

Stratemeyer Edward

The Putnam Hall Rivals



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The Putnam Hall Rivals / or, Fun and Sport Afloat and Ashore:*

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Arthur M. Winfield

The Putnam Hall Rivals / or, Fun and Sport Afloat and Ashore

INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys:

This tale of "The Putnam Hall Rivals" is a companion story to "The Putnam Hall Cadets" brought out about a year ago. It relates the further adventures of Jack Ruddy, Pepper Ditmore, and their chums, at and near Putnam Hall, an ideal boarding school for boys, located upon a beautiful lake in the upper portion of the State of New York. As at all boarding academies there are many keen rivalries, – in the classrooms, at the gymnasium, on the athletic field, and also on the lake. The majority of the boys are upright and open-hearted, but among the cadets there are to be found a few who are mean and even base, and these do a number of things which cause our heroes not a little trouble.

The "Putnam Hall Series" was started at the earnest solicitation of a number of my young friends who had read my "Rover Boys Series" and wanted to know more about what had

happened at Putnam Hall previous to the coming of the three Rover brothers on the scene. When the Rovers arrived they found at the academy a set of wide-awake lads, full of fun and “go,” and it is about these that the present tale concerns itself.

Once again I thank the thousands of boys, and girls too, who have shown their appreciation of my efforts to amuse and instruct them. May you enjoy this volume from the first page to the last, is the earnest wish of the author.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

Arthur M. Winfield.

June 5, 1906.

CHAPTER I

OUT ON THE ICE

“Line up, fellows, line up!”

“Wait a minute, Jack, my skate strap is loose.”

“Well, don’t take all the afternoon to fix it, Pep. Remember, we have only three-quarters of an hour off to-day.”

“Oh, I’ll remember it right enough,” grumbled Pepper Ditmore, as he fixed the skate strap. “And such good skating, too! Isn’t it a shame! I wish we had a whole holiday to-morrow.”

“Make it a week,” put in a cadet named Dale Blackmore. “I declare, I almost love skating as well as I do baseball and football.”

“Are you all ready?” came from Jack Ruddy, a moment later. “I am not going to wait any longer.”

“All ready!” was the answering cry, and six boys lined up on the smooth ice of the lake.

“Then go!” shouted Jack, and away went the half-dozen, with Jack at their side, down the lake, which the keen wind of the day before had swept almost entirely clear of snow.

They were a merry, light-hearted set of boys, all bent upon having the best possible time on the present occasion. Coming out on the ice but a few minutes before, a race had been quickly arranged, the winner to be treated to some pie whenever the

others should visit the town and be able to get it for him.

Of the seven boys making such rapid progress over the frozen surface of the lake, Jack Ruddy was the leader in more ways than one. He was a well-built fellow, with bright, earnest eyes, and only a few months before had been chosen major of the school battalion.

In another volume of this "Putnam Hall Series," entitled "The Putnam Hall Cadets," I related the particulars of how the military academy was organized by Captain Victor Putnam, who had received his own military training at West Point, that grand government institution of ours, and who had also seen strenuous service under Uncle Sam in the far west. A fall from a horse had put him in a sick bed, and after his recovery he had decided to retire from the army and go to teaching.

The captain had had considerable money left to him, and with this he purchased a beautiful plot of ground on Cayuga Lake, in New York State, and there he built Putnam Hall, a handsome structure of brick and stone, shaped like the letter E, and containing many fine classrooms, dormitories, a library, messroom, office, and numerous other apartments.

The academy stood in the middle of a ten-acre plot. In front was a smooth, grassy parade ground and also a well-kept wagon road, running off in the direction of Cedarville, the nearest village on the lake. To the rear of the school the grounds ran down to the lake, and here were the barns and a storehouse on one side, and a gymnasium on the other, backed up by thick woods, and

on the lake shore a boathouse and a line of bathing-houses.

The school was organized upon military lines, and each cadet was attired in military uniform and was given instruction in military matters daily. The regular studies were similar to those at any first-class preparatory school. Captain Putnam was at the head of the school, and his first assistant was Josiah Crabtree, and his second assistant George Strong. The majority of the boys liked the captain and George Strong very much, but Crabtree was a sour and morose individual they all but despised, even though they had to admit that he was well educated and could teach when he set his mind to it.

Jack Ruddy and Pepper Ditmore were chums, hailing from the western part of New York State. Jack was a trifle older than Pepper, but both were of the same size. Jack was a whole-souled fellow and it was small wonder that, at the first election for officers, the cadets chose him as the major of the school battalion. Pepper was full of fun, and this had gained him the nickname of Imp. He was content to remain "a high private in the rear rank," as he expressed it, but nobody loved him any the less on that account.

At the academy, Jack and Pepper had speedily become acquainted with a number who had since become their warm friends. There was Dale Blackmore, just introduced, who was a great football player, and also Henry Lee, who was captain of Company A, Bart Conners, who was captain of Company B, Paul Singleton, generally called Stuffer because of his fondness

for eating, Andy Snow, an acrobatic youth who was the best gymnast at the Hall, Joseph Hogan, usually spoken of as Emerald on account of his Irish brogue, and a score of others whom we shall meet as our story progresses.

These were Jack and Pepper's friends. The chums had also made some enemies, of whom the worst was Dan Baxter, the bully of the school. The bully at this time had two cronies almost as bad as himself named Gus Coulter and Nick Paxton, and also a toady, John Fenwick, called by all the students Mumps.

Rivalries had been keen almost from the start, and it had galled Dan Baxter exceedingly to see Jack made major of the battalion, he himself having plotted and schemed to obtain that honor, but without avail. From that hour on the bully did all he could to get Jack and his chum into trouble. This at last led to a fight between the bully and Jack, and the youthful major came out practically a victor, although the fight was broken off before it was finished. But Dan Baxter boasted that he would yet whip Jack and whip Pepper, too.

During the early part of the winter George Strong, the second assistant teacher, had mysteriously disappeared. Two strange men had been seen around the Hall several times by Jack and Pepper, and it was at last learned that the strange men had something to do with the disappearance of the assistant teacher. A hunt was instituted by Captain Putnam, in which he was joined by Jack, Pepper, Andy Snow, and Dale Blackmore. The missing instructor was found a prisoner in a cabin in the woods, his

captors being the two mysterious men, who proved to be relatives of George Strong. They had lost their fortunes and this had turned their brain, so that they were not responsible for their doings. As soon as the teacher was rescued, he sent the demented men to the west, a relative from that part of the country coming on to take them away.

George Strong had been very grateful to the boys for what they had done for him, and he did what he could to help them along in their studies. The insane relatives had imagined that the teacher had hidden away a fortune belonging to the family. The teacher told the boys that it was true that, during the Revolutionary War, his ancestors had buried a pot of gold, to keep it out of the hands of the British.

“But it was not worth anything like a million, as my unfortunate relatives believed,” had been George Strong’s statement to Jack and Pepper. “At the most it would be worth eight or ten thousand dollars.”

“That’s a tidy sum,” Jack had answered.

“You are right.”

“I’d like to pick up eight or ten thousand dollars,” Pepper had put in. “Mr. Strong, have you any idea where this fortune you speak of is located?”

“A very faint idea.”

“If you’ll tell us, – and the place is close by, – we might look for it for you.”

“A letter was left by my great-grandfather in which the pot

of gold was mentioned as resting at the foot of the tree with the stone in its roots, twenty paces north of the old well. I have never been able to locate either the well or the tree.”

“But was it around here?” Jack had questioned with interest.

“Somewhere in this vicinity, for the farm belonging to my great-grandfather was located not many miles from here.”

“I thought the Indians were here at that time.”

“So they were, but my great-grandfather had some Indian blood in his veins and was a frontiersman, and the red men did not molest him very much.”

“Haven’t you ever hunted for the pot of gold?”

“A great many times – years ago. But I at last gave it up as useless. More than likely the old well mentioned has fallen in and the tree rotted away, so the landmarks are all gone and nothing is left by which to locate the treasure.”

And there the talk had come to an end, but the boys had not forgotten about the pot of gold.

CHAPTER II

A GAME OF SNAP-THE-WHIP

The race was on in earnest and the skates flashed brightly in the rays of the declining sun.

Pepper was in advance. Dale was slowly but surely crawling up to him.

“Go it, Imp! go it!” shrieked Jack, when he saw that he could not win.

Pepper did “go it,” and despite Dale’s effort to get ahead kept to the front. In the meantime Andy Snow also kept coming up, until he and Dale were tied for second place.

“Whoop, Pepper has won!” cried Stuffer Singleton, who was bringing up the rear. “Where are you, Andy?”

“Here I am!” answered the acrobatic pupil, and just then struck a crack in the ice, went down, and turned a handspring, coming to his feet again like a flash.

“Would yez look at that now!” burst out Joseph Hogan, as he stopped racing to look at Andy. “Sure an’ it’s in a circus you ought to be,” he continued.

“Andy’s doing stunts!” cried Jack.

“Say, Stuffer, why didn’t you try to win?” asked Andy, as he circled up to the stout youth. “Did you eat too much for dinner?”

“Eat too much!” snorted Stuffer. “With old Crabtree watching

me? Not much! When I asked for more meat he wouldn't let me have it. And I think I got the smallest dish of dessert, too!" grumbled the youth who was fond of good living.

"Pepper, you are all right," said Jack, slapping his chum on the back. "That was well won!"

"And do I get the pie?" asked Pepper, with a smile.

"Certainly you do!" came from several of the others, who all loved the Imp. "But you have got to wait till we go to Cedarville."

"Sure, an' if he'll be satisfied wid wan piece he'll not have to wait at all, at all!" came from Hogan, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Why, what have you got up your sleeve, Emerald?" asked Jack.

"Tis not up me sleeve at all, but in me pocket," answered the Irish lad, and hauled forth a piece of brown paper containing a small cut of mince pie.

"Hullo, where did you get that?" asked several of the others, in astonishment.

"Got it from the kitchen, when nobody was looking," answered Hogan. "It was on the table – set out, I think, for Snuggers' dinner. I didn't want to see him after gittin' indigestion, so I – well, I made an appropriation, as the politicians say."

"Phew! I'll wager poor Peleg was mad!" was Pepper's comment. He referred to Peleg Snuggers, the general-utility man around Putnam Hall.

"So here you are, Imp," went on Hogan, and held out the pie.

"That's the reason you proposed pie as a prize, eh?" cried

Dale. "Supposing you had won?"

"Sure, I should have eaten the piece myself," answered Emerald.

"I'll accept the pie on one condition," came from Pepper. "That is that you all have a bite with me."

"We will!" was the shout, and a minute later each lad present was chewing on his mouthful of the dainty.

After that, the boys skated around for a little while longer. There were others on the lake, but they, for the most part, kept by themselves.

"I see Dan Baxter is out, with a new pair of skates," said Jack to Pepper, presently.

"Yes, and he has a new camera, too," answered Pepper. "By the way, I'd like to have a camera myself. I think I'll write home for one before long. It will be lots of sport to take some winter pictures."

Jack and Pepper, with Andy, had skated a little to one side, and now the three moved along one of the shores, where grew some evergreens, now loaded down with snow. The sun was going down and it was growing dark.

"Hi, you!" came suddenly from one side of them. "What do you mean by spoiling my picture!"

All three of the boys looked around and saw that Dan Baxter had set up his tripod on the ice. On the tripod rested his camera, the lens pointed at the evergreens on the shore. The three boys had swept along between the camera and the object Baxter

wished to photograph just as the picture was being taken.

“I didn’t know you were trying to get a picture, Dan,” said Jack.

“Didn’t know it?” roared the bully of Putnam Hall. “Are you blind?”

“Not at all.”

“Then what did you rush in between for, tell me that? I was trying to get a nice time picture, and you have spoilt the plate.”

“I am very sorry. Haven’t you got another plate?”

“Of course I have. Do you think I carry only one plate? But that’s no reason why you and Pep Ditmore and Andy Snow should act so clownish.”

“Thank you, Baxter, but I didn’t act clownish,” cried Pepper, circling up on his skates.

“I say you did.”

“We didn’t see the camera at all,” put in Andy Snow. “So please don’t get so hot about it.”

“Oh, I know you fellows!” stormed Dan Baxter, working himself up into a rage, as was often his habit. “You think you can ride over me. But you can’t do it.”

“If you are going to take a picture you had better do it,” said Jack, quietly. “It will be too dark in another ten minutes.”

“Oh, don’t give me any advice, Jack Ruddy. Just because you are the major this term you can’t boss me.”

“I am not trying to boss you, as you call it, Baxter. Come, why can’t you drop the past and be friends?”

"I don't want to be friends with you."

"We'd rather have you for enemies any time," came from Gus Coulter, who had been helping his crony carry the photographing outfit.

"That's the talk," added Nick Paxton, who was likewise present. "We prefer to choose our own friends; eh, fellows?"

"And we don't choose the Ruddy crowd," said Coulter.

"Very well, have your own way," answered Jack, coldly. "But it would be nicer the other way."

"I wouldn't trust you, Ruddy, or trust your friends either," remarked Dan Baxter, bitterly. "You'd pretend to be friends and then get us into a hole the first chance you got. I know you!"

"You evidently judge us by yourself," said Pepper, hotly. "We are not so mean."

"Don't waste any words on them," said Andy. "Come on and let them take their pictures," and he skated away, and Jack and Pepper followed.

"What a fellow Dan Baxter is!" sighed the youthful major of the cadets. "No matter how nice a fellow tries to be to him he seems to resent it."

"It's because he doesn't want us for friends," answered Pepper. "He prefers fellows like Coulter and Paxton, and that sneak, Mumps."

Just then a merry crowd of skaters swept along, playing snap-the-whip. Our friends were invited to join in, and the sport soon became so uproarious that the bully and his associates were

forgotten for the time being.

“Here is where I live!” ejaculated Pepper, as he skated along. “Come on, fellows, and snap for keeps this time.”

“Not too fast!” cried out Stuffer, who chanced to be on the end at the time. “I – I – can’t keep up, you – know!” And then down he went on the smooth ice and rolled over and over. Several other skaters went down likewise, and a general laugh arose. Then up the cadets leaped, to form a new “whip.”

“Only five minutes more!” said Dale, consulting a watch he carried. “We won’t dare to be late to-day.”

“Not much, with old Crabtree on guard,” answered Pepper. “If we are he’ll be certain to keep us in to-morrow for it.”

“How I wish I had him out here on the ice,” was Dale’s comment.

“Sure an’ we’d be after teachin’ him some foin points,” said Hogan. “We’d make him spread th’ eagle on his head, so we would!”

“Crabtree knows enough to keep off the ice,” said Jack. “Perhaps he can’t skate.”

“Mr. Strong is a beautiful skater,” said Pepper. “I saw him out day before yesterday. He cut some very fancy figures.”

“What a difference between those two men,” said Andy. “Just as much difference as between Baxter and – and Joe Nelson,” he added, naming a quiet and steady pupil, well liked by all of the cadets.

“Now, boys, for the last swing!” cried Jack. “Pepper, your turn

on the end this time.”

“All right, but please don’t snap me into the middle of next week,” answered the fun-loving youth.

“We’ll snap you into the middle of next year!” cried Andy, gleefully. He wanted to square up with somebody for a tumble he had taken.

Away went the boys, in a long line, across the lake. All were shouting and cheering, the hills beyond the lake echoing with their glee. They did not attempt to make a sweep until all had gained good headway.

“Now then, all together!” came from Dale. “Let her go!”

“Whoop!” shrieked Andy. “Good-bye, Pepper!”

The long line began to sweep around. It was fairly close to the lake shore, at a spot where there was a point upon which grew a number of low bushes, all thickly covered with snow.

“Pepper is going into the snow this trip!” cried Dale, as the line broke, and Pepper was hurled forward, flat on the smooth ice. But he was mistaken. The boy turned over and over, and then disappeared around the point like a flash. The next instant there came a strange crash, an exclamation of alarm, and then a babel of voices raised in anger.

CHAPTER III

THE BULLY OF THE SCHOOL

“What in the world is up now?” ejaculated Jack, as he started to skate around the point.

“Pepper is in trouble, that’s sure,” answered Andy.

In a moment the boys who had been playing snap-the-whip saw what had happened. Around the point of land Dan Baxter had been trying to take a time picture of the snow-laden bushes and the rocks beyond – certainly an artistic bit of landscape. Pepper, sprawling on the ice, had hit the tripod and sent the camera crashing down and the bully of Putnam Hall with it.

“Look here!” spluttered Dan Baxter, as he got on his knees. “What’s the meaning of this?”

“I – er – I didn’t – er – see you!” gasped Pepper. The wind had been knocked completely out of him by the unexpected contact with camera, tripod, and owner.

“It’s false!” cried the bully. “You couldn’t help seeing me! It’s all a bluff!”

“You – er – you’re mistaken,” panted Pepper, and started to rise, when the bully caught him by the collar and pulled him flat again.

“Let go of me, Dan Baxter!”

“I’ll not! I am going to teach you a good lesson!”

“Hi! hi! What’s this?” exclaimed Jack, skating closer. “Let go of him, Baxter.”

“Why should I?”

“He isn’t to blame,” put in Andy.

“Sure, an’ that’s the truth av it,” broke in Emerald. “We all had a hand, so we did!”

“We were playing snap-the-whip,” explained Dale. “You must have seen us.”

“Thanks, but I don’t watch such childish games,” sneered the bully. “I was tending to my own business when he comes along, smashes the camera, and knocks me down. Do you think I am going to stand for that?”

“You can’t stand if you are knocked down,” said Andy, dryly.

“Humph! Don’t get funny, Snow! This is no laughing matter.”

“As the dentist said when he pulled the wrong tooth,” came softly from Dale.

“Is the camera really broken?” asked Jack.

“Yes, it is, and it cost my dad twenty-five dollars.”

“I can get one like it for twelve,” said Stuffer. “Same size and make.”

“Humph!”

“I don’t think it is broken,” said Jack, looking the box over.

“I heard something crack.”

“Maybe it was the glass plate. The lens and shutter are certainly O. K., and the box is tight too. One leg of the tripod is broken though.”

“Pepper Ditmore has got to pay for this,” came firmly from Dan Baxter.

“That’s right, don’t let him crawl out of it,” put in Gus Coulter.

“He’s too smart altogether,” added Nick Paxton.

“See here, Coulter, don’t you put in your oar,” cried Pepper. “If you do, I’ll give you what I gave you before.” And then Gus Coulter slunk back, for he had not forgotten the drubbing Pepper had administered but a few weeks previous.

“Are you going to pay for the damage done or not?” demanded Dan Baxter.

“I shall certainly pay,” said Pepper, promptly. “Let me have the camera and I’ll get it fixed. Or you can have it fixed and have the bill sent to me.”

“We’ll all pay the bill,” cried Jack. “I think I am as much to blame as Pep.”

“So am I,” added Andy, and many of the others who had been playing snap-the-whip said the same.

“I am not going to let you have my camera,” said Dan Baxter, sulkily. “I’ll get it mended as it should be.” He paused a moment. “But I ain’t going to let you knock me down for nothing.”

“As I explained, it was an accident, Dan.”

“Humph! You ought to be made to apologize,” growled the bully. He would have attacked Pepper, only he realized that the lad had too many friends around.

A war of words followed, lasting several minutes. Then of a sudden one of the boys let out a low whistle.

“Five minutes over time, fellows. We must get back to the Hall!”

“Five minutes late!” came the cry. “This won’t do at all! Come on and get back!”

And then the majority ran off, leaving Pepper and Jack with Dan Baxter and Gus Coulter.

“I’ve got to get back to the Hall, Baxter,” said Pepper. “But I’ll settle to-morrow.”

“Yes – for I’ll make you settle,” answered the bully, meaningly. “I’ve stood all I’m going to stand from you and your cronies.”

So speaking the bully picked up his camera and hurried away, followed by Gus Coulter with the case containing the plates.

“I am sorry this happened,” observed Jack, as he and Pepper ran for the mess-hall. “This will make Baxter more down on us than ever.”

“I couldn’t help it, Jack. I did what I could to steer clear of the bushes. I didn’t want to scratch my face, and I didn’t know he was back there out of sight.”

When Jack and Pepper reached the Hall they were met by Josiah Crabtree, who viewed them sternly.

“What is the meaning of this, Major Ruddy?” demanded the first assistant teacher. “You are setting a bad example for those under you.”

“We had a little trouble on the ice,” answered Jack. “Pepper fell down and knocked over Dan Baxter’s camera, and we had to straighten matters out.”

“Humph! See that you are not late again,” muttered the teacher, and passed on.

“Phew! we got off easily that time,” exclaimed Pepper, in a low tone. “He must have something else to attend to,” and in this surmise the youth was correct.

A drum was already rolling, and the boys were hurrying to the parade ground. Jack dashed in and got his sword, and Pepper got his gun, and both hurried to the parade ground.

“Battalion, attention!” commanded the youthful major, and soon the cadets were in line. Then came a short drill, followed by the order to march. The drums sounded out, the fifes struck up a lively air, and around the parade ground went the cadets, and at last marched into the mess-hall, where they all sat down to a plain but substantial supper.

During the meal Pepper and Jack saw Dan Baxter scowl at them, and both felt that the bully “had it in for them.”

“He is bound to get square,” said Jack. “Pep, we must keep our eyes peeled.”

After supper the boys had an hour off. Some spent the time in the library reading, while others drifted into the gymnasium.

Jack had some studies to attend to, and went to an open classroom. Pepper walked to the gymnasium, accompanied by Andy Snow.

Both boys were soon exercising on the rings, and Andy showed what he could do on a turning bar, – doing the “giant swing” and other difficult feats.

While they were exercising, Mumps, the toady to Dan Baxter, came in, followed by a new student named Reff Ritter.

Reff Ritter was a youth who had a very high opinion of himself. His parents were fairly well off and the boy had traveled a good deal in foreign countries. Reff had an idea that he could do almost anything, and he loved to boast of his ability and also to boast of where he had been and what he had seen. A few of the boys, including Mumps, toadied to him, but the majority voted the newcomer “a pill.” He had tried to become friendly with Jack and Pepper, but both had tired of his everlasting boastings.

“Are you a gymnast?” asked Mumps, as he and Reff Ritter came to a halt close to where Andy and Pepper were practicing.

“Oh, yes, certainly!” exclaimed Ritter, in a loud voice. “I took some lessons in New York and I finished up while I was in London and Berlin. A German instructor – one of the *Turn-verein* men – taught me a lot of tricks.”

“What do you think of that?” went on Mumps, as Andy made a swing on the rings.

“Fair, only fair,” drawled Reff Ritter. “Not at all graceful. Now when I was stopping at Madrid, there was a Spaniard there who showed me how to do a turn like that, and it was perfection, I can assure you.”

Andy heard the remark, and it made his ears tingle. He gave a swing and landed on the floor in front of Ritter and Mumps.

“I’d like to see that Spanish swing you just mentioned,” he said, coldly.

“Humph! I didn’t – er – calculate to do anything in the way of gymnastics this evening,” stammered Reff Ritter.

“Maybe you are afraid to try,” went on Andy, pointedly.

“Not at all! not at all!” exclaimed the new student. “I’ll show you how to do it if you want me to.”

He took off his coat and vest and also his collar and tie. Then he leaped up on the rings and began to swing.

“Here goes!” he called out, and made the turn, while a small crowd began to gather.

“Good! That’s fine!” called out Mumps. “Now, Andy Snow, how do you like it?”

The turn had been a fairly good one. Andy smiled quietly.

“Can you make the double turn?” he called up to Reff Ritter.

“Certainly – I learned that in Berlin also,” was the answer, and the turn was made, after a good deal of an effort. Then, warming up, Reff Ritter began to show off, doing about everything he had ever learned. He did not stop until he was practically out of breath.

Taken as a whole, it was a fair exhibition of gymnastic work, and some of the boys standing around applauded.

“Have you finished?” asked Pepper.

“I have,” answered Reff Ritter. He caught his breath. “There’s a pattern for your friend to go by.”

“Thank you, but I don’t need any pattern,” answered Andy. “Here goes for another try at it!”

He went up lightly and began to perform. First he did several

things which were comparatively easy. But each turn was clean-cut in itself and decidedly graceful.

“Andy certainly knows how to go at it,” remarked Joe Nelson, who was present.

“Huh! He hasn’t done anything as difficult as I did,” put in Reff Ritter.

Then Andy began to do other things, making swings and leaps that were really wonderful in one who was only an amateur. The boys applauded more and more. Then he made a leap and a twist seldom seen outside of a regular circus performance.

“Look at that!” cried Pepper, enthusiastically. “Nobody can do better!”

“Sure, an’ Andy’s the bist acrobat in the school, so he is,” said Emerald.

And the majority of those standing around agreed with the Irish cadet.

CHAPTER IV

A DOSE OF SNOW AND ICICLES

As soon as it became apparent that Andy was doing much better than he had been able to do, Reff Ritter lost interest in the exhibition going on.

“I reckon I’ve seen enough,” he drawled. “It’s cold in here anyway. I’m going back to the school,” and he shuffled off, followed by Mumps.

“Andy, you are ten times better than he is on the bar and rings,” cried Pepper.

“Sure, an’ that Ritter is a big blow, so he is!” was Hogan’s comment. “I am glad that Andy took him down.”

“I don’t think he’ll like it much,” observed Andy.

The acrobatic youth was right. Reff Ritter was very bitter at heart.

“Where are Baxter and Coulter?” he asked of Mumps, as they hurried outside.

“Went down to the old boathouse,” and Mumps winked.

“For a smoke?”

“Yes,” was the whispered answer. For, as my readers may imagine, smoking among the cadets was strictly prohibited.

“Think I’ll have a cigarette myself,” said Ritter. “Will you come along?”

Now, Mumps did not like to smoke, as it made him sick. But he did not wish to offend his new friend, and so he agreed to go along. They soon made their way to where Baxter and Coulter had taken themselves, and the toady gave a peculiar whistle.

It was answered a moment later, and Coulter appeared.

“Oh, it’s you,” he said. “All right, come in.”

They entered a section of the old boathouse that was but little used. It would have been cold, only the cadets had found a charcoal stove, and this was burning. Around it were Dan Baxter, Paxton, and Coulter, all smoking cigarettes.

“Hullo, glad to see you,” said Dan Baxter to Reff Ritter. “Sit down with us and enjoy yourself.”

Ritter sat down and drew from his pocket a package of imported cigarettes. He offered one to Mumps, and the toady lit it. Then Ritter lit one himself, inhaling the smoke and blowing it forth through his nose.

“Say, this is something like,” he observed. “Quite a cozy bunk you have.”

“It’s good enough for a smoking place in the winter time,” answered the bully of Putnam Hall. “In the summer time we can go anywhere.”

“Captain Putnam must be down on smoking.”

“He is.”

“I don’t see why,” said Paxton. “I’ve smoked ever since I was eight years old.” And his pinched face showed it.

“I love these imported Egyptian cigarettes,” went on Reff

Ritter. "I get the genuine, you know."

"I've got a treat for all hands," said Dan Baxter, after a pause. He brought forth a big bottle from his overcoat.

"What is that?" asked Mumps.

"Wine – I bought it down at Cedarville."

"Just the stuff!" exclaimed Ritter. "I'm with you on wine. I got used to drinking it when I was over in Europe. You know they serve it regularly for dinner at all the hotels."

The bottle of wine was passed around, and all of the boys assembled drank a portion. Mumps wanted to decline, but did not dare.

"Don't be afraid of it, Mumpsy, old boy," said Baxter to his toady. "Drink it, it will make a man of you."

The boys continued to smoke and drink for the best part of half an hour. Then they heard a peculiar noise outside.

"Hi, somebody is coming!" cried Paxton, in alarm. "Put out the light!"

The lantern that hung on a nail was extinguished and the boys listened. They heard somebody moving around in the dark. Then all became silent.

"I – I don't like this," said Mumps, in a trembling voice. "I think somebody was spying on us!"

"We had better get back to the school," said Baxter, and this advice was followed without delay. They saw somebody running across the campus, but could not make out who the person was.

During the time the Baxter crowd had been smoking and

drinking they had talked over many matters, and particularly their troubles with Pepper, Jack, and Andy Snow. The bully of the Hall wanted to get even with Pepper for the trouble on the ice, and Reff Ritter was willing to do almost anything to “put a spoke in Andy Snow’s wheel,” as he expressed it.

The upshot of the talk was that the crowd determined to play some tricks on our friends, and do it that very night.

“I know something brand-new,” said Coulter, and told his cronies of it.

“That’s the talk – if we can work it,” said Baxter. “And we’ll do something else, too,” he added.

Gus Coulter’s idea was to get some snow and stuff it into the pillows of the other boys. The heat of the boys’ heads would gradually melt the snow and leave the lads in beds that were soaking wet.

As luck would have it, Dan Baxter and his party found the dormitory occupied by Jack and the others empty when they went upstairs. They quickly got out the bed pillows, and from the roof of an addition to the academy procured the necessary snow, which they stuffed into the pillow-cases, next to the feathers. Then they got a number of icicles and put several at the foot of each bed, under the blankets, and in such manner that the boys’ feet would come up against them.

“And now for a finishing touch,” said Ritter, and placed a big chunk of snow on the upper edge of the dormitory door, leaving the door slightly open. Then the boys hid away to watch

proceedings.

It was not long after this that Jack and his friends came upstairs to go to bed. They did not, however, go straight to their dormitory, but stopped to talk to some other cadets at the end of the hall.

“I wish they would go in their room,” whispered Paxton, from a corner. “I am getting tired of waiting.”

“Say, here comes old Crabtree,” put in Mumps.

“Yes, and he’s going toward their room!” cried Gus Coulter, in surprise.

He spoke the truth, and an instant later Josiah Crabtree pushed upon the dormitory door. Down came the big chunk of snow on the teacher, sending him flat to the floor.

“Hi! hi! What’s this?” spluttered Josiah Crabtree. “Who is – er – who covered me with snow?”

He turned over and got to his feet. His shoulders were full of snow and some snow had gone down inside his collar, causing him to shiver with cold.

The noise attracted the attention of all the cadets in the vicinity, and soon they gathered around the teacher.

“What’s the matter?”

“Old Crabtree is taking a snow bath for his health.”

“Where did all that snow come from?”

“Major Ruddy, can you explain this?” demanded the assistant teacher, turning angrily to Jack.

“No, sir, I cannot,” was the answer.

“I was going to enter this dormitory when down came this snow, almost burying me alive!”

“I am sorry, Mr. Crabtree.”

“It is outrageous – villainous! Somebody is responsible!”

“I am not. I know nothing about the snow.”

“I guess it was put there for our benefit,” put in Pepper. “We were about to enter the room when you came along.”

“Humph! A silly trick.”

“How did you happen to catch it, Mr. Crabtree?” asked Andy, curiously.

“I was going into the room to see if the windows were closed. There is a great draught through this hallway, as you can feel. Then you do not know who did this?” went on the instructor, gazing sharply at the assembled pupils.

All looked blankly at each other. Dan Baxter and his cronies took good care to keep in the background.

“Gather up the snow and throw it out of a window,” ordered Josiah Crabtree, and this was done, but not before several snowballs had been thrown, one catching Mumps in the neck and another landing on Reff Ritter’s left ear. Then the throwing was stopped, order was restored, and all of the cadets were told to retire.

“Somebody put up a job on us right enough,” observed Pepper, when he and his chums were in the dormitory and the door had been closed. “If old Crabtree hadn’t come along one of us would have gotten that dose.”

"I'll wager that I know who is guilty," came from Dale.

"Dan Baxter and his crowd?"

"Exactly. Didn't you see how they hung back and how they grinned at us?"

"I saw it," came from Andy. "That's why I soaked Mumps with a snowball."

"And I let Ritter have it in the ear," said Pepper. "But I say, fellows, we want to be on our guard."

"Do you think they played more jokes on us?" questioned Hogan. "Sure an' it would be just like 'em to do it, so it would!" he added.

"It certainly won't do any harm to look around," suggested Jack. "It won't take but a few minutes to do it."

Pepper held up his hand.

"Wait!" he whispered, and sliding to the door, threw it open suddenly. Outside he found Ritter, Baxter, and Coulter. The trio were amazed at being thus suddenly confronted.

"I thought so!" cried Pepper, triumphantly.

"Oh, go to grass!" muttered the bully of the school, and walked away.

"We'll fix you another time," muttered Ritter.

"And do it well too," added Coulter.

Pepper waited until he had seen the others enter their dormitory and then closed his own door again.

"I've found something!" cried Andy, and dove into his pillow-case. "Filled with snow!"

“Snow for Snow!” said Jack.

“That’s a cold pun,” observed Dale. “Just the same, here is snow in my pillow too. Say, we just got this in time. It would have melted before long and then our pillows would have been wringing wet.”

“Don’t say a word about snow,” said Emerald. “Just be after lookin’ at this now!” And he held up three icicles he had dislodged from his bed. “Ain’t they iligant foot-warmers though!”

Without delay the other boys looked into their beds, and soon all the icicles were disposed of, and the snow was likewise cleaned away. They then made another hunt around the dormitory, to make certain that nothing else was wrong.

“I guess we are safe now,” said Jack, at last. “But what a mess this would have made if we had not found it out in time!”

“I know what I am going to do,” said Pepper, decidedly.

“What, Imp?” came from several of the others.

“I’m going to pay the Baxter crowd back, and with interest.”
And the others instantly agreed to help him.

CHAPTER V

THE DOCTORED CAKE

Two days later Pepper and Andy were out on the lake skating, when Andy broke his skate and pitched flat on the ice.

“Hullo, what are you doing?” cried Pepper.

“Looking to see how thick the ice is,” was the merry retort.

“I thought you were looking for stars,” went on the Imp.

“No, thanks, I didn’t go down on the back of my head. Just the same, my left skate is broken.”

“That’s too bad.”

Both of the boys looked the broken skate over, and then retired to the old boathouse to see if they could not fix it. By chance they entered the place which Dan Baxter’s crowd had been using from time to time as a rendezvous.

“Hullo, look here!” cried Pepper, gazing around. “I didn’t know that anybody came here.”

“Neither did I.”

“Here are lots of cigarette butts.”

“Yes, Pep, and – look in the corner.”

Pepper looked in the direction pointed out. From under a pile of old leaves, which the wind had blown into the boathouse when the door was open, shone the neck of a bottle.

“A wine bottle, I declare, Andy. Can it be that some of the

fellows have been drinking down here?"

"I don't know. It looks a little like it."

"But that is against the rules."

"So is smoking, and those butts look to be pretty fresh."

The boys were mystified, but could not answer the question which arose in their minds. They looked around for what they were after, but could not mend the broken skate.

"I'll have to take it down to Cedarville and have it mended," said the acrobatic youth. "Maybe I can get off to-morrow."

"If you can't, I'll lend you a pair, Andy. I have two."

"Thank you, Pep. But I like this pair. They just fit my feet."

It was not until the following Tuesday that Pepper, Andy, and Jack got permission to visit Cedarville, the nearest steamboat town on the lake to Putnam Hall. In the meantime, on Monday, Dale and Hogan came to them in some little excitement.

"We have got news," said Dale.

"Dan Baxter is going to celebrate," added the Irish cadet. "Sure an' he's going to have an iligant spread, so he is!"

"What is he going to celebrate?" asked Pepper, with interest.

"He got a big allowance from home – smuggled it past Captain Putnam, too," explained Dale. "As a consequence, he is going to give the fellows of his dormitory a feast, or something like that."

"How did you learn all this?" asked Jack.

"By accident. Baxter passed a note to Paxton, who dropped it. I thought it was some plot against us, and read the note. Then I heard Paxton telling Billy Sabine. Baxter is going to make it the

biggest spread ever given in this school.”

“That is our chance to get even with him!” cried Pepper, his eyes dancing. “We ought to doctor up that feast for them.”

“How can we do it?” asked Jack.

“Oh, I’ll think up something before the time comes,” answered the Imp. “When does it come off?”

“Wednesday night.”

This was all Dale and Emerald could tell, and a minute later Jack, Pepper, and Andy entered the classroom for the afternoon session.

It was not until after school on Tuesday that the three boys started for Cedarville. It was rather a long distance, but they did not mind it. They skated part of the way on the lake and then took to the wagon-road.

Cedarville was not a large place, but it boasted of some rather good stores, and also a blacksmith shop and several churches. The cadets went to the churches from time to time and were fairly well known to all of the storekeepers.

Having left the broken skate where it could be mended, Andy and his chums walked around the town and made several small purchases. Coming out of one of the stores they met a farmer whom they knew, he having delivered potatoes and other vegetables at the Hall.

“How are you, Mr. Shepard?” said Jack.

“How do you do, boys?” answered the farmer. “Visitin’ town, eh?”

“No, we’re out hunting elephants,” answered Pepper, with a grin.

At this the farmer, who was a good-natured man, laughed.

“Got to have your joke, I see,” he observed. “How be you gettin’ on at school?”

“Bang-up,” answered Andy.

“Captain Putnam is a powerful good man.”

“Yes, we all like the captain,” answered Jack. “How are matters at your farm this winter?”

“Kind o’ slow. Had some of the boys over yesterday.”

“Who?”

“A feller named Baxter and two friends. They come fer some apples an’ cider an’ some other things. Got my wife to cook a turkey fer ’em too.”

“Oh, yes, we know something about that spread,” said Jack, carelessly. “He is going to give some of the boys something great.”

“Have you delivered the stuff yet?” asked Pepper.

“Goin’ to at supper time to-morrow night.”

“Not at the academy?” said Andy.

“No, he said it was to be a surprise on everybody.”

“On some of the fellows,” corrected Pepper.

“You are going to leave the stuff somewhere for him, I suppose,” said Andy.

“Yes – outside the grounds – at seven sharp,” answered Amos Shepard, and then as a farmhand came along, he walked away

with the man.

“This is certainly news,” was Pepper’s comment. “Boys, we must get hold of that stuff if we can do it.”

“Right you are,” answered Jack. “But how is it to be done? We don’t know where Mr. Shepard will leave it, and it won’t do to ask him.”

“No, that would make him suspicious,” said Andy. “But I know what we can do.”

“What?”

“Sneak out on the road that runs from his farm over to the Hall. When he comes along we can watch and see where he goes.”

“Good for you!” cried Pepper. “Just the very thing!”

The walking had made the boys hungry, and before starting on the return to the Hall they entered the main bakery of Cedarville, to get some cakes and a small pie.

“Hullo, there’s a big cake for you!” cried Pepper, pointing to one that had just been placed on a back shelf. “I shouldn’t mind a slice of that!”

“Maybe you’ll get a slice of it,” said the baker, rubbing his hands together and smiling in a meaning manner.

“How so?” asked Andy, quickly.

“Oh, you wait and see,” said the baker.

“Can that be a cake Dan Baxter ordered?” whispered Jack to his chums.

“Maybe,” said Pepper. He followed the baker to the back of the shop. “I guess that’s Baxter’s cake, eh?” he whispered into

the man's ear.

The baker winked suggestively.

"Is he coming for it, or are you going to send it to him?"

"He told me not to say anything about it to anybody," replied the baker.

"Oh! Well, I won't ask questions then. Don't say anything about our being here," went on Pepper. "It might hurt his feelings, if he knew we had seen the cake before he showed it."

"I shan't say a word," answered the baker.

The boys paid for their purchases and quitted the bakery, and looking through the window they saw the baker leave the shop to go to work at his oven, which was in the cellar.

"Oh, if only we could doctor that cake!" murmured Pepper. "I'd give a dollar to be able to do it!"

"The icing on the top was soft," said Andy.

"It's a raisin cake," said Jack. "A few stones in place of some raisins wouldn't go bad."

"And a little pepper would give it an extra flavor," said Pepper, with a wink. "Come on!"

He ran to the nearest grocery store and there procured some strong red pepper. In the meantime Andy found a cleared spot in a sunny corner of the village and got a handful of sand.

The three boys walked back to the vicinity of the bakery. The baker was not in sight. But there was a bell on his door, which rang out sharply every time the door was opened.

"We can't go in by the door," said Jack. "He will come at once,

as soon as the bell rings.”

“There is a side window – let us try that,” said Pepper.

“Supposing he comes?” asked Andy.

“We can buy some more cakes.”

The window opened out on a lane and was located close to the shelf upon which rested the cake. They found the lower sash unfastened and raised it cautiously. Then all three hopped into the bakery and stepped over to where the cake rested.

It took but a few minutes to fill the cake with pepper and fine sand. This done, they smoothed down the half-soft icing with the blade of a pocketknife. Just as they were finishing the work they heard footsteps on the stairs in the rear.

“Quick – out you go!” cried Pepper, and cleared the window, followed by his chums. Then they put down the sash and ran off, without the baker catching sight of them or having any idea of what had been done.

“That cake will taste fine,” said Andy, with a laugh, when they were on their way back to the Hall. “Won’t Dan Baxter and his crowd enjoy it!”

“They’ll want to hang us if they find us out,” said Jack.

“We must take good care that they don’t find us out,” came from Pepper.

“Now, if we can only locate the things Mr. Shepard is going to bring over,” went on Jack.

“I’d like to lay hold of the turkey,” said Andy. “Yum! yum! I wouldn’t do a thing to that bird!”

“Ditto here!” cried Pepper. “Oh, we must locate the turkey by all means – and some bread and butter. Think of nice turkey sandwiches!”

“And a few apples!”

And thus talking of what more they intended to do, the three cadets hurried back to Putnam Hall with all possible speed.

CHAPTER VI

THE BASKET IN THE TREE

Supper was served at Putnam Hall in the winter time at six o'clock, and as a general thing the meal was over inside of half an hour, when the cadets had an hour or more to themselves.

On the following day, after supper, Jack and the others watched Dan Baxter and his cronies closely.

“Emerald, you and Dale stop them about seven o'clock,” said Pepper, and to this the two cadets agreed.

The Irish lad and Dale kept a close eye on Dan Baxter, who was with Coulter and Reff Ritter. At a few minutes to seven the bully and his cronies started away from the Hall in the direction of a side road – that leading past the Shepard farm.

“Here is where we hold 'em up a bit,” said Dale, and ran forward calling loudly.

“What do you want?” asked the bully, stopping short, with a scowl.

“Wait a minute,” said Dale, and walked up slowly, while Hogan did the same.

“Don't be all night about it,” put in Reff Ritter.

“What's this report I heard to-day?” said Dale, facing the bully.

“What report?” asked Baxter, suspiciously.

“You know, Baxter.”

“I must say I do not.”

“About that race on the ice, and all that,” said Hogan. “It’s a queer tale, so it is! Didn’t yez hear all about it at Cedarville?”

“I haven’t heard anything.”

“Neither have I,” put in Ritter.

“I guess Coulter knows about it,” went on Dale. “He usually knows everything. Did you see the horse?” he demanded.

“The horse?” asked Gus Coulter, puzzled. “What in the world are you talking about?”

“That horse they brought into the school.”

“I didn’t see any horse.”

“Certainly he was a beauty,” said Hogan, with a broad laugh. “All painted with that red paint, too. Where did that paint come from, answer me that now?” he demanded, in a whisper.

“I don’t know anything about a horse or any red paint either,” growled Dan Baxter. “Is this a joke?”

“Listen to that!” cried Dale. “Say, you can put on a good front, can’t you?”

“It’s true.”

“Maybe you don’t know about that ghost business either,” came from Hogan. “Very innocent, so ye are, I must say!” And he winked with his left eye in a most mysterious manner.

“See here, you are talking Greek to me!” roared Baxter. He was anxious to get away. “If you can’t explain I don’t want to talk to you.”

“Emerald, perhaps they don’t know after all,” whispered Dale, but in such a manner that the bully and his friends could hear.

“Be gorry, I hope we haven’t put our foot into it thin!” muttered the Irish cadet. He walked up to Reff Ritter. “Say, forget it!”

“Forget what?” demanded Ritter.

“All I was after telling you.”

“You’ve told me nothing yet.”

“Is that so now? Then so much the better.”

“Oh, you’re trying to fool us!” burst out Dan Baxter. “I don’t want to listen to another word,” and he turned away, and his friends followed him. Dale and Hogan waited a minute and then went back to the Hall, so that the bully and his cronies might not get too suspicious.

“We held ’em up ten minutes,” said Dale. “I hope that helped Pepper and the others out.”

In the meantime Pepper, Andy, and Jack left the Hall by a roundabout way and hurried along the road leading to the Shepard farm. It was quite dark and rather cold, although there was but little wind.

“I see a carriage coming!” exclaimed Jack, presently. “Step back of the bushes and see who is driving it.”

The others complied, and soon the carriage came up. On the seat driving was Amos Shepard, and at his feet rested a big square basket.

“There he goes,” exclaimed Pepper, when the farmer had

passed. "Let us follow him."

It was an easy matter to follow the carriage, for the road was rocky and the farmer had to drive slowly. Coming to a turn, the man in the carriage dismounted and placed the big basket in a crotch of a tree. Then he went on his way to Cedarville.

"Quick – there is no time to lose!" exclaimed Pepper. "Dan Baxter may come for this basket at any minute."

They soon had the basket out of the crotch of the tree and examined the contents. There were the stuffed turkey, nicely cooked, some fresh biscuit, two pies, some apples, a jug of cider, and some other things.

"We'll appropriate a pie and some biscuits and apples, and likewise a bit of the turkey," said Andy.

"Be careful," warned Jack. "If you muss the turkey up Baxter will suspect something."

"I'll fix that easily enough," came from the resourceful Pepper.

Having taken what they wanted, the boys proceeded to "season" what remained with the pepper and with some lard and vinegar Andy had procured on the sly from the academy kitchen. They had brought some napkins with them, and in these placed what they had appropriated. Then Pepper calmly proceeded to break down one of the tree limbs.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Jack.

"I'll show you," said Pepper, calmly, and under the broken-down limb he placed the basket, resting on its side. "How is that?"

"First-rate!" laughed Jack.

“Looks exactly as if the basket had been on the limb and it had broken and spilt the stuff,” said Andy.

“Now we’ll get out of sight and watch,” went on the Imp.

They ran out of sight and waited. Not five minutes later Dan Baxter, Coulter, and Ritter hove into sight.

“Here is the spot, fellows,” they heard the bully of the Hall exclaim. “Anybody around?”

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

“Where’s the basket?” asked Coulter, gazing up into the tree.

“Here it is, on the ground,” said Baxter. “Too bad, it’s tumbled over.”

“The limb broke down with it, it was so heavy,” said Reff Ritter.

Baxter got down and struck a match.

“The stuff is pretty well tumbled around,” said he. “And, say – some of the turkey is gone!” he added.

“Maybe some animal came up and took it,” suggested Coulter. “I thought I saw a dog on the road.”

“I am not going to eat after a dog,” said Ritter.

“Oh, I reckon it’s all right,” said Baxter, hastily. He did not want anything to occur to spoil the grandness of his proposed spread. To his cronies he had boasted that this was to be the finest spread ever given on the sly at Putnam Hall.

Taking up the basket, the bully rearranged the things. He noticed that there was not as much as he had ordered, and made up his mind to “pitch into” Amos Shepard when next they should

meet. He and Coulter carried the basket and Ritter the jug of cider, and off they went to the Hall, entering unobserved by a back way, and sneaking to their dormitory, where the goodies were hidden in a clothes closet.

“Oh, wait till to-night!” said Pepper, as he and his chums also returned.

The evening seemed to drag after that, so many were waiting for bedtime to come. Baxter tried to learn from Dale what the talk earlier in the evening had meant, but got no satisfaction.

All of the boys of the bully’s dormitory had been invited to the feast and also some other cadets, making a total of sixteen lads who were to participate. They were all followers of Dan Baxter, and but few of them were liked by the other cadets.

At last it was time to go to bed, and one after another the boys went off. Our friends undressed and then slipped on some warm coats over their night garments. Soon the monitors came around to see that everything was as it should be for the night.

“Now is our time,” whispered Pepper. “Baxter’s crowd will be stirring soon.”

With caution they left their dormitory and stole along the hallway. As luck would have it, there was a room next to the Baxter dormitory that was vacant, the plaster having fallen and being not yet repaired. The door was unlocked and our friends entered.

“Listen,” said Pepper, as they all came close to a door which communicated with the next dormitory.

“Now, fellows, we’ll have the finest feast you ever saw at any school,” they heard Dan Baxter say. “I’ll carve the turkey and you, Coulter, can cut the cake, and Mumps can pour out the cider. After the cider we’ll have something a little stronger.”

“I don’t think they have anything hotter than that cider,” murmured Pepper.

Those outside of the room heard the bully and his cronies make numerous preparations for the feast. Then the stuff was passed around and all prepared to do full justice to what was handed to them.

“That is all right,” exclaimed Reff Ritter, as he bit into a turkey sandwich. “Say, wouldn’t it make Jack Ruddy and his crowd feel sore to know about these good things we are having!”

“Say, this sandwich is pretty warm,” came from Paxton. “Phew! but it’s hot!”

“Why, it’s cold, Nick,” answered the bully of the Hall.

“Is it? Not much! It’s full of pepper.”

“Ouch!” came from Mumps. “Oh, my tooth!”

“What’s the matter with it?” asked Coulter.

“I’ve bitten on something hard. Guess it was a stone.”

“Creation, what’s this?” came from Ritter. “Say, Dan, this smells like vinegar.”

Another boy was drinking some cider. He made a wry face and ejected the liquid from his mouth.

“That’s the worst cider I ever tasted!”

“Let me see!” cried Dan Baxter, and caught up a glassful. He

took one swallow and began to breathe heavily.

“It’s – it’s – pep – peppery!” he gasped. “Oh, my insides are burning up! Somebody give me some water.”

“Whow! The cake is peppery, too!” came from another.

“And full of sand!”

“This piece of celery has got lard all over it!”

“This is the worst sandwich I ever tried to eat!”

“This apple is full of vinegar!”

“So is this currant jelly!”

“Say, fellows, somebody has played a trick on us!”

“Don’t eat any more of the stuff. It may be poisoned!”

“Oh, don’t say that!” groaned Mumps, turning pale. “I – I don’t want to be poisoned!”

“Who – who touched this stuff?” gasped Dan Baxter. He was so angry he could hardly speak.

No one could answer the question.

“If I ever find out who did it, I’ll – I’ll skin ’em alive, that’s what I’ll do!”

“One thing is certain,” said Reff Ritter, in deep disgust. “All of the stuff was fixed up, and there will be no feast to-night, that is sure. I wouldn’t touch another mouthful for a thousand dollars.”

“I am going to find out who did this,” said Baxter, starting up. “And I am going to find out to-night!”

CHAPTER VII

IN THE CLASSROOM

“It’s time for us to get out!” whispered Jack to his chums. “Baxter is going on a rampage!”

“To our dormitory!” whispered Andy, and led the way on tiptoes. The others followed, and in less than a minute they were safe in their room with the door tightly closed.

“Perhaps we had better get into bed for the present,” suggested Stuffer Singleton. “Baxter may come this way.”

This was considered good advice, and it did not take them long to put out the light that had been lit and get into bed. With ears on the alert they awaited developments.

They were not long in coming. Footsteps sounded in the hallway, and then they heard some whispered conversation in front of their door. Pepper wanted to laugh outright and had all he could do to hold in.

“I don’t hear them,” came softly in Dan Baxter’s voice.

“They are foxy,” answered Ritter.

The door was tried and Dan Baxter looked into the room. He could see next to nothing in the almost total darkness.

“Who – who’s there?” asked Andy, sleepily. “Is it time to – to get up?”

A grunt from Dan Baxter was the only response, and then the

door was closed again, and they heard Baxter and some others moving away.

“Say, Andy, that was rich!” whispered Pepper, and gave a low laugh.

“Don’t stir too much yet,” cautioned Jack. “They may come back.”

“I am going to the door to watch,” answered Pepper. “If they come this way again I can crawl back to bed in a jiffy.”

Standing at the door, which he held on a crack, the Imp saw Baxter and several others move from one dormitory to another, listening and spying at every door.

“Cheese it, here comes Mr. Strong!” he heard Coulter say, a short while later, and off the bully’s crowd scampered to their rooms. Then the second assistant teacher came up the stairs and Pepper hurried back to his bed. George Strong looked around the hallway and walked to several dormitories, and then passed on to the third floor of the building.

“Will they come back again?” asked Andy, after a long spell of silence.

“Better wait a while longer and see,” said Hogan.

“I’m itching to get at that stuff,” came, with a sigh, from Stuffer.

“Did you ever know a time that you wasn’t hungry, Stuffer?” asked Andy.

“Humph! I guess you’ll get away with your full share, Andy,” was the retort.

At last the boys considered themselves safe and crawled from their beds once more. A dim light was made, and sitting in a circle, they divided the good things on hand and devoured them with a keen relish. The turkey proved to be of the best, and the pie was "prime," as Andy expressed it.

"Oh, if Baxter could only see us now," whispered Pepper, with a mouth half full of turkey.

"It would make him dance with joy, I don't think," answered Jack.

The little feast kept up the best part of half an hour.

"Here goes the last of the pie!" cried Stuffer.

"Baxter, we thank thee for this feast!" added Pepper.

"Come again," put in Jack.

"Just you fellows wait, that's all!" came an unexpected voice from the doorway, and turning swiftly, they saw Dan Baxter standing there. He was shaking his fist at the crowd.

"Hullo!" gasped Pepper. For the instant he could say no more.

"I suspected it from the start," fairly hissed the bully of Putnam Hall. "Just wait, that's all! If I don't square up you can shoot me!" And away he went, giving the door the hardest kind of a bang after him.

"Now our cake is dough," came from Stuffer.

"Sure an' I'd like to know what he'll be after doin'," came curiously from Emerald.

"I wonder if he'll have the nerve to call Captain Putnam?" mused Andy.

“No,” answered Jack, promptly. “He won’t report this, for if he did he knows we would tell on him too. He’ll try to get square some other way.”

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