Wadsworth mansion rolled from the piazza steps through the spacious grounds; and Dave Porter and his chums were once more on their way to boarding school.

To those who have read the previous volumes of this line of stories Dave Porter will need no special introduction. For the benefit of new readers allow me to state that Dave was a wideawake American lad, now well along in his school years.

When a small child our hero had been found one day, walking along the railroad tracks near the town of Crumville. He could tell nothing about himself, and as nobody came to claim him, he was taken to the local poorhouse, where he remained a number of years. Then he was bound out to a broken-down college professor named Caspar Potts, who was farming for his health. The professor did what he could for the lad, but soon got into

difficulties with a mean money-lender named Aaron Poole, and would have lost his farm had it not been for something out of the ordinary happening.

On the outskirts of the town lived a wealthy jewelry manufacturer, Oliver Wadsworth. Mr. Wadsworth had a daughter named Jessie, and one day, through an explosion of an automobile tank, the little miss was in danger of being burned to death, when Dave came to her assistance. This so pleased the Wadsworths that they came not only to the boy's aid but also helped Caspar Potts.

"The lad shall go to boarding school and get a good education," said Oliver Wadsworth. And how Dave was sent off has already been related in the first book of this series, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall." At the school he made many warm friends, including Roger Morr, the son of a United States senator; Phil Lawrence, the offspring of a wealthy shipowner; Buster Beggs, who was fat as he was jolly, and Maurice, otherwise "Shadow" Hamilton, who would rather spin yarns than eat. He also made some enemies, not the least of whom were Gus Plum, a great bully, and Nat Poole, son of the money-lender already mentioned. Plum had since reformed, but Nat was as overbearing and dictatorial as ever.

The great cloud resting over Dave in those days was the question of his identity, and when some of his enemies spoke of him as "that poorhouse nobody" he resolved to find out who he really was. Getting a strange clew, he set forth on his travels, as

described in “Dave Porter in the South Seas,” where he found his uncle, Dunston Porter. Then he came back to Oak Hall, as told of in “Dave Porter’s Return to School,” and next went to the Land of the Midnight Sun, as set forth in “Dave Porter in the Far North,” where he was gladdened by a long-hoped-for meeting with his father.

“They can’t say I’m a poorhouse nobody now,” he told himself, and went back to Oak Hall once again, as set forth in “Dave Porter and His Classmates.” Here he made more friends than ever, but he likewise made enemies, the most bitter of the latter being one Link Merwell, the son of a ranch-owner of the West. Merwell did his best to get Dave into trouble, but in the end was exposed and had to leave the school.

Vacation time was now at hand, and through Laura Porter, our hero’s newly-found sister, Dave and his chums were invited to visit some of Laura’s friends in the Far West. Laura Porter and Jessie Wadsworth went along; and what a grand time the young folks had can be realized by reading “Dave Porter at Star Ranch.” The boys went hunting and fishing, and learned to do some broncho-riding, and they likewise fell in with Link Merwell again and showed that bully up in his true colors.

“Back to the grind now!” said Dave, after the vacation was over, and back he did go, to Oak Hall, as told of in “Dave Porter and His Rivals.” That term was a lively one, for some lads came there from another school, and they, led by Nat Poole, tried to run matters to suit themselves. But when the newcomers lost

an important football contest, Oak Hall woke up to the true condition of affairs, and Dave and his chums quickly regained their places on the eleven, and then won a grand victory. During this time Link Merwell, in company with another bad boy named Nick Jasniff, became a student at Rockville Military Academy, a rival institution of learning. Both bullies did their best to make trouble for our hero, but, as before, he exposed them, and this time they had to flee to escape arrest.

When the Christmas holidays came around Dave went back to Crumville, where he and his family and old Caspar Potts now lived with the Wadsworths. At that time Mr. Wadsworth had at his jewelry works some rare diamonds, waiting to be reset. Directly after Christmas came a startling robbery. The diamonds were gone, and it was learned by Dave that if they were not recovered, not only would Mr. Wadsworth be ruined, but that his own father and his uncle would be seriously crippled financially, as they had gone on a bond for the return of the gems.

At first, clues to the robbers were scarce, but soon Dave made a queer discovery, and followed this up by another, as set forth in the volume preceding this, entitled, "Dave Porter on Cave Island." He and his chums became satisfied that Link Merwell and Nick Jasniff had committed the theft, and they followed the evil pair, first to Florida and then to Cave Island, so named because of the numerous caverns it contained. The evil-doers were caught and the diamonds recovered, but, at the last moment, Link Merwell managed to escape.

“Let him go,” said Dave. “He acts as if he wanted to turn over a new leaf.”

“I am glad it wasn’t Jasniff,” returned Phil. “He is the worse of the pair.”

“Right you are,” agreed Roger.

The senator’s son and Phil had accompanied Dave to Crumville, and all had received a warm reception at the hands of those who were waiting for them. Mr. Wadsworth was delighted to get back the jewels, and thanked Dave over and over again for what he had done. Dave’s father and his uncle were also happy, and as for Laura, she had to hug her brother over and over again. Jessie wanted to hug him, too, but her maidenly modesty prevented this, but she gave Dave a look and a hand squeeze that meant a good deal, for our hero was her hero, too, and always had been.

The boys knew they had to go back to Oak Hall, but the older folks had insisted that they rest up a bit, after their traveling. So they “rested” by going skating and sleigh-riding for the last time that season, taking the girls along.

“I’ve got an idea,” said Dave’s uncle, one morning, after the snow had cleared away. “The roads are so fine just now, what is to prevent my taking you to Oak Hall in the touring car? We can make it in a day, I think.”

“Grand!” shouted Dave.

“Just the thing!” added Phil.

“Couldn’t be better,” supplemented Roger.

“You can ship your baggage on by express,” went on Dunston Porter, “and then we’ll have room enough to take Laura and Jessie, if they want to go along.”

“Fine!” burst out Roger, so quickly that it made Phil wink, and then the senator’s son grew red. “Isn’t it all right?” he demanded.

“Sure thing,” responded the shipowner’s son.

The matter was talked over; and that night it was arranged that the two girls should go along on the trip, returning later to Crumville with Mr. Porter. Not to tire Laura and Jessie too much, it was decided to leave after lunch the next day, stopping over night at Ryepoint, and finishing the trip to Oak Hall the morning following.

“If only the good weather holds out,” said Roger, wistfully. And then he added suddenly: “Who is going to sit in front with your uncle, Dave?”

“Why, you are, of course,” broke in Phil, with a grin.

“Why – er – I –” stammered the senator’s son.

“Now, Phil, you know you said you’d like that seat,” broke in Dave. “He’s only fooling you, Roger.” And then Roger looked quite satisfied, for, it might as well be confessed, Roger and Laura were very friendly and liked greatly to be in each other’s company. The senator’s son had a manly regard for Dave’s sister – the same kind of a feeling that our hero had for dear little Jessie.

The trunks and suit-cases had been shipped off, and the big six-cylinder car – a new machine belonging to the Porters – had been brought around, with Dunston Porter at the wheel, for the

old hunter and traveler had taken a strong liking to autoing. The girls and boys had piled in, after much handshaking and some kisses, and now the car was rolling out of the grounds, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Wadsworth, Dave's father, and old Caspar Potts standing on the piazza, waving the travelers adieu.

"Take care of yourself, my boy!" shouted Mr. Porter.

"I will, Dad!" called back Dave. "You take it easy till I get back," he added, for he knew that his parent had been working hard of late.

"I hate to see Dave go – he is so full of life and good cheer," murmured Mrs. Wadsworth, with a sigh.

"Best lad in the world," added her husband.

"Yes, yes! The very best!" came in a quavering voice from old Caspar Potts, and the tears stood in his glistening eyes.

"I trust he comes through this year at Oak Hall all right," resumed Mr. Porter, as, the automobile having disappeared, those left behind reentered the house. "He wishes to graduate, you know."

"Don't you think he'll come through?" asked the manufacturer, quickly.

"I'm not sure about it. He has lost so much time – on that trip he and the others took – you know."

"That is true."

"Oh, Davy will come through, never fear!" cried Caspar Potts. "I know the lad. If he makes up his mind – well, it's as good as done," and he nodded his whitened head several times. To the

old college professor who knew him so well, there was no youth quite so clever and manly as Dave Porter.

In the meantime the big touring car was leaving Crumville rapidly behind. On the front seat, beside Mr. Porter, sat Phil, waving an Oak Hall banner and cracking all kinds of jokes. In the back were the two girls with Dave and Roger. All were well bundled up, for the air, though clear, was still cold.

“Here is where we make fifty miles an hour!” cried the shipowner’s son, gayly.

“Oh, Phil!” burst out Laura. “Fifty miles an hour! Uncle Dunston, don’t you dare—”

“Phil is fooling,” interrupted her uncle.

“That’s it – I made a mistake – we are to go at sixty miles an hour, just as soon as we pass the next chicken coop. We won’t dare do it before, for fear of blowing the coop over. We—”

“Why not make it seventy-five miles while you are at it,” broke in Dave. “Nothing like going the limit.” And at this there was a general laugh.

“There is a bad turn ahead,” said Dunston Porter, a minute later. “They have torn up part of the road around the hill. We’ll have to take it pretty slowly.”

The touring car crept up the hill, past several heaps of dirt, and then started to come down on the other side. Here there was a sharp curve, with heavy bushes on both sides. Mr. Porter blew the horn loud and long, to warn anybody ahead that he was coming.

“Look out!” yelled Phil, suddenly. But the warning was not

necessary, for Dunston Porter saw the danger and so did the others. A horse and buggy were just ahead on the torn-up highway, going in the same direction as themselves. The horse was prancing and rearing and the driver was sawing at the lines in an effort to quiet the steed. It looked as if there might be a collision.

CHAPTER III

A TALK OF THE FUTURE

The girls screamed and the boys uttered various cries and words of advice. Dave leaned forward, to jam on the hand-brake, but his uncle was ahead of him in the action. The foot-brake was already down, and from the rear wheels came a shrill squeaking, as the bands gripped the hubs. But the hill was a steep one and the big touring car, well laden, continued to move downward, although but slowly.

“Keep over! Keep over to the right!” yelled Dunston Porter, to the driver of the buggy. But the man was fully as excited as his horse, and he continued to saw on the reins, until the turnout occupied the very center of the narrow and torn-up highway.

It was a time of peril, and a man less used to critical moments than Dunston Porter might have lost his head completely. But this old traveler and hunter, who had faced grizzly bears in the West and lions in Africa, managed to keep cool. He saw a chance to pass on the right of the turnout ahead, and like a flash he let go on the two brakes and turned on a little power. Forward bounded the big car, the right wheels on the very edge of a water-gully. The left mud-guards scraped the buggy, and the man driving it uttered a yell of fright. Then the touring car went on, to come to a halt at the bottom of the hill, a short distance away.

“Hello!” exclaimed Dave, as he looked back at the turnout that had caused the trouble. “It’s Mr. Poole!”

“You mean Nat’s father?” queried Phil.

“Yes.”

“Hi, you! What do you mean by running into me?” stormed the money-lender, savagely, as he presently managed to get his steed under control and came down beside the touring car.

“What do you mean by blocking the road, Mr. Poole?” returned Dunston Porter, coldly.

“I didn’t block the road!”

“You certainly did. If we had run into you, it would have been your fault.”

“Nonsense! You passed me on the wrong side.”

“Because you didn’t give me room to pass on the other side.”

“And your horn scared my horse.”

“I don’t see how that is my fault. Your horse ought to be used to auto-horns by this time.”

“You’ve scraped all the paint off my carriage, and I had it painted only last week,” went on the money-lender, warming up. “It’s an outrage how you auto fellows think you own the whole road!”

“I won’t discuss the matter now, Mr. Poole,” answered Dunston Porter, stiffly. “I think it was your fault entirely. But if you think otherwise, come and see me when I get back from this trip, which will be in four days.” And without waiting for more words, Dave’s uncle started up the touring car, and Aaron Poole

was soon left far behind.

“If he isn’t a peach!” murmured Roger, slangily. “It’s easy to see where Nat gets his meanness from. He is simply a chip off the old block.”

“He’s a pretty big chip,” returned Phil, dryly.

“I don’t see how he can blame us,” said Dave. “We simply couldn’t pass him on the left. If we had tried, we’d have gone in the ditch sure. And the scraping we did to his buggy amounts to next to nothing.”

“I am not afraid of what he’ll do,” said Dunston Porter. “A couple of dollars will fix up those scratches, and if he is so close-fisted I’ll foot the bill. But I’ll give him a piece of my mind for blocking the road.”

“But his horse was frightened, Uncle Dunston,” said Laura.

“A little, yes, but if Poole hadn’t got scared himself he might have drawn closer to the side of the road. I think he was more frightened than the horse.”

“He certainly was,” declared Phil. “When we scraped the buggy his face got as white as chalk, and he almost dropped the lines.”

“He’ll hate all of us worse than ever for this,” was Dave’s comment.

“I am not afraid of him,” answered the uncle.

On and on sped the big touring car, and soon the stirring incident on the road was, for the time being, forgotten. Crumville had been left far behind, and now they passed through one

pretty village after another. On the broad, level stretches Dunston Porter allowed the boys to “spell” him at the wheel, for each knew how to run an automobile.

“Twenty miles more to Ryeport!” cried Dave, as they came to a crossroads and read a signboard.

“And it’s just half-past five,” added the senator’s son, consulting his watch. “We’ll get there in plenty of time to wash up and have a fine dinner.”

“And, say, maybe we won’t do a thing to that table!” murmured Phil, smacking his lips.

“Oh, you boys are always hungry,” was Jessie’s comment.

“Well, you know, we’ve got to grow,” answered Phil, with a grin.

“I think I’ll enjoy eating after such a long ride,” said Laura. “The fresh air certainly does give one an appetite.”

“I think I’ll order bread and milk for all hands,” remarked Dunston Porter, with a sly smile.

“Bread and milk!” murmured Jessie, in dismay.

“Sure. It’s famous for your complexion.”

“A juicy steak for mine!” cried Dave. “Steak, and vegetables, and salad, and pudding or pie.”

“Well, I guess that will do for me, too,” said his uncle, simply. “You see, I suppose I’ll have to eat to keep you company,” and he smiled again.

“Uncle Dunston, what a tease you are!” murmured Laura. “Your appetite is just as good as that of any of the boys.”

Dave was at the wheel, and he sent the touring car along the smooth highway at a speed of twenty miles an hour. He would have liked to drive faster, but his uncle would not permit this.

“The law says twenty miles an hour, and I believe in obeying the law,” said Dunston Porter. “Besides, you can never tell what may happen, and it is best to have your car under control.”

The truth of the latter remark was demonstrated less than five minutes later, when they came to another crossroads. Without warning of any kind, a racing car came rushing swiftly from one direction and a coach from the other. Dave could not cross ahead of the racing car, and the approach of the coach from the opposite direction cut him off from turning with the car. So all that was left to do was to jam on both brakes, which he did, and then, as the racing car shot past, he released the wheels and went on, just ahead of the coach. But it was a narrow escape all around, and the girls and Roger leaped to their feet in alarm.

“Phew! see them streak along!” was Phil’s comment, gazing after the racing car, which was fast disappearing in a cloud of dust.

“They ought to be arrested!” was Laura’s comment. “Why, we might have been smashed up!”

“Good work, Davy!” cried Dunston Porter. “You did just the right thing.”

“Even if that coach driver is shaking his fist at us, eh?” answered Dave, and he bobbed his head in the direction of the coach, which had hauled up but was now going on.

“If you had been going a little faster it would have been all up with us,” said Phil, with a grave shake of his head.

“Let me take the wheel now,” said Dunston Porter, quietly, and Dave slid out of the driving-seat willingly enough, for the excitement had left him somewhat limp.

Half-past six found them in Ryeport, and a few minutes later they rolled up to the National Hotel, and the girls and boys got out, while Mr. Porter took the car around to the garage. They had sent word ahead for rooms, and all soon felt at home. The girls had a fine apartment on the second floor, front, with Dunston Porter next to them, and the three boys in a big room across the hallway.

When the young people assembled in the dining-room, after brushing and washing up, a surprise awaited them. They had a table to themselves, ordered by Dunston Porter, and decorated with a big bouquet of roses and carnations. A full course dinner was served.

“Oh, this is lovely!” cried Jessie, as she caught sight of the flowers.

“Just grand, Uncle Dunston!” added Laura. And then she added, in a lower voice: “If there wasn’t such a crowd, I’d give you a big hug for this!”

“And so would I,” added Jessie.

“All right, that’s one you owe me, girls, remember that,” answered the old hunter and traveler.

They spent over an hour at the table, enjoying the bountiful

spread provided, and telling stories and jokes. The boys were in their element, and kept the girls laughing almost constantly.

“We’ll be back to the grind day after to-morrow, so we had better make the best of it,” was the way Dave expressed himself.

After the meal, Dunston Porter went out to give directions concerning the touring car, and Phil accompanied him. This left our hero and Roger alone with the two girls. They sought out the hotel parlor, which they found deserted, and Dave and Jessie walked to the far end, where there was an alcove, while Roger and Laura went to the piano.

“Dave, won’t it be hard work to go back to the grind, as you call it?” questioned Jessie, as both stood looking out of the window.

“In a way, yes, but it’s what a fellow has got to expect, Jessie,” he returned. “A chap can’t get an education without working for it.”

“I trust you pass with high honors,” the girl went on, with a hopeful look into his face.

“I’ll try my best. Of course, I’ve lost some time – going to Cave Island and all that. Maybe I’ll flunk.”

“Oh, Dave, that would be – be–” Jessie could not go on.

“As soon as I get back I’m going to buckle down, and get to be a regular greasy grind, as they call ’em. I’ve made up my mind to one thing I’m afraid the others won’t like.”

“What’s that?”

“I’m going to cut the baseball nine, if I can. It takes too much

time from our studies.”

“Won’t that be easy?”

“I don’t know. I made quite a record, you know. Maybe the crowd will insist on it that I play. Of course, I don’t want to see Oak Hall lose any games. But I guess they’ll have players enough – with all the new students coming in.”

“And if you do graduate, Dave, what then?” asked Jessie, after a pause. This question had been on her mind a long time, but she had hesitated about asking it.

“To tell the honest truth, Jessie, I don’t know,” answered Dave, very slowly. “I’ve thought and thought, but I can’t seem to hit the right thing. Your father and Professor Potts seem to think I ought to go to college, and I rather incline that way myself. But then I think of going to some technical institution, and of taking up civil engineering, or mining, or something like that. Uncle Dunston knew a young fellow who became a civil engineer and went to South America and laid out a railroad across the Andes Mountains, and he knew another young fellow who took up mining and made a big thing of a mine in Montana. That sort of thing appeals to me, and it appeals to Dad, too.”

“But it would take you so far from home, Dave!” and Jessie caught hold of his arm as she spoke, as if afraid he was going to leave that minute.

“I know it, but – er – but – would you care, Jessie?” he stammered.

“Care? Of course, I’d care!” she replied, and suddenly began

to blush. "We'd all care."

"But would you care very much?" he insisted, lowering his voice. "Because, if you would, I'd tell you something."

"What would you tell me?" she asked.

"The young fellow who went to South America as a civil engineer took his wife with him."

"Oh, Dave!" and for the moment Jessie turned her head away.

"If I went so far off, I'd want somebody with me, Jessie. A fellow would be awfully lonely otherwise."

"I – I suppose that would be so."

"If you thought enough of a fellow, would you go to South America, or Montana, or Africa with him?" And Dave looked Jessie full in the face.

"I'd go to the end of the world with him," she answered, with sudden boldness.

Then Mr. Porter and Phil came back, and the conversation became general.

CHAPTER IV

MR. JOB HASKERS'S DOINGS

“And now for Oak Hall!”

It was Dave who uttered the words, the next morning, after a good night's rest and an early breakfast. The big touring car had been brought around by Dunston Porter, and the young folks had climbed in and stowed away the limited baggage they carried. All felt in excellent spirits, and Dave was particularly gay. What Jessie had said the evening before, and the way she had said it, still hung in his mind. She was a splendid girl, and if it was in him to do it, he was going to make himself worthy of her. He was still young, so he did not dwell long over these things, but his regard for her was entirely proper, and likely to make him do his best in his endeavors.

Phil had asked for permission to run the car for a while and took the wheel as soon as Ryeport was left behind. The shipowner's son knew how to handle an automobile almost as well as any of them, but he had one fault, which was, that he did not steer out of the way of sharp stones and like things calculated to bring on punctures and blow-outs.

“My, what a glorious morning!” exclaimed Laura, as they bowled along over the smooth roads.

“Couldn't be better,” answered Roger. “Wish we were going

on all day!" he added.

"So do I," added Dave. They expected to reach Oakdale by noon, get dinner there, and then run up to the school.

"Not too fast, Phil," warned Mr. Porter, as the shipowner's son "let her out a bit," as he expressed it. "You don't know what sort of a road you've got beyond the turn."

"We'll soon be coming to some roads we know," answered Phil. "Those we used to travel on our bicycles."

They passed through several towns and villages. Then they reached a crossroads, and here some men and a steam roller were at work, and the road was closed. One of the workmen motioned for them to take the road on the left.

"Must be a road around," said Dunston Porter. "It doesn't look very good, but you can try it. Shall I take the wheel?"

"Oh, I can run the car easily enough," answered Phil.

For half a mile they went on without trouble, through a rolling country where the scenery was very fine. Then they reached a point where the road was full of loose stones.

"Be careful!" cried Mr. Porter.

They rolled on, past a pretty farmhouse and some barns. They were just on the point of making another turn when there came a sudden bang! from under the car, and the turnout swayed to one side of the road. Phil threw out the clutch and put on the brakes, and they came to a standstill. Then the driver shut off the engine.

"What is the matter?" queried Jessie.

"A blow-out, I guess," answered Dave. "We'll soon see."

Dunston Porter and the boys got down to the ground and made an examination. The shoe of the rear left wheel had been badly cut by the sharp stones and the inner tube had been blown out through the cut.

“We’ll have to put on one of the other shoes,” said Mr. Porter. They carried two with them, besides half a dozen inner tubes.

“All right, here is where we get to work!” cried Dave. “Somebody time us, please,” and he started in by getting off his coat and cuffs and donning a working jumper. His uncle quickly followed suit, while Phil and Roger got out the lifting-jack and some tools.

The girls stood watching the proceedings for a while and then strolled back towards the farmhouse. The boys and Mr. Porter became so engrossed in putting on a new inner tube and a shoe that they did not notice their absence. The new shoe fitted the rim of the wheel rather tightly and they had all they could do to get it into place.

“Phew! this is work and no mistake!” murmured Roger. “I wonder why they can’t get tires that won’t blow out or go down.”

“Maybe some day they will have them,” answered Dunston Porter.

“I reckon this is all my fault,” put in Phil, ruefully. “I must have gone over some extra sharp stone, and it cut like a knife.”

“Oh, such accidents are liable to happen to anybody,” answered Dave. He looked at his watch. “Twenty-five minutes, and we haven’t blown it up yet! No record job this time.”

“Thank fortune we’ve got a patent pump to do the pumping for us,” remarked his uncle. Pumping tires by hand he found a very disagreeable task.

At last the shoe and tube were in place and the pump was set in motion. Dave watched the gauge, and when it was high enough he shut off the air. The tools were put away, and they were ready to go on again.

“The girls went back to that farmhouse,” said the senator’s son, pointing to a small cottage.

“Let us run back and pick them up, and wash our hands at the well.”

Once in front of the house, Dunston Porter, who was at the wheel, sounded the horn. At the same time the boys made for the well, which stood between the house and one of the barns.

“Maybe the girls went inside,” remarked Dave, as he looked in vain for them.

“Must be somewhere around,” returned Phil.

All washed up, using soap and towels carried in the car. Then Dave went to the door of the farmhouse and knocked. In answer to the summons Laura appeared.

“Oh, Dave, come in!” she cried. “I want you to meet the lady here.”

Wondering what his sister wanted, our hero stepped into the sitting-room, which was small and plainly but neatly furnished. In a rocking-chair sat an elderly woman, pale and careworn.

“Mrs. Breen, this is my brother,” said Laura. “And these are

his school chums,” she added, nodding towards Phil and Roger.

“How do you do, boys?” said the woman, in a thin, trembling voice.

“We just told her we were bound for Oak Hall,” said Jessie, who was also present. “And she says she knows somebody there.”

“She knows Mr. Job Haskers,” finished Laura.

“Mr. Haskers!” repeated Dave, mentioning the name of one of the teachers – a dictatorial individual nobody liked, and who was allowed to keep his position mainly because of his abilities as an instructor. The chums had had more than one dispute with Job Haskers, and all wished that he would leave the school.

“Yes, yes, I know him,” answered Mrs. Breen, nodding her head gravely and thoughtfully. “He is a great scholar – a very great scholar,” and she nodded again. She was not well and her mind did not appear to be overly bright. She lived alone in the cottage, a neighboring farmer taking care of her few acres of ground for her.

“Dave, come here,” whispered Laura, and led her brother to a corner of the room. “Mrs. Breen tells me that Mr. Haskers owes her money – that he used to board with her and that he borrowed some – and she says he writes that he can’t pay her because he gets so little salary, and that sometimes he has to wait a long while himself.”

“How much is it?” asked Dave, with interest. He remembered how close-fisted Job Haskers had been on more than one occasion.

“Nearly two hundred dollars, so she says.”

“He ought to be able to pay that, Laura. I think he gets a fair salary – in fact, I am sure of it – and I am also pretty sure that Doctor Clay doesn’t keep him waiting for his money.”

“It is too bad! She looks so helpless and so much in need,” murmured the girl.

“I’ll find out about this,” answered Dave.

He sat down, as did the others, and soon had the elderly lady telling her story in detail. It was not very long. Job Haskers had boarded with her one summer, just before obtaining his position at Oak Hall, and he owed her sixty dollars for this. During the time he had spent with her he had spoken of a school-book he was going to publish that would bring him in much money, and she had loaned him a hundred and twenty-five dollars for this. But she had never seen the school-book, nor had he ever paid back a cent. His plea, when she had written to him, had been that his pay was poor and that he had to wait a long time to get money, and that his publishers had not yet gotten around to selling his book.

“I never heard of any book he got out,” said Roger. “And I think I would hear if there was such a book.”

“That’s so,” added Phil. “Old Haskers would be so proud of it he would want everybody to know.”

“It is certainly a shame he doesn’t pay this lady, if he has the money,” was Dunston Porter’s comment. “Did he give you a note?” he asked of Mrs. Breen.

“He wrote out some kind of a paper and was going to give it to me. But I never got it.”

“He’s a swindler, that’s what he is!” murmured Phil, wrathfully.

“It looks that way,” answered Dave, in an equally low tone.

“He knows this lady is next to helpless and he intends to do her out of the money!”

“He ought to be sued,” exclaimed Roger.

“You have no note, or other writing about the money?” questioned Mr. Porter.

“I have his letters,” answered the elderly lady. “They are in the bureau yonder.” And she pointed to an ancient chest of drawers.

“Shall I get them?” asked Jessie, for she saw that it was a task for the old lady to move around.

“If you will, my dear. I am so stiff it is hard to get up.”

Both girls went to the chest of drawers and brought out a small box of letters. Mrs. Breen put on her glasses and fumbled them over and brought forth three communications which were, as the boys recognized, in Job Haskers’s well-known jerky handwriting. She passed them over to be read, and all present perused them with interest.

The contents, however, were disappointing, especially to the boys and Dunston Porter, who had hoped to find something by which legally to hold the school-teacher. Not once did Job Haskers mention that he owed Mrs. Breen any money. He simply stated that he regretted he could do nothing for her, that times

were hard, and that his income was limited and hard to get. He said as little as possible, and the tone of the communications showed that he hoped he would hear no more from the old lady who had done what she could to aid him.

“I think this is the limit!” said Dave to his uncle. “Don’t you think he ought to be sued?”

“I don’t know about suing him, Dave; but I think this ought to be put in a lawyer’s hands.”

“He makes money enough to pay this lady,” said Phil. “Say, I’ve a good mind to give him a piece of my mind!” he added, hotly.

“I’ll look into this when I come back this way,” said Dunston Porter, after a little more talk. “Perhaps I can get one of our lawyers to prod this Haskers a little, and also state the case to Doctor Clay.”

“Oh, will you do that, Uncle Dunston?” cried Laura, brightening, for she, as well as all of the others, felt sorry for Mrs. Breen, who seemed so poor, old, and lonesome.

“Yes, I’ll do it. And now we had better be on our way, – if we want to reach Oakdale by noon,” went on Mr. Porter.

The boys went out, followed by Jessie. Laura lingered, to whisper something in her uncle’s ear. Dunston Porter nodded, and then Laura joined the others.

“Mrs. Breen, I will be back in a day or two, to see you about this money affair,” said Mr. Porter, when he and the old lady were alone. “In the meantime, as you were so kind as to take the

young ladies in while we were mending our machine, allow me to make you a little present,” and as he finished he placed a five-dollar bill in her lap.

“Oh!” she cried, taking up the banknote. “Why, it’s five dollars! I – I can’t really take all that money!”

“Oh, yes, you can,” said Mr. Porter, smiling. “Use it as you see fit, and remember that I’ll be back, and we’ll do what we can to get that money from Mr. Haskers.”

“You are very, very kind!” murmured the old lady, and tears stood in her eyes. The past winter had been a severe one for her, and she had had a hard struggle to get along.

“Good-by!” shouted the girls and boys to her, and she waved her hand to them. Then the automobile started off once more, in the direction of Oakdale.

CHAPTER V

AT OAK HALL ONCE MORE

“Hurrah! here we are at Oakdale at last!”

“Old town looks natural, doesn’t it?”

“So it does, Roger. See any of the fellows?”

“Not yet, Dave. But we are sure to meet somebody, even if it is a school-day,” went on the senator’s son.

“Uncle Dunston, let me take the auto around to the hotel,” said our hero. “I know the streets better than you do. We have to make several turns.”

“All right, Dave,” was the ready answer, and Dunston Porter arose and allowed his nephew to crowd into the driver’s seat.

The run to the town in the vicinity of which Oak Hall was located had been made without further incident. On the way the party had talked over Mrs. Breen’s affairs, and Dunston Porter had promised to take the matter up, through his lawyer.

“I think it best that our names don’t appear in the case,” said he. “Otherwise, Mr. Haskers might not treat you so well during the term.”

“He never treats us well, anyway,” grumbled Phil. “But you are right, don’t mention our names.”

On this late winter day the town looked rather dreary, but the young folks were in high spirits, and Dave, with a grand flourish,

ran the car up to one of the best hotels the place afforded. As before, word had been sent ahead that they were coming, and the host of the resort came out to meet them.

“We’ll have dinner ready inside of quarter of an hour,” he said. “Come in and make yourselves at home.”

The repast was fully as good as the dinner served at Ryeport, and everybody enjoyed it greatly.

“And now for the Hall!” cried Dave.

“Glad to leave us?” asked Jessie, half-reproachfully.

“You know better than to ask such a question,” he replied. “But if we have got to get back to the grind, why, we might as well do it.”

“And I’m a bit anxious to see how the old place looks,” added the senator’s son.

“Dave, you can run the car to the Hall, if you wish,” said Mr. Porter, feeling sure the youth would like to do that very thing.

“All right.”

The touring automobile was brought around, and they were just getting in when there came a sudden hail from across the way.

“Hello, there, everybody!”

“It’s Dave Porter, and Roger, and Phil!” said somebody else.

“Why, how are you, Shadow!” cried our hero. “And how are you, Buster?” he added, as Maurice Hamilton and Buster Beggs came across the road to greet them.

“Fine!” puffed Buster, who was very fat and jolly. “Only

Shadow has been walking the feet off of me!” And then the stout youth shook hands all around.

“Now, just to hear that!” cried Shadow, as he, too, shook hands. “Why, all we did was to walk from the Hall to here.”

“And up one street and down another for half an hour,” burst in Buster.

“Say, that puts me in mind of a story!” cried Shadow, who was noted for his yarn-spinning weakness. “Once two men started to walk—”

“Stow it!” came from three of the other lads in concert.

“It’s too early yet to tell stories, Shadow,” said Dave, with a smile. “You can tell them to-night. Tell us now, is there anything new at the Hall?”

“There sure is.”

“What?” asked Phil and Roger.

“The wild man.”

“Oh, has he turned up again?” asked the girls, with interest.

“Twice – yesterday morning and this morning,” said Buster.

“He didn’t turn up at all, Buster,” interposed Shadow. “When you start to tell a story, why don’t you tell it straight?”

“Oh, you tell it,” grumbled the fat boy. “You have that sort of thing down to a science.”

“There isn’t very much to tell,” went on Shadow Hamilton. “He left his mark, that’s all.”

“Left his mark?” queried Dave.

“That’s it – wide, blue marks. He must have about a ton of

blue chalk.”

“Say, Shadow, you are talking in riddles,” burst out the shipowner’s son. “Give it to us in plain United States, can’t you?”

“Sure I can. Well, this wild man visited the school yesterday morning and this morning, before anybody was up. The first time he went into the big classroom and took some books, and the next time he visited the kitchen and pantry and took some grub – I beg the ladies’ pardon – I should have said food – a ham, a chicken, and some doughnuts.”

“And the blue chalk–?” queried Mr. Porter.

“I was coming to that. In the classroom he left his mark – a big circle, with a cross inside, in blue chalk.”

“And how do you know that is the mark of the wild man?” asked Laura.

“Oh, we found that out some time ago,” answered Shadow. “He seems to have a mania for blue chalk, and even puts it on his face sometimes, and he chinks down that circle with the cross wherever he goes.”

“Then, if he does that, why can’t they trail him down?” asked Dave.

“Because he is like a flea – when you try to put your hands on him he isn’t there,” answered Shadow. “And say, that puts me in mind of another story. Once three boys were–”

“That will do, Shadow!” cried Roger. “About the wild man is enough for the present.”

“Have they any idea who he is?” asked Dunston Porter.

“Not the slightest,” answered Buster. “And they don’t know where he keeps himself, although it must be in the woods near the school.”

“Oh, Dave, I hope he doesn’t harm anybody!” cried Jessie, with a shiver.

“Are you boys ready to go back to the Hall?” asked Dunston Porter.

“I am,” responded Buster, readily.

“So am I,” added the story-teller of the school.

“Then we’ll take you along, provided you don’t mind being crowded.”

“We won’t mind, if the young ladies won’t,” returned the fat youth.

“Oh, come in by all means!” cried Laura.

“We’ll make room somehow,” added Jessie.

A minute later the big car started on the way to Oak Hall, with Dave at the wheel and his uncle beside him.

“Looks familiar, doesn’t it?” called out Roger, as they spun along the turnpike.

“It certainly does!” answered Roger, and then he added, “What do you say to the old school song?”

“Fine!” came back the answer, and then the senator’s son commenced a song they all knew well, which was sung to the tune of “Auld Lang Syne.” The girls knew the song, too, and readily joined in.

“Oak Hall we never shall forget,
No matter where we roam;
It is the very best of schools,
To us it’s just like home!
Then give three cheers, and let them ring
Throughout this world so wide,
To let the people know that we
Elect to here abide!”

Loud and clear over the cool air sounded the song, and it was sung several times. Then, just as the car rolled into the grounds of the school, the boys gave one of the Hall yells, and Dave honked the horn of the automobile loud and long.

“Hello! It’s the Porter crowd!”

“Welcome to our city!”

“How about Cave Island, Dave! Did you bring it with you?”

“Heard you caught Jasniff and Merwell, Roger. Good for you!”

“Say, Phil, you’re as sunburnt as if you’d been to the seashore for a summer.”

So the talk ran on as half a dozen students flocked up to the car. The afternoon session was over, and despite the chilliness many lads were out on the campus. Many knew the girls – having met them at some athletic games and at a commencement – and those that did not were glad of a chance for an introduction.

“I am real glad to see you back, boys,” said Doctor Hasmer Clay, the head of the institution, as he appeared and shook hands.

“Glad to see you, Mr. Porter, and also the young ladies,” he added. “So you came all the way by automobile, eh? It must have been a delightful trip.”

“It was,” answered Dave’s uncle.

All went inside, and the visitors were permitted to accompany Dave and his chums to their dormitory. The boys’ baggage had already arrived, so it did not take the lads long to settle down.

“And now we’ll have to start back,” said Dunston Porter, a little later. “Dave, take good care of yourself, and make a good record.”

“I’ll do my best, Uncle Dunston.”

“And don’t let that wild man get you,” added Jessie, as she took his hand and allowed him to hold her own, perhaps longer than was necessary.

“And don’t forget to write,” put in his sister.

“Oh, I’ll not forget that!” answered Dave, with a smile, both to his sister and to the girl whom he regarded so warmly.

It was a trying moment – this parting – but it was soon over, and, with Dunston Porter at the wheel, and the girls and boys waving their hands, the touring car left the Oak Hall grounds, on its return journey to Crumville.

“Well, here we are, as the pug dog said to the looking-glass, when he walked behind it to look for himself,” remarked Phil, dropping into a chair.

“I suppose it will take us a few days to get settled down,” answered Dave, resting on the top of a table. “I don’t feel much

like unpacking yet, do you?"

"No, let us wait until to-night or to-morrow," returned Roger, dropping on one of the beds. He was still thinking of how clear and deep Laura's eyes had appeared when she had said good-by to him.

"I really hope you will not be homesick," said a girlish voice, and Bertram Vane, one of the students, appeared from the next room and sat down on a chair. "Homesickness is such an awfully cruel thing, don't you know?"

"No homesickness here, Polly," answered Dave. "I guess we are just tired out, that's all. We've done a lot of traveling since we left Oak Hall."

"So I understand. Wasn't it dreadful that Jasniff and Merwell should prove such villains!" went on the girlish student. "Weren't you really afraid to – er – to touch them?"

"Not much!" cried Phil. "I am only sorry Merwell got away."

"But you got the diamonds, I heard?" put in Sam Day, who was another of the chums.

"We did."

At that moment came musical sounds from another room near by – the sounds of somebody strumming on a guitar.

"Hello, there's Luke Watson!" cried Roger. "Hi, come in with that guitar and give us a tune, Luke!" he called out.

"Thought I might cheer you up," said Luke, appearing. "How would you like me to play 'The Girl I Left Behind Me,' or something like that?"

“Make it ‘Oh, Those Eyes So Tender!’” suggested Buster.

“Or else that beautiful ditty called, ‘He Loved, But Had to Leave Her,’” suggested Shadow. “Say, that puts me in mind of a story,” he went on. “This is true, too, though you may not believe it. A young man went to call on his best girl and took a bouquet of flowers along. The bouquet was done up in several thicknesses of tissue paper. Some of his friends who were jokers got hold of that bouquet and fixed it up for him. He gave it to the girl, and when she took off the tissue paper what do you suppose she found? A bunch of celery and some soup greens! He was so fussed up he didn’t know what to say, and he got out in a hurry.”

“Hurrah for the chaps who fixed up the bouquet!” cried Phil. “But start up, Luke. Something in which we can all join.”

“But not too loud,” cautioned Roger. “Old Haskers might not like—”

“Oh, hang old Haskers!” interrupted Phil. “He can’t—”

“Sh-sh!” came from Dave, suddenly, and silence fell on the group of boys. All turned towards the doorway leading to the hall. There, on the threshold, stood the instructor just mentioned, Mr. Job Haskers.

CHAPTER VI

PHIL SHOWS HIS STUBBORNNESS

Not one of the boys knew how to act or what to say. All wondered if Job Haskers had heard his name mentioned.

If the ill-natured instructor had heard, he made no mention of it. He looked sharply about the apartment and waved his hand to Luke.

“Watson, how many times have I told you that you make too much noise with your musical instruments?” he said, harshly. “You disturb the students who wish to study.”

“I thought this was the recreation hour, Mr. Haskers,” answered the lad, who loved to play the guitar and banjo.

“True, but I think we get altogether too much of your music,” growled the instructor. He turned to Dave, Roger, and Phil. “So you are back at last. It is high time, if you wish to go on with your regular classes.”

“We told Doctor Clay that we would make up what we have missed, Mr. Haskers,” answered Dave, in a gentle tone, for he knew how easy it was to start a quarrel with the man before him. As Phil had once said, Job Haskers was always walking around “with a chip on his shoulder.”

“And how soon will you make up the lessons in my class?” demanded the instructor.

“I think I can do it inside of ten days or two weeks.”

“That won’t suit me, Porter. You’ll have to do better. I’ll give each of you just a week – one week, understand? If you can’t make the lessons up in that time I’ll have to drop you to the next lower class.”

“Oh, Mr. Haskers!” burst out Roger. He knew what that meant only too well. They would not have a chance to graduate that coming June.

“I’ll not argue the point, Morr. I’ll give you a week, starting to-morrow. When you come to the classroom I will show you just what you have to make up.” Job Haskers looked around the room. “Now, then, remember, I want less noise here.” And so speaking, he turned on his heel and walked away.

For a moment there was silence, as the boys looked at each other and listened to the sounds of Mr. Haskers’s retreating footsteps. Then Phil made a face and punched one of the bed pillows, savagely.

“Now, wouldn’t that make a saint turn in his grave?” he remarked. “Isn’t he the real, kind, generous soul!”

“He ought to be ducked in the river!” was Buster’s comment. “Why, how can anybody make up the lessons you’ve missed in a week? It’s absurd! Say, do you know what I’d do if I were you? I’d complain to the doctor.”

“So would I,” added Sam Day. “Two weeks would be short enough.”

“I’ll not complain to the doctor,” returned Phil. “But I know

what I will do,” he added, quickly, as though struck by a sudden idea.

“What?” came from several.

“Never mind what. But I’ll wager he’ll give us more time.”

“I guess I know what you think of doing,” said Dave. “But take my advice and don’t, Phil.”

“Humph! I’ll see about it, Dave. He isn’t going to run such a thing as this up my back without a kick,” grumbled the shipowner’s son.

“Well, wait first and see if he doesn’t change his mind, or if we can’t get through in the week,” cautioned Dave.

“What was Phil going to do?” questioned Luke, strumming lowly over the strings of his guitar.

“Oh, don’t let’s talk about it,” cried Dave, before Roger could speak. He did not wish the Mrs. Breen affair to become public property. “Tell us about the wild man, and all the other things that have happened here since we went away.”

“And you tell us all about Cave Island and those stolen jewels,” said Buster.

Thereafter the conversation became general, Dave and his chums telling of their quest of the Carwith diamonds, and the other students relating the particulars of a feast they had had in one of the dormitories, and of various efforts made to catch the so-called wild man.

“I don’t believe he is what one would call a wild man,” said Ben Basswood, Dave’s old chum from home, who had just come in

from some experiments in the school laboratory. "He is simple-minded and very shy. He gets excited once in a while, like when he threw those mud-balls."

"Well, you ought to know," remarked Buster. "Ben is the only fellow here who has talked to the man," he explained.

"When was that, Ben?" questioned Dave.

"That was when the man first appeared," answered the Crumville lad. "I didn't find out until yesterday that he was the wild man, and then it was because of that blue chalk he uses. I met him in the woods when I was out during that last snow, looking for rabbits with my shotgun. I came across him, sitting on a rock, looking at an old newspaper. He had some of the blue chalk in his hand and had marked a circle with a cross on the rock. He asked me where I was going, and told me to look out and not shoot a star, and then he asked me if I used chalk for powder, and said he could supply a superior brand of chalk cheap. I thought at first that he was merely joking, but I didn't like the look in his eyes, and then I made up my mind he was not right in his head, and I left him. When I came back that way, an hour later, he was gone, and I have never seen him since."

"Where was this, Ben?"

"Up in the woods, where the brook branches off by the two big rocks."

"I know the spot!" cried Roger. "Say, maybe he hangs out around there."

"No, we hunted around there yesterday, but he wasn't to be

seen. I don't believe he has any settled place of abode, but just roams through the woods."

"Poor fellow! Somebody ought to catch him and place him in a sanitarium," was Dave's comment.

Various matters were talked over until the supper hour, and then the boys filed down to the dining-hall. Here our hero met more of his school chums, including Gus Plum, who had once been his enemy but who was now quite friendly, and little Chip Macklin, who in days gone by had been Plum's toady.

"Very glad to see you back, Dave!" cried Gus. "And, say, you've certainly made a hero of yourself," he added, warmly.

"It was great, what you and Roger and Phil did," added Chip, in deep admiration.

Everybody was glad to see Dave back, and after supper it was all he could do to get away from many of his friends. But he managed it at last, and he, Roger, and Phil went upstairs, to put away their things and get out their schoolbooks.

"We have got to study and that is all there is to it," said Dave, firmly. "Fun is one thing and getting ready to graduate is another. We have got to get down to the grind, boys."

"That's right," answered the senator's son.

"But don't forget what old Haskers said," grumbled Phil. "He'll make us sweat, just you wait and see!"

"Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," quoted Dave. "I think we can get through if we buckle down hard."

"Supposing Mr. Dale and the other teachers pin us down as

old Haskers did?" demanded Phil.

"They won't do it," declared our hero. "Take my word for it, Mr. Dale will give us a month, if we want it. I know him. And the others will do the same."

"Well, maybe we can get through, if that's the case," said the shipowner's son, slowly. "Just the same, I think old Haskers the meanest man alive."

The following morning, after a good night's rest, the boys went to their various classes. As Dave had predicted, Mr. Dale, the head teacher, treated them with all possible consideration, for he loved boys and understood them thoroughly. The other teachers were likewise very lenient.

"Old Haskers is the one stumbling-block," said Roger. "Dave, maybe we had better see Doctor Clay about him."

"Not much!" cried Phil. "We've got a club we can use on Haskers. Why not use it?"

"You mean, go to him and tell him we know about that Mrs. Breen affair, and that we will expose him if he doesn't let up on us, Phil?" said Dave.

"Yes."

"Do you think that is a – well, a gentlemanly thing to do?"

"It's what old Haskers would do, if he was in our place."

"Perhaps. But I'd rather not do it. Let my uncle's lawyer try to collect that money without our appearing in the case. We have had trouble enough in the past with Haskers. Let us buckle in and study up. I am sure we can get through," added Dave, earnestly.

“All right,” growled Phil; but his manner showed that he was not satisfied.

Two days went by, and the boys settled down to the regular routine of the school. The lessons to be made up were exceedingly hard, and Dave found he had to study almost constantly to do what was required of him.

“But I am going to make it!” he murmured, setting his teeth hard. “I am not going to disappoint the folks at home.”

One afternoon the three chums had a very hard lesson in Latin to do. It was a clear, sunshiny day and they had one of the windows wide open to let in the fresh air. Dave and Roger were bending over their books when they heard a sudden exclamation from Phil.

“I’ll be hanged if I’m going to do it!”

And then of a sudden a Latin book was hurled across the room, to land on a bureau, just missing the glass.

“Hello!” cried Dave, raising his head. “What’s wrong now?”

“I’m not going to do it!” cried Phil, stretching himself. “It’s an outrage and I won’t submit to it.”

“You mean this boning away for Haskers?” queried Roger.

“Just that,” answered the shipowner’s son. “Why can’t he treat us as fairly as the other teachers did? It wouldn’t hurt him a bit to give us more time.”

“Phil, what’s the use of talking it over again?” asked Dave. “I thought we had settled it once for all.”

“No, I won’t stand it, I tell you,” cried Phil, stubbornly. “He

can't make a pack-mule of me."

"Well, then, speak to the doctor about it," advised Roger.

"I don't have to speak to the doctor," stormed Phil; and walking over to a rack, he caught up his cap and marched from the room.

"He is certainly in a bad humor," was Dave's comment. "I am afraid he'll put his foot into it, Roger."

"So am I. He's been aching to get back at old Haskers ever since he put all this studying up to us."

"Do you know, Ben is just as angry at Haskers as Phil is?" went on our hero, after a pause, during which both had hoped that their close chum would return. But Phil had stalked down the stairs and out of the building.

"Ben?"

"Yes, so he told me this noon."

"What about?"

"Oh, Ben talked in class and old Haskers penalized him heavily – gave him a lot of extra Latin to do. It nearly broke Ben up."

"You told Ben about that Breen affair, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Maybe he and Phil will both go to Haskers about it."

"I hope not, Roger. I don't think it is just the right thing to do – to use that as a club over Haskers to get him to let us off. I don't like that kind of dealing."

"Neither do I. But it's just what such a mean-spirited fellow

as Haskers deserves. He has never treated us squarely since we came here. I think this school would be a good deal better off without him, even if he is well educated.”

Dave heaved a deep sigh. He was on the point of replying, but changed his mind. He took up his book again, and soon was trying his best to study. Roger followed his example.

But both boys made slow progress. Each was thinking about Phil. What would be the outcome of their headstrong chum's actions?

CHAPTER VII

PHIL AND BEN MAKE A MOVE

So far Dave and Nat Poole had not met face to face. Our hero had seen the money-lender's son a number of times, but Nat had always been with some of his cronies and had, apparently, not taken any notice.

But on the morning following the conversation just recorded, the pair came face to face in one of the narrow hallways.

"Good-morning, Nat," said Dave, pleasantly.

"Morning," grumbled the other student. He was about to pass Dave, but suddenly changed his mind. "So you got back, eh?"

"Yes, I've been back several days."

"I heard that Link Merwell got away from you?"

"That is true."

"Humph! If I had the chance to nab him that you had, I'd not let him get away."

"We held Jasniff."

"Maybe you let Merwell go on purpose," continued the money-lender's son, shrewdly.

"Not at all, Nat. He gave us the slip, clean and clear."

"Humph!" Nat paused for a moment. "I got word from my dad that you almost smashed him up on the road with your auto."

"Hardly as bad as that."

“He is going to make your uncle pay for the damage done.”

“It wasn’t much.”

“It was enough. You want to be more careful with your car after this. You auto fellows seem to think you own the whole road.”

“What about your motor-boat, Nat?” asked Dave. He remembered how the money-lender’s son had played more than one mean trick while running the craft.

“Oh, my boat is all right, Dave Porter!” sniffed Nat; and then he moved on, with a scowl on his face.

“The same old Nat,” soliloquized our hero. “Too bad that he can’t make himself a bit more agreeable.”

That day was a particularly trying one in the classroom. The lessons were unusually hard, and Dave had all he could do to pass, especially in those studies presided over by Professor Haskers. Roger made one miss in his Latin and poor Phil made several, while Ben Basswood’s recitation was a complete failure.

As was usual with him, Job Haskers was exceedingly dictatorial, and said some cutting things that brought the blood to Dave’s face.

“You must do much better than this, Porter and Morr,” said the professor. “Otherwise I shall have to place you in the next lower class. You, Lawrence and Basswood, have failed so utterly that I will have to take your cases under immediate consideration. The class is dismissed.”

“The old bear!” growled Ben, under his breath.

He looked inquiringly at Phil, and the latter nodded knowingly.

Dave did not know what to do. He did not wish Phil and Ben to get into further trouble, yet he did not know how to interfere. Besides, he was suffering himself and hardly knew what to do on his own account.

“This is the worst yet,” cried Roger, as he and our hero came out of the classroom side by side.

“There go Phil and Ben,” returned Dave. “Roger, they have got some plan up their sleeve.”

“I believe you, Dave. I wish I knew what to do. Shall we go to Doctor Clay?”

“I’ve been thinking of that, Roger. But I hate to do it. I’d rather fight my own battles.”

“So would I.”

“Let us wait until to-morrow and see if things don’t take a turn for the better.”

“All right, just as you say. But it’s a shame, the way old Haskers treats us,” grumbled the senator’s son.

In the meantime Phil and Ben had gone on ahead. Both were exceeding angry and consequently not in a frame of mind to use their best judgment.

“It’s an outrage!” burst out the shipowner’s son. “An outrage, Ben! I am not going to stand for it!”

“Well, I am with you, Phil,” returned Ben. “But what can we do?”

“You know what I spoke about last evening?”

“Yes.”

“How about doing that?”

“I am with you, if you are game.”

“Of course we may make old Haskers tearing mad.”

“We’ll only face him with the truth, won’t we?”

“Yes.”

“Then, let us do it. And the sooner the better.”

“Yes, but we must see him alone.”

“Of course. I think we can manage it just before supper – when he goes up to his room to fix up for the evening.”

The two chums talked the affair over for a long time.

“I don’t suppose Dave will like this,” ventured Ben, presently.

“What do you think?”

“He isn’t hit as hard as we are,” answered Phil, lamely. “If he was – well, he might look at things in a different light.”

“That’s so,” answered Ben. But deep down in his heart he was afraid that our hero would not altogether approve of what he and Phil proposed to do.

The boys took a walk, and purposely kept out of the way of Dave and Roger. They did not return to the Hall until fifteen minutes before the first bell for supper. Then they came in by a side entrance and passed swiftly up the stairs and along the hallway to the room occupied by Job Haskers.

“Who is it?” asked the teacher, sharply, when Phil had knocked.

"Mr. Haskers, it is Phil Lawrence," was the reply. "Ben Basswood is with me. We wish to see you."

"Ah, indeed!" said the teacher, coldly. "You come to me at an unusual hour. You may see me to-morrow, before class."

"Mr. Haskers, we wish very much to see you now," put in Ben.

"We have got to see you," added Phil, warmly.

There was no immediate reply to this. The boys heard Job Haskers moving around the room and heard him shut a bureau. Then the door was flung open.

"You insist upon seeing me, eh?" demanded the professor, harshly.

"We do, Mr. Haskers," returned Phil, boldly.

"Very well, young gentlemen; step in." And Job Haskers glared at the boys as he stood aside for them to enter.

"We came to see you, sir, about those Latin lessons," went on Phil, finding it just then difficult to speak. He realized that Job Haskers was in no humor for being lenient.

"Well?" shot out the professor.

"We feel that we are not being treated fairly," put in Ben, believing he should not make Phil do all the talking.

"Not treated fairly? I believe I am the best judge of that, Basswood."

"Mr. Haskers, I hate to say it, but you are a hard-hearted man!" cried out Phil, the door being closed, so that no outsider might hear. "You are not giving us a fair chance. The other teachers have given me and Dave Porter and Roger Morr several weeks in

which to make up those lessons we missed while we were away. You wish to give us only a week.”

“And you didn’t give me a fair chance to make up,” added Ben.

“See here, who is master here, you or I?” demanded Job Haskers, drawing himself up. “Boys, you are impudent! I will not stand it!”

“Yes, you will stand it,” cried Phil, throwing caution to the winds. “All we ask is a fair deal, and you have got to give it to us. We’ll make up those lessons, if you’ll give us a fair amount of time. I don’t intend to be put in a lower class for nothing.”

“And I’m not going to stand it either,” came from Ben.

“Ha! this to me?” snarled Job Haskers. “Take care, or I’ll have you dismissed from the Hall!”

“If you try it, it will be the worst day’s work you ever did, Mr. Haskers,” warned the shipowner’s son.

“What, you threaten me?”

“We are going to make you give us a fair chance, that is all. And if you’ll do that, we’ll give you a fair chance.”

“Why, why – you – you–” The irate instructor knew not for the moment how to proceed.

“Mr. Haskers, I think you had better listen to me,” pursued Phil.

“I have listened to all I care to hear.”

“Oh, no, you haven’t. There is much more – and you had better listen closely – if you care at all for your reputation here at Oak Hall.”

The professor stared at the boy and grew a trifle pale.

“Wha – what do you – er – mean by that, Lawrence?”

“I hate very much to bring this subject up, Mr. Haskers, but you practically compel me to do it. If you will only promise to give us a fair chance to make up our lessons, I won’t say a word about it.”

“Just what do you mean?” faltered the teacher.

“I know something about your doings in the past – doings which are of no credit to you. If you disgrace Ben and me by degrading us in classes, we’ll disgrace you by telling all we know.”

“And what do you know?” demanded Job Haskers, hastily.

“We know a good deal,” put in Ben.

“All about your dealing with the poor widow, Mrs. Breen,” added the shipowner’s son. “How you still owe her for board, and how you borrowed money to publish a book that was never issued.”

“Who told you that?” cried Job Haskers, stepping back in consternation. “Who told you that I had borrowed money from her, and that I owed her for board?”

“Never mind who told us,” said Ben. “We know it is true.”

“And you went to that lawyer, eh?” stormed Professor Haskers. “You got him to threaten a suit, didn’t you? I got his letter only this afternoon.”

“We went to no lawyer,” answered Phil.

“I know better! I see it all now! You want to get me into trouble

– to disgrace me here!” Job Haskers began to pace the floor. “It is – er – a mistake. I meant to pay that lady but it – er – slipped my mind. And the book has been issued, but the publishers have not – er – seen fit to push it, that is why you and the world at large have not heard of it.”

“Mr. Haskers, we haven’t told anybody about this,” went on Phil, pointedly. “You can settle with that lawyer, whoever he may be, – and we’ll not say a word to anybody – that is, providing you’ll give us a fair chance in our lessons.”

“Ha! maybe you wish me to pass you without an examination,” cried the teacher, cunningly.

“No, sir!” answered Phil, stoutly.

“We simply ask for more time, that is all,” added Ben. “We don’t ask any favor. We can make up the lessons if you will give us as much time as the other teachers would give us.”

“You have not told anybody of this – this – er – affair of Mrs. Breen?”

“No.”

“It is all a mistake, but I should not like it to get abroad. It would hurt my reputation a great deal. I shall settle the matter in the near future. I do not owe that lady as much as the lawyer says I do, – but that is not your affair.” Job Haskers continued to pace the floor. “Now about your lessons,” he continued, after a pause. “If I – er – thought that I had really been too hard on you–” He paused.

“You certainly have been hard,” said Phil.

“And if you really need more time—”

“Give us two weeks more and we’ll be all right,” put in Ben.

“And if – er – if I should decide to do that, you will – er—”

“We’ll make good – and keep our mouths shut,” finished Phil.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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