

Stratemeyer Edward

The Putnam Hall Champions



Edward Stratemeyer

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Arthur M. Winfield

The Putnam Hall Champions / or, Bound to Win Out

INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys:

This tale is complete in itself, but forms volume three in a line issued under the general title of "Putnam Hall Series."

This series was started at the request of many boys and girls who had read some volumes of the "Rover Boys' Series," and who wanted to know what had taken place at Putnam Hall previous to the arrival there of the three Rover brothers. When the Rovers came on the scene Putnam Hall had been flourishing for some time and was filled with bright, go-ahead cadets, who had been mixed up in innumerable scrapes, and who had gone through quite a few adventures. My young friends wanted to hear all about these wideawake lads, and for their benefit I started this series.

In the first volume, called "The Putnam Hall Cadets," I told just how the school came to be founded, and related many of the adventures of Jack Ruddy, Pepper Ditmore, and their chums. In the second volume, entitled "The Putnam Hall Rivals," the doings of these cadets were again followed, and I also told the particulars of a queer balloon ride and of a remarkable discovery in the woods.

In the present story I have endeavored to show something of what the Putnam Hall boys could do when it came to contests on the lake, in the gymnasium, and elsewhere. A large portion of the cadets' "off time" was devoted to sports, and the rivalry, both in the academy and against other schools, was of the keenest. Mixed in with the rivalry was a generous share of fun, and what some of this hilarity led to I leave the pages which follow to tell.

Once again I thank my young friends for the interest they have shown in my stories. I trust the reading of this volume will please you all.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

Arthur M. Winfield.

CHAPTER I

A RACE ON THE LAKE

“Talk about a life on the ocean wave, Pep; isn’t this good enough for anybody?”

“It certainly is, Jack,” answered Pepper Ditmore. “And I think the *Alice* is going to prove a dandy.”

“The *Alice* a dandy?” came from a third youth aboard the sloop. “How can you make that out? Girls aren’t dandies.”

“But this girl is a boat,” put in a fourth youth. “Say, has anybody got an apple he doesn’t want?” he went on, looking from one to another of his companions.

“What, Stuffer, aren’t you filled up yet?” demanded Jack Ruddy, who had hold of the tiller of the craft that was speeding up the lake. “To my certain knowledge you have eaten ten apples already.”

“Ten?” snorted Paul Singleton, who was often called Stuffer because of his love of eating. “Not a bit of it! I’ve only had four – and two were very small.”

“Here’s another – my last,” cried Pepper, and threw the apple to his chum.

“By the way, Jack, I want to ask a question,” said Dale Blackmore. “Why did you call the new sloop the *Alice*?”

“Name of his best girl,” answered Pepper, promptly. “Why do you ask foolish questions?”

“I haven’t any best girl and you know it,” retorted Jack Ruddy. “I named the sloop after my cousin, Alice Smith. Her father, my uncle, gave me the boat. He – ”

“Hullo, here comes another sloop!” cried Paul Singleton, looking across the lake. “Wonder what boat that is?”

“I see a big P on the mainsail,” answered Dale Blackmore. “Must belong to some of the Pornell Academy fellows.”

“I know that boat – heard about her when I was in town yesterday,” said Pepper Ditmore. “She belongs to a fellow of Pornell named Fred Century.”

“Gracious, Imp, is he a hundred years old?” queried Dale, with a grimace.

“Hardly. He’s only a little older than I am. The sloop is named the *Ajax*, and Century claims she is the swiftest thing that was ever launched here.”

“She certainly looks as if she could make time,” was Dale Blackmore’s critical comment, as he gazed at the approaching craft, with her snowy spread of sails. “I don’t think she is quite as wide as the *Alice*.”

“She is every bit as long,” came from Paul Singleton. “And her sails are every bit as big.”

“Sloop ahoy!” came a hail from the approaching craft.

“Ahoy, the *Ajax*!” answered Jack Ruddy.

“Is that the new boat from Putnam Hall?”

“Yes.”

“We thought it might be,” went on Fred Century, as he came closer. “This is the new boat from Pornell Academy.”

“Yes, we know that,” answered Jack. “Fine-looking sloop, too,” he added.

“Do you want to race?” asked another youth aboard the *Ajax*.

“Well, we didn’t come out to race,” answered the young owner of the *Alice*. “We just came out for a quiet sail. We’ve got to be back to the Hall by six o’clock.”

“Oh, they are afraid to race you, Fred,” said another boy aboard the *Ajax*. “They know you can beat them out of their boots.”

“Let us race them, Jack,” whispered Pepper.

“No use of racing if the *Alice* isn’t in proper condition,” interrupted Dale.

“Oh, she’s all right – but I like to go over everything before a race,” said Jack, a bit doubtfully. “Some of the blocks work rather stiffly, and I haven’t quite got the swing of this tiller yet.”

“Want to race or not?” cried a third boy aboard the *Ajax*.

“Of course, if you are afraid of being beaten – ” began Fred Century.

“Did you come out just for the purpose of racing?” demanded Jack.

“Why, hardly,” said the owner of the *Ajax*. “We just saw you, and thought you’d like a little brush, that’s all.”

“How far do you want to race?”

“As far as you please.”

“Very well, what do you say to Cat Point and from there to Borden’s Cove? The first sloop to reach the white rock at the cove is to be the winner.”

“Done!” answered Fred Century, promptly.

“We’ll beat you by half a mile!” sang out one of the boys aboard the Pornell boat, a lad named Will Carey.

“Better do your blowing after the race is over,” answered Pepper.

“Oh, we’ll beat you all right enough,” said the owner of the Pornell boat. “This sloop of mine is going to be the queen of this lake, and don’t you forget it.”

A few words more were spoken – as to how the boats should round Cat Point – and then the race was started. There was a favorable breeze, and each craft let out its mainsail to the fullest and likewise the topsail and the jib.

“We are carrying four passengers while they are only carrying three,” said Dale, when the race was on in earnest. “We should have made them take some extra ballast aboard.”

The course mapped out was about two miles in one direction and two miles in another. At the start of the race the *Alice* had a little the better of it, but before half a mile had been covered the *Ajax* came crawling up and then passed the Putnam Hall boat.

“Here is where we leave you behind!” sang out Fred Century.

“We’ll show you a clean pair of heels over the whole course,” added Will Carey.

“As soon as you are ready to give up the race, blow your fog-horn,” said Bat Sedley, the third member of the party aboard the *Ajax*.

“You’ll hear no fog-horn to-day,” answered Paul.

“Good-bye!” shouted Fred Century, and then his sloop took an extra spurt and went ahead a distance of a hundred yards or more.

“Oh, Jack, we’ve got to beat them!” murmured Pepper. “If we don’t – ”

“They’ll never get done crowing,” finished Paul.

“We’ll do our best,” answered the youthful owner of the *Alice*. “This race has only started.” And then he moved the tiller a trifle, to bring his boat on a more direct course for Cat Point.

To those who have read the previous volumes in this “Putnam Hall Series” the boys aboard the *Alice* need no special introduction. For the benefit of those who now meet them for the first time I would state that they were all pupils at Putnam Hall military academy, a fine institution of learning, located on the shore of Cayuga Lake, in New York State. Of the lads Jack Ruddy was a little the oldest. He was a well-built and handsome boy, and had been chosen as major of the school battalion.

Jack’s bosom companion was Pepper Ditmore, often called Imp, because he loved to play pranks. Pepper was such a wideawake, jolly youth you could not help but love him, and he had a host of friends.

Putnam Hall had been built by Captain Victor Putnam, a retired officer of the United States Army, who had seen strenuous service for Uncle Sam in the far West. The captain had had considerable money left to him, and with this he had purchased ten acres of land on the shore of the lake and erected his school, a handsome structure of brick and stone, containing many class-rooms, a large number of dormitories, and likewise a library, mess-room, or dining hall, an office, and other

necessary apartments. There was a beautiful campus in front of the building and a parade ground to one side. Towards the rear were a gymnasium and several barns, and also a boathouse, fronting the lake. Beyond, around a curve of the shore, were fields cultivated for the benefit of the Hall, and further away were several patches of woods.

As was but natural in the case of an old army officer, Captain Putnam had organized his school upon military lines, and his students made up a battalion of two companies, as related in details in the first volume of this series, called "The Putnam Hall Cadets." The students had voted for their own officers, and after a contest that was more or less spirited, Jack Ruddy was elected major of the battalion, and a youth named Henry Lee became captain of Company A, and Bart Conners captain of Company B. Some of the boys wanted Pepper to try for an officer's position, but he declined, stating he would just as lief remain "a high private in the rear rank."

At the school there was a big youth named Dan Baxter, who was a good deal of a bully. He had wanted to be an officer, and it made him very sore to see himself defeated. Together with a crony named Nick Paxton and a boy called Mumps he plotted to break up a picnic of Jack and his friends. This plot proved a boomerang, and after that Baxter and his cohorts did all they could to get Jack and his chums into trouble.

The first assistant teacher at the Hall was Josiah Crabtree, a man of good education, but one who was decidedly sour in his make-up and who never knew how to take fun. With him the cadets were continually in "hot water," and more than once the boys wished Crabtree would leave Putnam Hall never to return.

The second assistant teacher was George Strong, and he was as much beloved as the first assistant was despised. George Strong had not forgotten the time when he was a boy himself, and he often came out on the lake or the athletic field, or in the gymnasium, to take part in their sports and pastimes. Pepper voted him "the prince of good teachers," and Jack and the others endorsed this sentiment.

During the first session of Putnam Hall, George Strong had mysteriously disappeared. Two strange men had been seen around the school, and it was learned that the strangers had something to do with the missing instructor. A hunt was instituted by Captain Putnam, and in this he was joined by Jack, Pepper, Dale, and an acrobatic pupil named Andy Snow. George Strong was found to be a prisoner in a hut in the woods, and it was learned that his captors were the two strange men. These men were related distantly to the teacher and both were insane – their minds having been affected by the loss of their fortunes.

After the insane men were cared for George Strong told the cadets about a pot of gold which his ancestors had buried during the Revolutionary War. One day some of the cadets took a balloon ride, as related in detail in the second volume of this series, entitled "The Putnam Hall Rivals," and this ride brought them to a strange part of the woods near the lake. Here they came on some landmarks which had been mentioned to them, and to their joy unearthed the pot of gold coins. For this find the cadets were rewarded by George Strong, and the teacher became a closer friend to the boys than ever.

Dan Baxter had been called away from Putnam Hall by his father. He had had a fierce fight with Pepper and gotten the worst of it, and he was, consequently, glad enough to disappear for the time being. But he left behind him many of his cronies, and three of these, Reff Ritter, Gus Coulter, and Nick Paxton, vowed they would "square accounts" with the Imp and also with his chums.

"I've got a plan to make Pep Ditmore eat humble pie," said Reff Ritter, one day. And then he related some of the details to Coulter and Paxton.

"Just the thing!" cried Coulter. "But don't leave out Jack Ruddy. I'd rather get square with Ruddy than anybody. He has been down on me ever since I came to the Hall. I hate him like poison." And Gus Coulter's face took on a dark look.

"Yes, we'll include Ruddy," answered Reff Ritter. "I hate him, too. I'd give most anything if we could drive 'em both from the school."

“Maybe we can – if we watch our chances,” answered Gus Coulter.

CHAPTER II

WHAT THE WIND DID

Pornell Academy was a rival institution of learning, located several miles from Putnam Hall. It was presided over by Doctor Pornell, who had not fancied Captain Putnam's coming to that locality. The students of Pornell were for the most part sons of wealthy parents, and a large number of them thought themselves superior to the Putnam Hall cadets.

On one occasion the lads of the two institutions had had quite a lively row, but this had been patched up, and several contests on the lake and on the athletic field had come off. Sometimes the Putnam Hall cadets were defeated, but more times they were victorious, which pleased them not a little.

Fred Century had come to Pornell Academy several months before this story opens. He was from Portland, Maine, and belonged to a boat club that usually sailed its craft on Casco Bay. Immediately on his arrival at Cayuga Lake he took up boating and then had his father purchase for him the *Ajax*, certainly a craft of which any young man might well be proud. Then he heard that Jack had a new boat, the *Alice*, and he watched for his opportunity to race. That opportunity had now presented itself; and the race was on.

It was a beautiful day, with the sun shining brightly and the breeze strong enough to make the sails of the sloops fill well. The Putnam Hall cadets had left the school with no idea of a contest of any sort, but now that the race was in progress they were keenly interested.

"I've heard about this Fred Century," remarked Dale, as the *Alice* sped on her course. "They tell me his father is next door to being a millionaire."

"One thing is certain – he has a good opinion of his boat," added Pepper.

"Well, I've got a good opinion of my boat, too," answered the young major. "I want her to win."

"Oh, she must win!" cried Stuffer. "Why, don't you know that those Pornell fellows are just aching for a chance to crow over us?"

The race had now been noted by a number of people out in pleasure boats. Many knew that the two sloops were new boats and they were curious to learn which might prove to be the better. Some waved their hands and handkerchiefs, and others shouted words of encouragement to one group of lads or the other.

"It looks to me as if the Pornell boat was going to win," said one gentleman, who was out in his pleasure yacht.

"Oh, papa, how can you say that?" cried his daughter, who was an admirer of the Putnam Hall cadets.

"Because their boat is ahead," was the answer.

It was not long before Cat Point was reached. The *Ajax* rounded the rocks in fine style, for Fred Century was really a skillful skipper and knew how to handle his craft to perfection.

"Good-bye to you!" he called out, as his craft stood for a moment close to the *Alice*.

"We'll tell everybody you're coming sooner or later," added Bat Sedley. "Don't be too long – folks may get tired of waiting."

"I rather think they'll get tired of your blowing," retorted Paul.

"Don't get uppish!" cried the Pornell Academy boy, angrily, and then the two sloops passed out of speaking distance of each other.

"I wish the wind would freshen," said Jack, with something like a sigh.

"What good will that do?" demanded Dale.

"If it got too fresh it would make them take in some sail. The *Alice* is broader than the *Ajax*, consequently we can risk a little more than they can."

“Well, I think the breeze is freshening,” said Pepper. “Just look down the lake.”

They did as directed and saw that he was right, for the water was beginning to show numerous whitecaps and ripples. The *Alice* rounded Cat Point, the mainsail was thrown over, and they started for Borden’s Cove with the rival sloop more than a quarter of a mile in the lead.

“I don’t believe we can catch up to that boat even if the wind does freshen,” remarked Dale, soberly. “She’s got too much of a lead.”

“Here comes the breeze!” shouted Pepper, and he was right, the wind had freshened as if by magic, and at once the sloop bounded forward at an increased speed, cutting the water like a thing of life and sending a shower of spray over all those on board.

“Hi! I didn’t come out for a shower-bath!” yelled Pepper.

“Got to stand for it, though,” answered Jack, with a grin. “All for the glory of the cause, you know.”

The breeze kept increasing, and this caused the *Alice* to heel well over on her side. This made Paul a little bit anxious.

“Hadn’t we better take in some sail?” he ventured. “We don’t want to be dumped into the lake.”

“Not yet,” answered Jack. “It will have to blow harder than this to send the *Alice* over. There is a whole lot of lead in her keel.”

With the increase in the wind the *Alice* kept gaining slowly but surely on the *Ajax*, and this gladdened the heart of the youthful owner. He looked ahead and saw that Fred Century was gazing back anxiously on the rival that was coming nearer.

“I guess he is wondering when we’ll take in some sail,” said Jack. “Well, he can keep on wondering.”

“He is taking in his topsail!” cried Pepper, a moment later, and the announcement proved correct. In the meantime the wind came stronger than ever, until it fairly whistled through the ropes aboard the *Alice*. Under ordinary circumstances Jack would have lowered not only his topsail but also his mainsail – or at least taken a reef in the latter – but now he was determined to win the race if taking a small risk would do it. By this time the other boats on the lake were making for various harbors.

But if Jack was willing to take a risk, so was Fred Century, and against the wishes of his two companions the lad from Pornell Academy kept all his sails flying. As a consequence the *Ajax* suddenly careened and took aboard enough water to literally wash the deck and flood the standing-room.

“Hi, look out, or we’ll all be drowned!” yelled Will Carey. He was not much of a sailor or a swimmer.

“Oh, you mustn’t mind a dip like that,” said Fred Century, reassuringly, yet even as he spoke he looked anxiously at the sky and at the wind-clouds scurrying past. He knew that if the wind increased much more he would have to take in his topsail and his mainsail and perhaps his jib.

“That other sloop is coming up fast,” announced Bat Sedley, not a great while later. And he spoke the truth, the *Alice* was approaching by what looked to be leaps and bounds, making the best possible use of the stiffening breeze as Jack hung to the tiller and eased her off, this way or that. The young major had issued orders to his chums, and they stood ready to lower both mainsail and topsail at the word of command.

The *Alice* was still a good half-mile from Borden’s Cove when her bow overlapped the stern of the *Ajax*. At this Pepper set up a yell of pleasure and all with him joined in. They waved their hands to those on the other craft, but received no answer. Then they forged ahead, the ever-increasing wind driving them along faster and faster.

“Lower the topsail as soon as we are far enough ahead,” ordered Jack. “No use of running the risk of breaking our mast now.”

A strange whistling of the wind followed, and down came the topsail in a jiffy. Then several reefs were taken in the mainsail. The bosom of the lake was now a mass of whitecaps, while the sun went under a heavy cloud.

“It’s a wind squall, and a corker!” cried Jack.

“Why don’t they take in some sail on the *Ajax*?” asked Dale, as he clung to a guard rail, to keep from being swept overboard.

“They are taking in the topsail,” announced Jack. “But that isn’t enough. If they don’t – ”

The rest of his words was lost in the piping of the gale that came extra strong just then. The sloop seemed to be fairly lifted from the lake, then she sank into a hollow and the water dashed over her stern. Then she bobbed up like a cork and shot forward as before. Pepper, holding tight with might and main, glanced back.

“The *Ajax* has gone over!” he screamed, in alarm.

Only Jack understood his words, but the others saw the look in his face and saw him nod to a spot behind them on the bosom of the angry lake. True enough, carrying the mainsail had proved too much for the Pornell craft, and she was now drifting along on her side, her mast half-submerged in the lashing and foaming waves.

The Putnam Hall cadets were greatly alarmed, and with good reason. They had no desire to see any of their rivals drowned, and they felt it was more than likely one or another had gone overboard. Indeed, as they looked back, they saw one youth struggling in the water near the toppled-over mast, while another was trailing behind, clutching some broken cordage. The third lad was nowhere to be seen.

“What shall we do?” yelled Paul, to make himself heard above the wind.

“I’ll try to bring the sloop around,” answered Jack. “Stand ready to throw them some ropes and those life-preservers.”

As well as the squall would permit, the young major sent the *Alice* around. Even with only the jib set this was a dangerous operation, and he would not have undertaken it had he not thought it a case of life or death. As the sloop came broadside to the squall a wave struck her and broke over the deck. The full force of this landed on Pepper, carrying him off his feet in a twinkling. As he slid around Paul made a clutch for him and held fast.

“Goo – good for you, Stuffer!” gasped Pepper, when he could speak. “Say, but that was something awful!” And he took a better hold than before.

“I am afraid some of those fellows will go down before we can reach them,” answered Paul. “My, what a blow this is! And it looked to be a perfect afternoon when we started out!”

The sloop boasted of two life-preservers, with lines attached, and as well as they were able the cadets got these in readiness for use. In the meanwhile Jack, having brought the craft up in the wind, was now “jockeying” to get close to the overturned craft without crashing into the wreck or running anybody down. This was a delicate task, and would have been practically impossible had not the breeze just then died down a little.

“Save us! Save us!” came from the water, as the *Alice* drew closer.

“We’ll do it!” yelled back the boys from Putnam Hall.

“Here, catch the life-preserver!” called out Paul, and flung the preserver in question toward Bat Sedley, who was floundering around near the half-submerged mast. The Pornell Academy lad saw it coming and made a dive for it, catching it with one hand. Pepper threw the second life-preserver to Fred Century, who was trying to pull himself toward his wrecked craft by some loose ropes.

“Where is the third boy?” was asked, but for the moment nobody could answer that question. Bat Sedley had seen him hanging fast to some ropes as the *Ajax* went over, but had not seen him since.

“He must have gone down – ” began Pepper, when Jack set up a shout.

“There he is, under the edge of that sail,” and he pointed to where the broad mainsail of the *Ajax* rose and fell on the waves. True enough, Will Carey was there, one arm and one leg caught fast in the sheeting and some ropes. He had been struggling, but now he fell back and went under, out of sight.

“We have got to save him!” cried Jack. “Here, Pepper, take the tiller.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Go overboard after him.”

As he spoke the youthful owner of the *Alice* pulled off his cadet coat and cap. The next instant he was at the side of the sloop. He poised himself for a dive, and then cut the water like a knife and disappeared from view.

CHAPTER III

ABOUT A GYMNASTIC CONTEST

Major Jack Ruddy was a good swimmer, and felt perfectly at home in the water. He did not go down deep, but he made a long “fetch,” and when he came up he was close beside Will Carey. He caught that youth by the arm and dragged him clear of the sail.

“Sa – save m – me!” sputtered the Pornell Academy youth, after blowing some water from his mouth.

“I will,” answered Jack. “But keep quiet.”

“M – my foot is – is fast!”

“So I see.”

A piece of rope had become entwined around Will Carey’s ankle. It was caught in a loop and it was no easy thing to loosen it. The Pornell Academy lad thrashed around wildly and tried to get Jack by the throat.

“Don’t do that!” cried the young major. “Hold on easy-like.” But like many others in danger of drowning Will Carey now grew frantic, and scarcely realizing his actions he caught Jack by the neck and clung so fast that the young major was in danger of being choked to death.

The wind had now veered around, sending the *Alice* some distance away from the *Ajax*, so that Pepper and the others could offer no assistance. Such being the case, and realizing the seriousness of his position, Jack did what appeared to be cruel, but was fully justified. As well as he could he hauled back with his fist and struck the other boy in the chin. It was a stiff, hard blow and it dazed Will Carey and rendered him all but insensible. At once his hold on Jack relaxed, and he lay like a log in the young major’s arm.

With his free hand Jack worked with all possible haste on the rope which held the other boy a prisoner and soon managed to loosen the loop and slip Will’s foot through it. Then, with the Pornell Academy lad on his shoulder, he swam away from the capsized sloop.

“Jack! Jack!” came the call above the wind, and turning slightly he saw the *Alice* coming toward him. A line with one of the life-preservers attached was flung to him and he grasped it. Then he was hauled up to the stern of the sloop and finally dragged on board, with Will still in his grasp. The sufferer was just opening his eyes again.

“Don – don’t hi – hit me ag – again!” he gasped. “Please do – don’t!”

“You’re all right now,” answered Jack. He was so exhausted he could scarcely speak.

“Oh!” gasped Will Carey, and that was all he said for several minutes. Jack placed him on a seat and sank down beside him. All of the other lads but Pepper, who was at the tiller, surrounded the pair.

“It was a brave thing to do, Jack,” was Dale’s comment.

“What did you hit him for?” demanded Bat Sedley, who had seen the blow from a distance. “It was a mean thing to do when he was struggling for his life.”

“I had to do it – he had me by the throat. If I had not done it both of us might have been drowned.”

“Humph! I never heard of hitting a drowning person,” sneered Bat.

“I have heard of such a thing,” put in Fred Century. “I think you deserve a good deal of credit for what you did,” he added, with a warm look at the young major.

“I reckon he could have saved Will without trying to break his jaw,” grumbled Bat Sedley, and then turned his attention to the youth Jack had rescued. Clearly he was not one to give his rival any credit.

By this time the squall – for it was little else – was going down. The whitecaps still ruffled the bosom of Cayuga Lake, but the wind had dwindled to a gentle breeze, just enough to fill the sails of the *Alice* and no more.

“Are you all right, Jack?” questioned Paul.

“Yes,” was the reply. “I’d feel a little better with a dry uniform on, but that can’t be helped.”

“I think I’d feel better myself with dry clothing,” came from Fred Century, with a weak smile. He gazed anxiously at his capsized craft. “I must say, I don’t know what to do with my boat.”

“You certainly can’t right her out here,” said Pepper.

“I know that.”

“All we can do is to tow her in as she is,” continued Jack. “We’ll do that willingly; eh, fellows?”

“Sure,” came the prompt answer.

“If you’ll do that I’ll be much obliged. Our race didn’t turn out just as I anticipated,” went on Fred.

“You kept your sails up too long,” said Pepper.

“I know that – now. But I thought the *Ajax* would stand the blow until I reached the Cove. How are you, Will?” he continued, turning to the boy who had come so close to drowning.

Will Carey had little to say. He mumbled in a low tone and looked rather darkly at Jack.

“He is angry because you hit him,” whispered Paul to Jack.

“I can’t help it if he is, Stuffer,” was the answer. “I simply had to do something or go down with him.”

“I know it, and he ought to be thankful he was saved. But some fellows don’t know what gratitude is.”

Not without considerable difficulty a line was made fast to the bow of the capsized sloop and the task of towing the *Ajax* was begun.

“If we had time I think we could right that craft,” observed Pepper.

“How?” demanded Bat Sedley.

“By taking her over to yonder point, where the tall trees overhang the water. We could run a rope up over a tall tree limb and then fasten it to the mast of the *Ajax*. By pulling on the end of the rope I think we’d bring her up.”

“Yes – and sink her, too.”

“Not if we watched out and kept bailing as she righted.”

“I’d like to try that,” said Fred Century. “If you’ll take us over to the point and lend us some ropes I’ll do it,” he added, after turning the project over in his mind.

“Certainly I’ll take you over,” answered Jack. “And we’ll help all we can. But we’ve got to get back to Putnam Hall by six o’clock, you know.”

“Say!” ejaculated Will Carey, leaping to his feet with great suddenness. “Did anybody see my box?”

“Box? What box?” asked several.

“The little blue, tin box I was carrying in my coat-pocket.”

“I am sure I haven’t seen any blue box,” answered Pepper, and looked around the standing-room of the *Alice*.

“What did you have in it, Will?” asked Fred Century.

“Why – I – er – oh, not much, but I didn’t want to lose the box, that’s all,” stammered the youth who had come close to drowning.

“Did you have it in your pocket when you went overboard?” questioned the young major.

“Yes, and I had my hand on it, too,” was the reply. “I suppose it’s at the bottom of the lake now,” added Will Carey. His face showed a look of positive worry. “How deep is it where the *Ajax* went over?”

“Must be ten or twelve feet at least,” answered Dale.

“Did you think you might go fishing for it?” questioned Fred.

“Yes – but not now.” And that was all Will Carey said about the blue, tin box. But that he was very much worried was plainly evident. And he had good cause to worry, as we shall learn later.

The point of land mentioned having been gained, the *Ajax* was towed around as Fred Century desired, and then the young owner was loaned a number of ropes and a pail for bailing.

“If I can’t right her I’ll tie her fast and send some boat builder after her,” he announced. “I am much obliged for what you’ve done. Some day I’ll race you again.”

“Willingly!” cried Jack.

“I still think the *Ajax* a better boat than the *Alice*.”

“She certainly isn’t a bad boat,” put in Pepper. “A real race to a finish will have to decide which is the better of the two.”

“Oh, we’ll beat you out of your boots,” said Bat Sedley. Will Carey said nothing. He was still thinking about the loss of his blue, tin box.

As it was getting late, the Putnam Hall cadets lost no time in steering as straight a course as possible for the school dock. But the breeze was against them, so they were not able to reach the dock until nearly half-past six.

“It’s fortunate old Crabtree is away on business,” was Pepper’s comment. “He’d be sure to haul us over the coals for being late, even if we did meet with an accident.”

“Late again, eh?” cried a voice from the boathouse, and Peleg Snuggers, the general utility man around the Hall, stepped into view. “The captain don’t allow sech doin’s, and you young gents know it.”

“Couldn’t be helped, Peleg,” answered Pepper. “Blew so hard the wind turned our sails inside out.”

“You don’t tell me?” The hired man looked perplexed for a moment. “Inside out? How could that be? I reckon you’re joking. Oh, Major Jack, you’re all wet!”

“He wanted a swim and was too lazy to take off his clothes,” put in Dale.

“The uniform will be ruined. Better take it off now.”

“Oh, Jack wants to go to bed in it,” said Pepper, lightly. He loved to tease Peleg.

“Ha! ha! you must have your joke. I reckon he won’t go to bed in no wet clothes, ’less he wants to git rheumatism an’ lumbago, an’ a few other things,” answered Peleg Snuggers, and walked away.

Without loss of time Jack slipped up to his dormitory and changed his wet uniform for a dry suit. Then the wet clothing was sent to the laundry to be dried and pressed. In the meantime the other lads hastened to the mess-room for supper. There they told Captain Putnam of what had occurred.

“You must be more careful in the future,” said the master of the school. “A squall is a nasty thing to be out in – I know that from personal experience. I must see Major Ruddy and have a talk with him,” and he hastened off to Jack’s room. He could not help but praise the young major for his heroism.

It soon became noised about the Hall that the new sloop from Pornell Academy had met Jack’s craft, and more of the cadets were interested in the outcome of the race than they were in the rescue that had taken place.

“Of course it was a great thing to pull those chaps out of the water,” was Andy Snow’s comment. “But I do wish you had beaten them by about a mile, Pep.”

“Well, when the squall came we simply had to call it off – with the other sloop capsized.”

“Oh, I know that.”

“By the way, Andy,” went on Pepper. “I understand that you have a little contest of your own coming off at the gym.”

“So I have,” answered the acrobatic youth of Putnam Hall.

“Who are you going to meet this time?”

“Gus Coulter.”

“What, that bully! I thought you were done with Coulter, Ritter, and that crowd.”

“I thought I was,” said Andy. “But Coulter said I was afraid to meet him in a hand-walking and chinning-the-bar contest, and bragged to all the others what he could do, so I had to take him up.”

“Is he so good at lifting his own weight?”

“I don’t know. Henry Lee told me he saw him chinning the bar nine times.”

“Well, I hope you can do better than that.”

“Perhaps I can. But we are to do some walking on our hands first,” went on Andy. “I’d rather do some stunts on the bars and rings – it is more in my line,” he added. “I wish he would challenge me to do the giant’s swing against him – then I’d feel sure I could beat him.”

CHAPTER IV

SHORTCAKE AND LEMONADE

It was a jolly crowd that gathered that evening in the dormitory occupied by Jack, Pepper, and their chums. Besides Dale and Stuffer there were Andy, big Bart Conners, the captain of Company B, Joe Nelson, Henry Lee, and Joseph Hogan, an Irish youth who was the soul of good humor and wit.

Of course Jack and the others had to tell every detail of the adventure on the lake and tell all they could about the Pornell Academy sloop.

“Did those chaps say anything about Roy Bock?” asked Andy. He referred to a student of Pornell who had on several occasions caused our friends considerable trouble.

“Not a word,” answered Pepper.

“Maybe they are not friends of Bock and his crowd?” put in Dale.

“Carey and Sedley are that,” answered Hogan. “Didn’t I see them all at Cedarville a couple of Sunday nights ago.”

“On Sunday?” queried Jack. “I didn’t know they were allowed out on Sunday.”

“And how did you come to be out, Emerald?” questioned Pepper.

“I went to see me uncle, who was sthoppin’ at the hotel till Monday mornin’. Coming home I passed that new tavern on the shore road. I met Roy Bock comin’ out, and he had Sedley, Carey, and four or five others wid him. They was all smokin’ and cuttin’ up in a lively fashion.”

“I don’t believe Doctor Pornell approves of that,” came from Joe Nelson. He himself rarely did anything against the rules and was a good deal of a model for the other boys.

“I don’t believe that new tavern is a very good place, either,” said Jack. “Last week they arrested three men there, for getting into a quarrel over a game of cards. They said the men were drinking heavily and gambling. That kind of a resort is no place for any students to visit.”

“Roy Bock is sore on us,” was Andy’s comment. “Every time I meet him he glares at me as if he’d like to chew me up.”

“I know he is down on us,” answered Pepper.

“That’s because Pepper is sweet on those Ford girls,” said Bart Conners. “Say, Imp, which are you going to choose when you grow up?”

“Pep has got to stand aside for Jack and Andy,” put in Dale. “Ever since – ”

“Oh, change the subject!” cried Andy, growing red in the face.

“That’s what I say,” added Pepper. “By the way,” he continued. “Somebody said there was to be a surprise to-night.”

“Exactly – at ten-thirty,” answered Henry Lee.

“What is it?” questioned several.

“Well, if you must know, my cousin from Boston was in town to-day, and just for the fun of it he had the Cedarville baker make two big strawberry shortcakes for me. He told me to treat my friends. The baker is to leave them in a box at the apple-tree on the corner of the campus. He had a party to cater to, and he said he would leave the cakes at just ten o’clock.”

“Hurrah for the shortberry strawcakes!” cried Pepper. “Hen, your cousin is a fellow after my own heart.”

“I wanted to keep it a little quiet,” continued Henry Lee. “For I didn’t want to invite too many to the spread. I don’t really know how big the cakes will be – although I know my cousin Dick doesn’t do things by halves.”

“It is half-past nine now,” said Jack, consulting the time-piece he carried.

“I’d like one of you to go out with me, after the cakes,” said Henry. “Each may be in a separate box, you know.”

All volunteered at once, for all loved strawberry shortcake. At last it was decided that Pepper should go with Henry.

“What’s the matter with making some lemonade to go with the cake?” ventured Andy. “I know there is a basket of lemons in the storeroom downstairs, and there is plenty of sugar there, too – and water costs nothing.”

This plan met with instant approval, and Andy and Dale were appointed a committee of two to provide the lemonade. By this time the monitor was coming around, and they had to put out lights. The Hall became very quiet, for all the cadets were supposed to be in bed.

The four boys slipped downstairs by a back way, and while Andy and Dale tiptoed to the storeroom, Pepper and Henry slipped out of a side-door. Once outside, the latter put on their shoes, which they had carried in their hands, and hurried across the broad campus in the direction of the apple-tree where the baker was to leave the cakes.

“Perhaps he hasn’t arrived yet,” said Pepper. “If not, I suppose all we can do is to wait.”

When they got to the tree no boxes were there, and they sat down on a small grassy bank to wait. Beside the bank grew a clump of bushes, which screened them from the Hall. It was a fairly clear night, with bright stars shining in the heavens overhead.

“That baker is certainly late,” mused Henry, after a good ten minutes had passed.

“Getting hungry?” asked Pepper, good-naturedly. “He may have been delayed on account of the party.”

“I hope he doesn’t forget about the cakes. Perhaps – what’s that?”

The two cadets became silent, as they heard a door close rather sharply. Looking through the clump of bushes, they saw two figures stealing from the school building towards them.

“Some of the other fellows are coming,” cried Pepper.

“Why should they bother, Pep?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure. But I think – Well, I never! It is Gus Coulter and Reff Ritter! What can they be doing out here to-night?”

“Let us get out of sight and find out,” answered Henry, and dragged his chum to a clump of bushes still farther back from the campus. He had hardly done this when Gus Coulter and Reff Ritter came up.

“Anybody here yet?” asked Coulter.

“I don’t see anybody,” answered Ritter.

“Good enough! I was afraid they’d get here before us. Where do you suppose the baker put the cakes?”

“Mumps heard Lee say under this apple-tree.”

“I don’t see them.”

After that the two cadets became silent as they moved around in the vicinity of the apple-tree. In the meantime Pepper pinched Henry’s arm.

“They are after your strawberry shortcakes,” he whispered. “What a nerve!”

“Yes, and Mumps, the sneak, told them,” murmured Henry.

“Did you tell Mumps you were to have the cakes?”

“Tell Mumps? Not much! I have no use for that sneak! I suppose he must have been listening at the door of your dormitory – it’s just like him. If I ever get the chance, I’ll – ”

“Hush! They are coming this way!” interrupted Pepper. “Crouch low, or they’ll see us!”

The two cadets got down in the deepest shadows they could find. Coulter and Ritter came quite close, but did not discover the pair. The two bullies looked up and down the road.

“That baker must have left the cakes and they must have got ’em,” said Coulter. “Mumps didn’t tell us soon enough. Too bad! I thought sure we’d be able to spoil their little feast!”

"Maybe we can spoil it yet," answered Reff Ritter. "Let us go in again and see what can be done," and then he and his crony moved once again toward Putnam Hall and were lost to sight in the darkness.

"That shows what sort of fellows Coulter and Ritter are," said Pepper, when they were gone. "And it shows what a sneak Mumps is, too." As my old readers know, he, of course, referred to John Fenwick, who had, on more than one occasion, proved himself to be a sneak of the first water. Fenwick was a great toady to Dan Baxter, but during that individual's absence from the Hall had attached himself to Coulter and Ritter, and was willing to do almost anything to curry favor with them.

"I am certainly mighty glad they didn't get the cakes," was Henry's comment. "Wouldn't they have had the laugh on us!"

"They'll have the laugh on us, anyway, if we don't get the cakes. But I think I hear a wagon coming now."

Pepper was right – a wagon was coming along the main road at a good rate of speed. It was the baker's turnout, and soon he came to a halt near the apple-tree and leaped out with two flat pasteboard boxes in his hands.

"Sorry I am late, but that party delayed me," he said. "There you are – and you'll find them the best strawberry shortcakes you ever ate." And having delivered the delicacies he hopped into his wagon again and drove off.

"Well, we've got the goods, anyway," said Pepper, with a sigh of relief. "Now to get back into the Hall without being discovered."

"Let us send the cakes up by way of the window," suggested Henry. "It won't do to be caught with them in our possession – if Coulter and Ritter have squealed."

The boys ran across the campus, stooping at the roadway to pick up some pebbles. These they threw up to the window of one of the dormitories. It was a well-known signal, and the sash was immediately raised and Jack's head appeared, followed by the head of Dale.

"What's wrong?"

"Lower a line and haul up these two boxes," answered Henry.

"Coulter and Ritter are onto our game," said Pepper. "Mumps gave us away."

No more was said just then. A strong fishing line was let down from above, and one pasteboard box after another was raised up. Then the two cadets on the campus ran around to the side door of the Hall.

"As I suspected, they locked it," said Pepper, rather bitterly.

"Well, we've got to get in somehow. Wonder if they can't let down a rope of some kind?"

"They might let down the rope in the bath-room," answered Pepper. He referred to a rope which was tied to a ring in the bath-room floor. This had been placed there in case of fire, even though the school was provided with regular fire escapes.

Once more they summoned Jack and the others, and Jack ran to the bath-room and let the rope down. Then those below came up hand over hand, bracing their feet against the wall of the building as they did so.

As the boys came from the bath-room they heard light footsteps on the back stairs. Andy and Dale were coming up, each with a big pitcher of lemonade. Both were snickering.

"Where does the fun come in?" asked Jack, as all hurried to his dormitory.

"A joke on Coulter and Ritter," cried Andy, merrily. "We caught them nosing around downstairs and I called them into the store-room in the dark. Then I slipped past them and locked them in. They can't get out excepting by the window, and then they'll have to get back into the Hall."

"It serves 'em right," answered Pepper, and then told of what had been heard by himself and Henry down by the apple-tree. "We ought to pay Mumps back for spying on us, too," he added.

It was voted to dispose of the strawberry shortcake and the lemonade at once. The cakes were cut up and passed around, and voted “the best ever.” The lemonade was also good, and the cadets drank their fill of it.

“What are you going to do with the two pitchers?” asked Joe Nelson.

“Sure an’ I have an idea, so I have,” came from Emerald. “Phy not leave ’em in Mumps’s room?”

“That’s the talk,” cried Pepper. “And we’ll leave this chunk of ice, too,” and he rattled the piece in the pitcher as he spoke.

Taking the two pitchers, the Irish student and Pepper approached the dormitory in which John Fenwick slept, along with Ritter, Coulter, Nick Paxton and Dan Baxter. They found the door unlocked and pushed it open. To their astonishment they met Mumps face to face. He was waiting for the return of Ritter and Coulter.

“Say, what do you want?” he began, but got no further, for without ceremony both boys thrust the empty pitchers into his arms. Then Pepper rammed the piece of ice down Mumps’s neck, and he and Emerald ran off swiftly and silently.

CHAPTER V

THE INTERVIEW IN THE OFFICE

“Hi, you – er – you let me alone!” sputtered Mumps. “Oh, my back! What did you want to put ice down my back for? Oh, dear, I’ll be all froze up!” And he danced around and let the two pitchers fall to the floor with a crash.

“That’s the time we paid him back for his sneaking tricks,” whispered Pepper, as he sped for his dormitory.

“Sure, he’s makin’ noise enough to wake the dead, so he is!” was Hogan’s comment. “If that don’t wake Captain Putnam up he must be slapin’ wid cotton in his ears an’ ear muffers on!”

“The best thing we can do is to get in bed and lose no time about it,” answered the Imp, and began to undress before his bedroom was gained.

The others were speedily acquainted with the turn of affairs, and in less than three minutes every cadet was undressed and in bed. The pasteboard boxes had been thrown out of a window and all the crumbs of the little feast swept up.

Hogan was right, the noise soon awakened Captain Putnam, and the master of the Hall arose, donned a dressing gown, and sallied forth to see what was the matter. Then from an upper bed-chamber Mrs. Green, the matron of the school, appeared. She was a good-natured woman, but any alarm at night scared her.

“What is the trouble, Captain Putnam?” she asked, in a trembling voice. “Have burglars gotten into the school?”

“If they have they are making a big noise about it,” answered Captain Putnam. “I rather think some of the cadets are up to pranks.”

“Perhaps the school is on fire?”

“Is the school on fire?” demanded a student, who just then stuck his head out of a dormitory doorway.

“If the school is on fire I’m going to get out!” exclaimed another cadet.

“No! no! There is no fire!” cried the master of the Hall, hastily. “I believe it is nothing but some boys cutting-up. Listen!”

The sound in Mumps’s dormitory had ceased, but now came another sound from downstairs – the overturning of a chair, followed by the crash of glassware.

“That is in the dining-room, or the store-room!” shrieked Mrs. Green. “Oh, they must be burglars, sir! The boys would not make such a dreadful noise.”

“I’ll soon get at the bottom of this,” said Captain Putnam, sternly, and ran down the back stairs as rapidly as his dressing gown would permit. In the meantime many boys came out into the corridors, and George Strong, the assistant teacher, appeared.

When Captain Putnam reached the store-room he found the door locked. But the key was in the lock, and he speedily turned it and let himself in. It was almost totally dark in the room, and he had not taken two steps before he felt some broken glass under his feet. The window was open and he darted to it, to behold two students on the campus outside.

“Stop!” he called out. But instead of obeying the command the students kept on running, and disappeared from sight around an angle of the building.

“I will get at the bottom of this – I must get at the bottom of it,” the master of the Hall told himself, and lost no time in lighting up. A glance around showed him that a small stand containing some water-glasses had been tipped over and several glasses were broken.

“That stand was in the way in the dining-room, so we had it removed to here,” explained Mrs. Green. “Oh, what a mess! Be careful, sir, or you’ll cut your feet.”

“Mr. Strong, two students just leaped from this window and are outside,” said the captain, as his assistant appeared at the store-room door. “Find out who they are and bring them to my office.”

“Yes, sir,” answered George Strong, and ran for a door opening onto the campus. Once outside he saw Coulter and Ritter in the act of sneaking off towards the barns and ran after them.

“It will do you no good to run away,” he cried, as he came up and caught each by the arm. “Ah, so it is you, Coulter, and you, Ritter. You will report at once at Captain Putnam’s office.”

“We weren’t doing anything,” growled Gus Coulter.

“You can tell the captain your story.”

Meekly Ritter and Coulter marched into the Hall and to the office. They knew not what to say. They had not dreamed of being locked in the store-room, and the table with the glassware had been knocked over by Ritter in an endeavor to get the window open in the dark.

“Well, young men, what have you to say for yourselves?” demanded Captain Putnam, sternly, as he confronted the pair.

“We broke the glassware by mistake, sir,” answered Reff Ritter. “I will pay for the damage done.”

“But what were you doing in the store-room at this time of night?”

“We – er – we came down to get – er – to get some lemons,” faltered Coulter. “I – er – I had a pain in the stomach, and I thought sucking on a lemon would cure it.”

“Humph! Did you have a pain, too?” and the master of the Hall turned to Ritter.

“No, sir, but – er – Gus was so sick I thought I had best come down with him,” answered Ritter.

“Are you still sick, Coulter?”

“Why – er – the pain seems better now, sir. I guess I scared it away!” And the guilty cadet smiled faintly.

“Indeed! Well, why did you leave the store-room by way of the window?”

“Because while we were inside somebody came and locked the door on us.”

“Oh! Some other students, I presume.”

“Yes, sir. It was too dark for us to see who they were.”

“And you went down for nothing but lemons, eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, you go straight to bed, and after this, if you want any lemons you call one of the servants or teachers; do you hear?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Wait just a moment. What was that noise upstairs?”

“Where?”

“In the neighborhood of your dormitory.”

“I don’t know,” said Coulter.

“Maybe it was made by the boys who locked us in,” was Reff Ritter’s comment.

“I see. Well, go to bed. If I hear any more noise, or learn of any more prowling around in the dark, I’ll make an example of somebody,” added Captain Putnam, and with that the two cadets were dismissed, and they lost no time in making for their dormitory. There they learned from Mumps how the sneak had been treated by Pepper and Hogan.

“That chunk of ice was as cold as – as Greenland!” said the sneak, dismally. “It melted right on my backbone, so how could I help but make a noise. There are the two pitchers. I wish I could fire them at somebody’s head!”

“Put them out in the hall – away from our door,” ordered Ritter. “If they are found here they will make more trouble – and we’ve had enough for one night.”

“Jack Ruddy’s crowd put this up our back,” was Coulter’s comment. “Oh, how I wish I could get square with them!”

“I am glad I didn’t go downstairs,” came from Nick Paxton.

“Then you didn’t get hold of the strawberry shortcakes at all,” said Mumps.

“No, and we don’t know if they got ’em, either,” answered Coulter. “Maybe you were mistaken, Mumpsy.”

“No, I wasn’t mistaken.”

“Well, we made a fizzle of getting the cakes anyway,” growled Ritter. “I am going to bed,” and in a thoroughly bad humor he turned in, and his cronies followed his example.

The joke on Coulter, Ritter, and Mumps could not be kept, and by the next day many students were laughing at the two bullies and the sneak. This made the three very angry, but they did not dare to say anything in public, for fear of getting into trouble with Captain Putnam.

The contest between Coulter and Andy Snow was to come off in the gymnasium that afternoon after school and, as a consequence, quite a number of students assembled to witness what was to take place. A large number thought Andy would win out, yet Gus Coulter had quite a few supporters, for he was known to be not only large but strong.

When Andy came in Coulter had not yet arrived. At once Andy began to practice. As soon as he did this Nick Paxton came up to him.

“Do you want to swing against me?” demanded Paxton.

“No, I have a contest with Coulter to-day,” answered Andy shortly. He had no use for Paxton, and was not above letting the latter know it.

“Afraid, eh?” sneered the other cadet.

“No, I am not afraid of you, Paxton, and you know it,” answered Andy, promptly.

“Yes, you are afraid,” growled the other boy, and moved off. In a minute, however, he came back, and seizing hold of a long rope suspended from the gymnasium ceiling, commenced to swing upon it.

Jack and Pepper came in, and they stood talking to Andy as Paxton continued to swing back and forth, close at hand. Then Paxton changed his course, so that his feet struck Jack on the arm.

“Stop that, Paxton!” cried the young major, but before he could say more the cadet on the rope launched himself forward again, with feet extended, and caught Andy in the left wrist. The blow was so strong that the acrobatic youth was bowled over on the polished floor.

“Ouch, my wrist!” cried Andy, as he scrambled up. Then he gazed sharply at Paxton. “What did you do that for?” he demanded.

“Excuse me, I didn’t mean to touch you,” was the short answer, and Paxton dropped from the rope and started for the other end of the gymnasium.

“Hold on there!” cried Pepper, and ran after Paxton.

“What do you want, Pep Ditmore?”

“You struck Andy on purpose!”

“I did not!”

“And I say you did! It was a mean thing to do.”

“Oh, you make me tired,” grunted Nick Paxton, but his tone betrayed his uneasiness.

“I believe you struck Andy so as to injure him,” said Jack. To this Paxton made no answer. Instead he moved on, and soon lost himself in a crowd of boys in another part of the gymnasium.

“Andy, does your wrist hurt much?” questioned Pepper, turning to his acrobatic chum.

“Yes, it does,” was the answer. “See, he scraped part of the skin off.”

“He ought to be hammered for it,” was Pepper’s emphatic declaration.

Andy walked over to a sink and there allowed the water to run over his wrist. Soon there was a small swelling, which pained considerably. Jack helped to tie a handkerchief around the bruised member.

“Well, Snow, are you ready for the contest?” demanded Gus Coulter, walking up. He had just passed Nick Paxton, and the latter had winked at him suggestively.

“Andy has been hurt,” explained Jack. “Paxton kicked him in the wrist.”

“Huh! Is this a trick to get out of meeting me?” grumbled Gus Coulter.

“No, it is no trick!” exclaimed Andy.

“Andy, you can’t meet him with your wrist in such bad shape,” expostulated Pepper.

“Postpone it until to-morrow,” suggested Dale, who was present.

“If he is to meet me at all it must be to-day,” said Coulter, flatly. “That bruise doesn’t amount to a hill of beans. I’ve got a hurt myself,” and he showed the back of his left hand, which had been slightly scratched by a playful kitten several days before.

“That is nothing to Andy’s bruise,” said Pepper. “See, his wrist is quite swelled.”

“Never mind, I’ll meet him, anyway – and beat him, too,” declared Andy. “Come on – I am ready if you are!”

CHAPTER VI

ANDY SNOW'S VICTORY

The crowd surrounding Andy were both pleased and astonished by his show of grit. It was easy to see that his wrist was in bad shape.

"Andy, you can't do it to-day," pleaded Pepper. "Make him meet you some other time."

"It is to-day or never," said Gus Coulter, bluntly.

In a few minutes the necessary space was cleared and the contest commenced. It had been agreed that the trial was to consist of the following: Each boy was to walk the length of the gymnasium on his hands and then rise up and "chin the bar," that is, draw himself up to his chin on a turning bar. The contestant to "chin the bar" the greatest number of times was to be the winner.

Harry Blossom had been chosen umpire of the contest, and at a word of command from him the two students fell upon their hands and started across the floor. At once Nick Paxton and Reff Ritter began to crowd Andy.

"You keep back there!" cried Jack, and shoved Paxton out of the way. Then he and Pepper elbowed their way to Reff Ritter. "Give Andy a show," both said.

"Oh, don't bother me," growled Ritter, giving Jack a black look.

"Then get out of Andy's way," answered the young major.

"That's right – keep the course clear, or I'll call the contest off," called out Harry Blossom, and Ritter and Paxton had to fall back. Mumps was also present and wanted to hinder Andy, but he had not the courage to do anything.

Andy's wrist pained him greatly, and long before he reached the end of the gymnasium he felt like giving up the contest. But he kept on, and finished walking on his hands as quickly as did Coulter. Then he pulled himself up on one bar while his opponent did the same on another.

"Three for Andy Snow!"

"Four for Gus Coulter!"

"Four for Andy!"

"Five for Gus! Stick to it, Gus, and you'll win!"

"Andy should not have tried it with that sore wrist!"

Amid encouraging cries and various criticisms, the "chinning" went on until Gus Coulter had pulled himself up twelve times. Andy had gone up ten times. Gus was trying his best to get up the thirteenth time, but seemed unable to make it.

Andy's wrist felt as if it was on fire, and he had to grit his teeth to keep from crying out with pain. But he clung to the bar and slowly but surely went up the eleventh time, and then the twelfth. Then he went up the thirteenth – just as Coulter did likewise.

"A tie!" was the cry.

Again the two boys tried to rise. But Gus Coulter's total strength was gone, and all he could do was to raise himself a few inches. He hung from the bar and glared at Andy.

"Want to call it a tie?" he gasped.

"No!" answered Andy, shortly, and then went up again. Gus could do no more, and he dropped to the floor. Then with a quick movement Andy raised himself up once again, and again, and then a third time – and then let go.

"Hurrah! Andy Snow wins!"

"He went up seventeen times to Coulter's thirteen."

"I can tell you, Andy Snow is a wonder! And he did it with that hurt wrist, too!"

So the cries ran on, while Gus Coulter sneaked away and out of sight. Pepper, Jack, and the others surrounded Andy. They saw he was very pale.

"It was too much for you, Andy," said the young major. "Come on out in the fresh air," and he led the way. On the campus he ran into Reff Ritter once more.

"Ritter, what do you mean by bumping into me," he said, sharply.

"I wasn't bumping into you," was the sharp reply. "Say, maybe you'd like to meet me in the gym. some day," went on the bully.

"At chinning?" asked Jack.

"No, on the bars, or the flying-rings."

"I am not afraid to meet you on the flying-rings," answered Jack, for that form of gymnastics appealed to him.

"All right, when do you want to meet me?"

"Any time you say."

"Done." And then and there, with the aid of several outsiders, the contest on the flying-rings was arranged.

"Jack, I am afraid you'll get the worst of it," said Pepper, for he remembered that Reff Ritter had travelled a good deal and had had several high-class instructors give him lessons in gymnastics.

"Perhaps," returned the young major. "But I wasn't going to show the white feather when he called on me to meet him."

Further discussion of the subject was cut short by the unexpected ringing of the school bell. At first the cadets thought this must be some joke, but soon learned otherwise. They were requested to meet in the assembly room, and were there addressed by Captain Putnam.

"I have an announcement of considerable importance to make," said the master of the Hall. "To-morrow afternoon this school will be visited by two of my old army friends, General Wallack and Major Darrowburg. General Wallack has been on duty on the Pacific coast and Major Darrowburg is one of the instructors at West Point. I shall ask these two old army friends of mine to inspect the school battalion and witness a drill. It is perhaps needless for me to say that I wish you all to appear at your best. I want every uniform carefully brushed, every shoe polished, and every gun and sword in the pink of condition. These gentlemen are deeply interested in our school, and I want them to see for themselves that we are close to the standard set by our government at West Point. To-morrow we will have dinner an hour earlier than usual, and that will give all ample time in which to make themselves presentable. I trust that every officer and every private will take a proper pride in this exhibition. And I wish to add, that any neglect on the part of an officer or a private to turn out in a fitting manner will be severely punished. Now you can go, and I trust you will, every one of you, add to the honor of Putnam Hall."

The cadets filed out of the assembly room and scattered in various directions. The announcement made by Captain Putnam created a keen interest.

"It will certainly be great to be inspected by two regular United States Army officers," observed Pepper. "Gosh! but we'll have to shine up for keeps! Guess I'll begin on my brass buttons right away!" And he said this so drolly all who heard him laughed.

"I've got to clean my gun," said Stuffer. "I meant to clean it last week, but it slipped my mind."

"Sure, an' it's meself must have a new braid on me coat," put in Emerald. "I'll go an' see about it to wanc't!" And he hurried off.

"I don't believe you've got much to do, Jack," said Pepper. "You always look as if you had stepped out of a bandbox. I don't see how you manage it."

"Well, you know I have to set the rest of the battalion an example, being major," was the reply. "If the major isn't up to the scratch how can he expect his men to be?"

"Yes, I know that's the way to look at it, but I really don't see how you keep your sword looking so fine, and your scabbard."

“I polish it pretty often – then it doesn’t come hard, Pep. The whole secret is in not letting things slip too long. When I find a button getting loose I don’t wait for it to fall off – I tighten it up right away.”

While Jack and his chums were talking matters over on the campus Coulter, Ritter, and Paxton had walked off toward the boat-house. They took but little interest in the inspection, until an idea regarding it entered Ritter’s head.

“I did what I could to lame Snow,” said Paxton to Coulter. “I kicked his wrist as hard as I could.”

“I was not in condition – my stomach has been weak for two days,” was Coulter’s explanation. “Another time I’ll beat him all to pieces.”

“Say, Reff, you had a run-in with Jack Ruddy, didn’t you?” asked Paxton, turning to Ritter.

“Yes.” Ritter was clicking his teeth together – something he was in the habit of doing when out of sorts. “Say, I wonder – ” He stopped short.

“What do you wonder?” asked Coulter.

“I was thinking of that exhibition drill.”

“Oh, pshaw! I am not going to worry about that. Why, if we make a fine showing who will get the credit? Captain Putnam, Jack Ruddy, and the other officers.”

“I am not going to make a good showing for Jack Ruddy’s benefit,” growled Paxton.

“I was thinking of something,” resumed Reff Ritter, slowly. “I wonder if we could manage it.”

“Manage what?” asked the two others.

“Manage to make a whole lot of trouble for Jack Ruddy and his crowd. It falls in with the first idea I had.”

“I’d like to do it!” declared Paxton.

“Same here,” added Coulter. “Only show us a safe and sure way.”

“You know how Ruddy keeps himself in the very best of condition all the time.”

“We couldn’t help but know that.”

“Well, supposing we spoilt that condition for him? Supposing we made his sword and its scabbard look rusty, his buttons dull, and his uniform full of spots? How would that strike those officers and Captain Putnam when that inspection came off?”

“I know one thing – Captain Putnam would be as mad as hops,” said Paxton. “More than likely he would reduce Ruddy to the ranks.”

“Yes, but you can’t work such a scheme,” said Coulter.

“Why not – if we can get hold of his things between now and to-morrow noon?”

“Because if he finds anything is mussed up he’ll do his best to clean up before he goes on the parade ground.”

“Yes, but what if he doesn’t find anything mussed up?” queried Reff Ritter.

“Yes, but – I don’t understand,” said Paxton. “He has eyes – he can readily see if anything is wrong.”

“Maybe not – if we fix him up in the right kind of a way.”

“Well, how are you going to do it?” demanded Coulter.

“I can do it easily enough, provided I can get down to the Cedarville drug store to-night.”

“What do you want from the drug store?”

“I want several chemicals. Can I trust you to keep this a secret?” And Reff Ritter looked around the boat-house to see if any outsiders were in sight. No one seemed to be around.

“Yes,” said both Coulter and Paxton, promptly.

“Well, my plan is simply this: From the druggist I will get certain chemicals to be mixed with water. Then, on the sly, we’ll get hold of Ruddy’s outfit. All we’ll have to do is to apply the chemicals to his sword, scabbard, buttons, and clothing. We can dilute the chemicals so that they will act in two, three or four hours, just as we please. At first the chemicals will not show at all, but after the

proper length of time they will turn everything they are on a sickly green. I know the action of the chemicals well, for I have used them in photography.”

“That’s a great idea!” cried Coulter. “Let us try it by all means. And we’ll put some on Andy Snow’s outfit, too!”

“Yes, and on Pepper Ditmore’s things,” broke in Paxton. “What’s the matter with doing up the whole Ruddy crowd while we are at it?”

“We will,” answered Reff Ritter. “We’ll make that inspection drill the worst looking affair that ever took place at Putnam Hall!”

“Yes, and bring seven kinds of trouble to Jack Ruddy and his crowd,” finished Coulter.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE DRUG STORE

Andy wanted his gun cleaned and oiled, and as his wrist was in no condition for use, Pepper volunteered to do the work. In the meantime Jack went around to several students whom he knew were usually careless in their appearance and told them they must brush up.

“I want every cadet to appear in first-class form,” said the young major. “Captain Putnam is depending upon me to have everything perfect.”

“I’m going to make everything shine like a looking-glass,” said Dale, “even if I have to work all night to do it.”

“Sure, and I want to look foine meself,” put in Hogan. “Mebbe, some day, I’ll be afther joining the regular army, I dunno.”

“West Point would just suit me,” added Henry Lee.

Having made a tour of the school and set many cadets to work cleaning up, the young major looked over his own things. A button on his coat wanted fastening and that was all. His sword and scabbard were as bright as a new silver dollar, and it must be confessed that he looked at them with satisfaction.

“Perhaps Captain Putnam will introduce me to those regular army officers,” he thought, “and if he does I want to look my very best.”

Some time later, having placed his outfit in the closet where it belonged, Jack joined Pepper and Andy. The former had finished cleaning the acrobatic cadet’s gun and was now at work on his own.

The three boys were talking among themselves when they noticed a cadet named Billy Sabine lounging near watching them curiously. It may be mentioned here that Sabine was an odd sort of youth – sometimes very good and sometimes very bad. He had been a toady to Dan Baxter and to Coulter. But when Reff Ritter came on the scene Billy had not been treated with the consideration he thought was due him, and, as a consequence, he was rather down on Ritter and his cronies.

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