

# THE PUTNAM HALL CHAMPIONS ARTHUR M. WINFIELD



PUTNAM HALL  
SERIES

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*The Putnam Hall Champions.*]

**THE PUTNAM HALL**  
**CHAMPIONS**  
*Or, Bound to Win Out*

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BY

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

AUTHOR OF "THE PUTNAM HALL CADETS," "THE PUTNAM HALL RIVALS," "THE ROVER BOYS SERIES," ETC.

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*ILLUSTRATED*

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## 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.

# **THE PUTNAM HALL CHAMPIONS**



## 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 Connors 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.

“SAVE US!” CAME FROM THE WATER, AS THE ALICE DREW CLOSER.

“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 Connors, 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 store-room, 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!” 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.

“Sabine acts as if he wanted something,” remarked Pepper. “Wonder what he’s got on his mind?”

“I’ll call him over and find out,” said Jack, and beckoned to the distant boy. Sabine came up slowly, as though revolving something of importance in his mind.

“Well, Billy, how goes it?” began the young major, sociably.

“Pretty well,” was Sabine’s short reply. “Going to have a great drill to-morrow, I suppose.”

“We hope to have. And I trust you’ll polish up for it.”

“Oh, I’m always polished.”

“I know you are, and I am glad of it. I wish I could say as much for every cadet in the battalion.”

There was a pause, and Billy Sabine rubbed his chin with his hand, a habit he had when turning something over in his mind. He was rather a slow thinker at the best.

“Say, are you polished up?” he asked.

“Why, yes, of course.”

“You want to put on your best front, don’t you?”

“To be sure.”

“Then you had better watch out that somebody doesn’t play a trick on you,” and with this remark Billy Sabine started to walk away.

“Play a trick?” repeated the young major. “What do you mean?”

“Oh—you watch out, that’s all.”

“Billy must know of something,” cried Pepper, his suspicions aroused.

“Call him back,” added Andy, and this was done. The other boy returned rather unwillingly.

“Who is going to play a trick on me?” demanded Jack.

“Why—er—I didn’t say he was going to play a trick—I only said for you to watch out.”

“You act as if you knew of something,” said Pepper. “If you do you had better say so.”

“I—er—I thought I’d warn you, that’s all.”

“But what do you know—come, out with it,” and now Jack caught the cadet by the arm, so that he could not run away. Billy Sabine looked around suspiciously.

“If I tell you, you won’t give me away, will you?” he asked, in a low voice.

“That depends,” answered Jack.

“I shan’t say a word unless you promise. I’m not going to get myself in a hole on your account.”

“Then you do know something!” cried Pepper. “Well, if you don’t tell us what it is, and anything happens, we’ll blame you, so there!”

“I’m not going to do anything!” exclaimed Sabine, in fresh alarm.

“What do you know?” said Jack, and now his voice was stern.

“I—er—I was down back of the boat-house awhile ago and I heard Reff Ritter, Gus Coulter, and Nick Paxton talking. They are all down on your crowd.”

“We know that,” answered Pepper, briefly.

“They didn’t see me, and I heard most of what they said, although not all.”

“And what did they say?” questioned Andy.

“First they talked about you”—Sabine nodded to the young major. “Ritter has a plan to spoil your things—sword and all that—so they won’t show up good at the inspection. He is going to get something down to the Cedarville drug store to-night and sprinkle or rub it on everything. After Ritter unfolded his plan he and the others agreed to fix up your whole crowd in the same way—so the inspection would be ruined, so far as you were concerned. They want to put you in disgrace with Captain Putnam.”

After that Billy Sabine told the particulars as far as he knew them. Jack and his chums listened with keen interest.

“We ought to report this to the captain!” cried Andy. “It’s the most outrageous thing I ever heard of!”

“This will bring disgrace to Captain Putnam as well as ourselves,” said Pepper. “But I don’t believe in carrying tales.”

“Remember, you promised not to get me into trouble,” came hastily and anxiously from Sabine.

“We promised nothing of the sort,” returned Jack. “But I think we can attend to this trick ourselves, without alarming Captain Putnam.”

“Shall we go to Ritter and his gang and punch their heads for them?” demanded Andy. “I guess I can do something, even with this sore wrist of mine.”

“Say, I’ve got an idea!” cried Pepper, suddenly. “Just the thing—if we can work it.” He turned to Sabine. “Are you sure Ritter is going to get those chemicals at Cedarville?”

“So he said.”

“And to-night?”

“Yes.”

“All right—I’ll see what I can do to put a spoke in his wheel when he least suspects it.”

At that moment Reff Ritter appeared not far away, and at once Billy Sabine walked off.

“Please don’t say a word about me,” he pleaded, as he departed.

“Now, what is your plan?” asked Jack of Pepper, some time later, when they and Andy were left alone.

“Why, it is simply this, to go to Cedarville and head off Ritter’s little game.”

“You mean to stop him from going to the drug store?” queried Andy.

“Not at all. The druggist has a new clerk, a fellow named Charley Fowler. I know him quite well. If I can see Fowler before Ritter gets there I think I can get him to play into our hands. Now do you catch the idea?”

“That’s all right—if you can get away.”

“I ought to have as good a chance as Ritter,” answered Pepper; and then the bell rang for the parade previous to supper.

It was no easy matter for Pepper to get off that evening, but when he told Mr. Strong that he wanted to see a friend in Cedarville on important business he was allowed leave of absence until nine o’clock, and as the cadets frequently went in pairs, he was allowed to take Andy with him.

“I’ll keep my eyes on the Ritter crowd,” said Jack, “and make sure they don’t play some trick of another kind during your absence.”

In a roundabout way Pepper and Andy learned that Reff Ritter and Gus Coulter were going to Cedarville on their bicycles. As soon as they heard this the two chums got out their own wheels, pumped up the tires, and were off.

“We’ve got to do a little spurring,” said Pepper. “Ritter and Coulter are both fast riders and we want to get to town quite awhile ahead of them.”

It was still fairly light, so that they did not need lamps. They pedaled along with

vigor, up hill and down, until the lights of the town shone in the distance. Without slacking speed they took to the main street and slacked up only when the drug store came into view.

“Now if only the clerk is in charge,” said Pepper. “I don’t know the proprietor very well.”

“Come, let us take our wheels to the rear,” suggested Andy. “Then if we want to get out in a hurry we can do it without Ritter and Coulter seeing us.”

They placed their bicycles in a shed at the back of the drug store and then hurried around again to the front. As they went in they met the proprietor coming out. This caused the cadets to breathe a sigh of relief.

“Well, boys, what can I do for you?” asked the clerk, as he came forward and nodded pleasantly to Pepper.

“You can do a whole lot for us, Charley,” answered Pepper, and continued: “Anybody here?”

“No, the boss just went out. I am in sole charge.”

“Will you be in charge for the next hour or so?”

“I’ll be in charge until I shut up. The boss is not coming back.”

“Good. Now I want to explain something,” went on the Imp, and as speedily as possible related what Billy Sabine had told about the trick Ritter proposed to play. The drug-store clerk was intensely interested, and as he had taken quite a fancy to Pepper he readily consented to do what the other proposed.

“I can fix this Ritter up with a little colored water and alcohol,” he said. “That mixture won’t harm your outfits in the least.”

“That’s the ticket!” exclaimed Andy, with a grin.

The boys then purchased some root beer to drink, and treated the clerk to a cigar—for he was fond of smoking. A minute later, looking out of the doorway, Andy saw Ritter and Coulter coming.

“Here is where we make our escape,” he said, and he and Pepper ran for a back door. They got out into the yard just as Ritter came into the drug store by the front door. Out in the yard it was dark, so the boys felt little fear of detection.

They listened at an open window and heard Ritter ask for several chemicals in liquid form. The clerk came to the rear, behind the prescription partition, and filled several bottles as he had promised.

“Some of these are poison,” he said to his customer. “You want to be careful how you use them.”

“We know all about that,” answered Reff Ritter.

“By law I can’t sell you these without a written doctor’s prescription,” went on the clerk.

“Oh, that will be all right,” put in Coulter.

“I won’t dare to put our labels on the bottles,” added the clerk.

“Put on any old thing,” answered Ritter. “We are not buying labels—we are buying chemicals.” And then the clerk pasted plain bits of paper on the bottles and scribbled on them with a lead pencil.

“We’ll take some packages of cigarettes, too,” said Ritter, after the bottles were delivered to him.

“Time for us to get out,” whispered Pepper to his chum. “They’ll be on the way to the Hall in a few minutes more.”

“Oh, they’ll likely stop for a smoke,” answered Andy. “But we might as well get back—we have accomplished what we came for. Won’t they be mad when they learn how they have been fooled!”



## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **A SCARE ON THE ROAD**

Carrying their wheels to the back of the yard behind the drug store, the two cadets lifted them over a board fence and jumped after them. Then they crossed a vacant lot and came out on a back street. Here they lit their bicycle lamps and then leaped into the saddles and were off.

“It’s a fine night for a ride,” observed Andy. “Wish we didn’t have to go right back to the Hall. I’d like to take a spin of ten or twelve miles.”

“We might go around by the upper road,” answered Pepper. “It won’t take but half an hour longer at the most. I don’t think Ritter and Coulter will hurry themselves. They like to smoke too well.”

“Yes, and play pool, Pep. It’s a wonder the captain doesn’t find out what they are up to.”

“Well, I am not going to turn tell-tale.”

Reaching the main road leading to Putnam Hall, the two cadets followed this for a quarter of a mile and then branched off to the left, on what was familiarly known as the upper road—since it ran on higher ground than that which followed the lake shore. This made a long turn between the hills to the west of the school and would give them a ride of four or five miles extra.

Two miles of the upper road were covered when Pepper noticed that his lamp was growing dimmer. He stopped and dismounted and shook the lamp. No sound from within followed.

“Empty,” he declared. “Too bad. I should have filled it before I started.”

“Never mind, I’ll lead and you can follow,” answered Andy. “I don’t believe

there is anything the matter with the road, anyway.”

Andy dashed ahead and Pepper followed him at a distance of fifty feet. Thus another half-mile was reeled off. Then Andy slowed up, calling upon his chum to do the same.

“My front tire is flattened out,” declared the acrobatic cadet. “I hope I haven’t got a bad puncture.”

“If it was bad I reckon you would have heard the air hiss,” answered Pepper.

The lamp was loosened from the wheel and turned on the flat tire, and both boys got close to find the puncture. Presently Pepper detected a small, sharp thorn sticking in the rubber. It had made a hole like that of a pin.

“I’ll wind a piece of tape around it,” said Andy. “That will hold till we get to the Hall, I guess,” and he brought out the bicycle tape from his repair bag.

Both boys were hard at work, bending over the wheel in the dim light of the lamp, when they were startled by hearing voices close to them. On both sides of the road were trees and bushes and the spot was certainly a lonely one.

“Somebody is coming—” began Pepper, when two figures stepped into the road and confronted the cadets.

The boys were amazed and alarmed, and with good reason. The figures were those of big boys or men, and each wore a green hood and a green mask which entirely concealed his face and head. More than this, each wore gloves with the finger-tips missing. Both carried heavy clubs in their hands.

For the moment the boys were so astonished they neither spoke nor moved. Then both leaped up and confronted the newcomers.

“We have them!” said one of the masked figures. “We have them at last.”

“Yes, we have them,” answered the other.

“Do you surrender?” demanded the first speaker of Andy and Pepper.

“Surrender? What for?” Pepper managed to ask.

“You shall know in due time. If you surrender, hand over your pocketbook.”

“I haven’t any pocketbook.”

“Yes, you have, and it has exactly two hundred dollars in it,” said the second masked fellow.

“We want both of your pocketbooks,” went on the first one who had spoken.

“I haven’t any pocketbook, either,” said Andy. “You’ve made a mistake in tackling us.”

“Let us take them to the cave for ransom!” cried the second fellow, and began to march around, waving his club over his head.

“Pep, this is a trick!” whispered the acrobatic youth. “Some of the fellows have followed us. Maybe they are going to initiate us in some new secret society.”

“By jinks, that’s so! Say, it would be great if we could get away from them!”

“Will you give up your pocketbooks?” demanded the first of the masked figures.

“Yes, and your red dancing-slippers,” added the second masked figure.

“Some of the cadets, beyond a doubt,” whispered Pepper. “Well, we’ve got no time for any initiations to-night.”

“Let’s pretend to submit,” answered Andy, in an equally low voice. “If I can only get this wheel pumped up it will be all right.” For the tire tape was now in place over the puncture.

“What say you?” demanded both figures, coming to a halt by the roadside, with clubs upraised.

“Let us mend this wheel first and we’ll do whatever you want,” answered Andy.

“It is well, proceed,” answered the leading masked person.

Andy already had his pocket-pump out, and he proceeded with all haste to pump up the tire. Then he put the pump back into his pocket.

“Take up your wheel,” he whispered. “Ride like mad when you get the chance. I am going to try to scare them.”

“The money!” roared one of the masked persons.

“Look! look!” screamed Andy, suddenly, and pointed into the woods. “The trees are on fire!”

The two masked figures wheeled around in fright. As they did this Andy and Pepper gave their wheels a push and leaped into the saddles. They pedalled with vigor and were soon fifty feet away.

“Come back! Come back!” yelled the two masked persons, in consternation.

“Not to-night!” called back Andy.

“You’ll have to find somebody else to initiate,” added Pepper.

“Confound the luck!” muttered one of the masked figures.

“And I thought we had them prisoners,” added the second masked person.

Laughing merrily over their escape, Andy and Pepper continued on their way to Putnam Hall. The darkness of the night speedily hid the two masked figures from their view.

“Did you discover who they were?” questioned the acrobatic youth, as they came in sight of the school.

“No. First I thought one of the fellows was Bart Connors, but he didn’t talk much like Bart.”

“Their voices had a familiar tone to them.”

“Yes, I know that. Well, whoever they were, they got left this time.”

“Maybe a whole crowd of them were back in the woods.”

“Perhaps. If so, we can find out who they are when they steal back into the Hall.”

“That’s an idea. Let us watch for them.”

The two cadets found Jack and the others anxiously awaiting their return.

“Ritter and Coulter just came in,” said the young major. “Ritter carried something in his pocket.”

“It’s all right—the drug clerk said it wouldn’t hurt our things a bit,” answered Pepper, and then he and Andy told of what had taken place at Cedarville and on the road.

“I didn’t hear of any new secret societies,” said Dale, who was present.

“Nor I,” added Jack. “But some of the fellows may be getting them up. It’s a mistake, though, to have initiations to-night. If the boys stay up late they’ll be as sleepy as owls at the inspection to-morrow.”

“I want to find out who those chaps are—if I possibly can,” said Pepper. “I am going to stay up, at least for awhile, and see if I can spot them.”

“And I’ll do the same,” added Andy.

Satisfied that no harm would now come to their outfits, Jack and the others retired. Andy and Pepper waited until all were asleep and then one stationed himself at a window on the east side of the Hall and the other at a window on the west.

For a good hour nobody appeared. Then Andy saw some figures moving down near the boat-house.

“The same pair, and they still have on the masks and hoods,” he said, after calling Pepper.

“Here they come,” said Pepper, a minute later, as the two masked figures approached the Hall. Then the two persons below passed out of sight behind the school.

“What do you suppose we had best do now?” questioned Pepper.

“Wait till they come upstairs.”

They waited, and thus ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed.

“I guess they are not coming up,” began Andy, when he heard a door close. Then came a murmuring of voices, and he and the Imp saw the dim forms of two cadets coming up a side stairs. The newcomers tiptoed their way along a corridor and one slipped into one dormitory and the other hurried into the room next to it.

“Joe Nelson and Harry Blossom!” whispered Pepper. “Who would have thought it!”

“I didn’t know they belonged to anything new.”

“Nor I. Well, we fooled them nicely.”

“Let us quiz them about it when we get the chance.”

“Sure.”

Andy and Pepper were tired enough to go to bed, and it did not take them long to get to sleep. When they awoke the Hall bell was clanging loudly. They were a little late, and so were some of the others, and there was a great rush to get dressed and downstairs on time.

The morning session was a brief one. During that period Reff Ritter got excused from his class for ten minutes, and Gus Coulter also got a leave of absence.

“I would like to go out a few minutes, Mr. Strong,” said Jack to the assistant teacher.

“Very well, Major Ruddy,” was the answer, and Jack hurried away and after Ritter and Coulter. He saw the conspirators go to a closet and get out two bottles of light-colored liquid. Then they visited the dormitory occupied by Jack and his friends, and also the rack where the cadets kept their swords and guns.

“What shall we do with the empty bottles?” Jack heard Coulter ask, as he and Ritter passed a door behind which the young major was in hiding.

“Put them in Sabine’s closet,” answered Ritter. “Then, if the worst comes to the worst, I can say that little sneak was in it.”

“All right,” answered Coulter, and the proposal was immediately carried out. Then the two conspirators went back to their class-room. But Jack got in ahead of them, and was deep in a history lesson when they entered.

The morning session at an end, it was announced that dinner would be served in the mess-room in a quarter of an hour. Losing no time, Jack and his chums ran to inspect their outfits. They found some parts of their uniforms damp, where the liquid from the bottles had been poured over them. The guns and Jack’s sword were also moist, but these were readily dried.

“I only hope the drug clerk didn’t make any mistake,” said the young major.

“We’ll know for certain after dinner,” answered Andy.

The visitors had already arrived, and Captain Putnam had had a salute from the new cannon on the campus fired in their honor, and was now entertaining them in his private dining-room. The cadets marched into the mess-room for dinner, and half an hour later dispersed, to prepare for the inspection.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **THE INSPECTION**

“Battalion, attention! Shoulder arms! Forward march!”



## THE INSPECTION.

### THE INSPECTION.

The drums beat, the fifes struck up a lively air, and off marched the two companies of Putnam Hall cadets, across the campus and back, down the road a pace, and then formed in a long line fronting the school building. Every sword shone like silver, every gun was bright, and every uniform was brushed to its best. At the head of the command was Major Jack Ruddy, as stiff as a ramrod, looking the equal of any West Point cadet.

“Battalion, attention! Carry arms! Support arms! Shoulder arms! Right face! Left face! About face. Load! Aim! Fire!”

One order after another was delivered by Jack, and the cadets of the two companies obeyed like one big machine. Only two boys were a little slow, Reff Ritter and Gus Coulter. Paxton wanted to drag, too, but did not dare.

“Very good! Very good indeed!” cried General Wallack, enthusiastically. “Captain Putnam, you are to be congratulated on having such a body of students under you.”

“I did not dream they could drill so well,” added Major Darrowburg. “Why, you are almost, if not quite, up to our West Point standard.”

“I trust you will do me the honor to inspect them more closely, General Wallack,” said Captain Putnam.

“With pleasure,” answered the regular army officer. “Major, will you come?”

“To be sure,” answered Major Darrowburg.

The two United States army officers came down from the piazza of the school followed by Captain Putnam. They approached Major Ruddy, who immediately saluted.

“This is Major John Ruddy,” said the master of Putnam Hall. “Ruddy, this is General Wallack and this is Major Darrowburg.”

“Glad to meet you, young man,” said the army general, and shook hands. “Some day I presume you’ll be in the regular army,” and he smiled pleasantly.

“Perhaps,” answered Jack. Then he shook hands with Major Darrowburg, and after that answered a number of questions put to him. The visitors praised the drill that had taken place and this made the young major blush not a little. But he was very happy, and doubly so to think that he had outwitted Reff Ritter and his cronies. His uniform did not show a spot and his sword and scabbard were as bright as the polish used could make them.

An inspection lasting fully half an hour followed, Captain Putnam showing his visitors along the line of cadets. Nearly everybody was smiling and happy. Only a few boys looked glum, and those lads were Reff Ritter and his cohorts.

“A really remarkable showing,” was General Wallack’s comment, after the inspection was over.

“If we could always do as well as this at the Point we’d have nothing to worry about,” added Major Darrowburg. “Captain Putnam, you certainly ought to feel proud of your school.”

“I am proud,” was the reply.

After the inspection the cadets marched around the campus once more. They were about to be dismissed when Pepper signed to Jack, who in turn beckoned to Captain Putnam and whispered something into his ear.

“I see no harm in it,” said the master of the Hall.

“Battalion, attention!” called out Jack. “I move we give three cheers for General Wallack and Major Darrowburg!”

“Hurrah!” cried the cadets, and the cheers were given with a will. Then the two army officers bowed and made little speeches, and more cheers followed; and that was the end of the inspection. Soon the visitors were driven away by Captain Putnam in the Hall carriage, and George Strong announced that for the rest of the day the cadets might do as they pleased, so long as they did not leave the Hall grounds.

“It was a perfect success,” said George Strong to the young major.

“I am very glad of it, Mr. Strong.”

“I know Captain Putnam is greatly pleased. I am sure he will have something to say to the boys when he gets back.” And Mr. Strong was right, the master of the Hall complimented all on their appearance and deportment, and said he was sure the visitors had been unusually impressed.

“I knew you would all do well,” said the captain. “But it has surpassed my expectations.”

The only fellows who were not happy were Reff Ritter and his cronies. They could not understand how it was that Jack and his chums had come forth looking so spotless and bright.

“That druggist must have humbugged you, Reff,” said Gus Coulter. “I guess he gave you water instead of those chemicals.”

“I don’t understand it at all,” answered Ritter. “But if the druggist did really humbug me I’ll fix him some time, see if I don’t!”

“Let us look at the stuff left in the bottles,” suggested Coulter. “Must be a few drops at least.”

The two passed into the school. On the stairs they met Pepper and Dale.

“It was beastly stuff,” said Pepper, in a loud tone. “I’d like to know who used it. If we hadn’t had that patent preparation to take out the stains we would have been in a pickle, I can tell you, Jack especially,” and then the Imp and Dale passed on.

“I see it all,” groaned Ritter, when he and Coulter were alone. “No need to look for those bottles now. The stuff worked too quickly, and those chaps got some other preparation and cleaned up with it.”

“Yes, that must be it,” said Coulter. “Well, better luck next time.”

Of course, Pepper had uttered his words merely to throw Ritter and his crony off the track, and the Imp’s trick had worked to a charm. Ritter never learned how he had been fooled.

When Pepper went down into the library that evening, to get a book to read, he was met by Andy and Joe Nelson. Andy was quite excited.

“Pepper, we made a mistake last night,” cried the acrobatic youth.

“A mistake? What do you mean?” and he looked at Joe Nelson.

“Andy tells me that you took me and Harry Blossom for the fellows with the green masks and the green hoods,” said Joe. “You made a mistake.”

“Joe and Harry saw those fellows, too,” continued Andy.

“You did? Where?”

“At the back of the Hall—just as we came in. We had been down to the boat-house looking for a gold stickpin Harry lost. We found the pin in a crack of the floor and then came up to the school. The men came around a corner. When they saw us, they ran off, across the corn-patch back of the barns.”

“Then they weren’t some of the students?”

“I don’t think so. But, of course, I am not sure,” answered Joe Nelson. “You can question Harry about it.”

Harry Blossom was in the music-room, playing on the piano and singing for the benefit of several of his friends. Later on, however, he came away and told what he had seen.

“I thought they were strangers, but now you mention it, I think they may have been some cadets out on a lark.”

“Certainly no men out to rob anybody would act as they did,” said Pepper, thoughtfully. “Why, they acted, for all the world, as if it was a huge joke!”

“Well, this is a mystery, true enough,” said Andy, and the others agreed with him. They concluded to say nothing more about the affair, but to keep their eyes “peeled,” as Pepper expressed it, for the next appearance of the two persons in green.

It galled Reff Ritter to see Jack Ruddy triumphant in the matter of the inspection,

and the bully wondered to himself how he could make the young major “eat humble pie,” as he termed it.

“Don’t you meet Ruddy on the flying-rings tomorrow?” asked Paxton.

“Yes,” was Ritter’s short answer.

“Well, you ought to be able to best him there—you’re such a perfect gymnast.”

“Ruddy has been taking extra lessons from the gym. teacher. I just heard of it this morning. That’s the reason he was so ready to take me up,” responded Reff Ritter, sourly.

“Are you afraid to meet him?” asked Paxton in astonishment.

“Not at all. But it is going to be no walk-over to outdo him, that’s all.”

“I wish he’d fall and break his neck,” growled Paxton.

“So do I. But he won’t fall—he is too strong and steady.”

Reff Ritter walked down to the gymnasium in a thoughtful mood. Only a few boys were about and none near the flying-rings.

“I wish I could fix it so Ruddy would get a good tumble,” he muttered. “It would serve him right.”

He leaped up on the flying-rings and tried one pair after another. He had a notion to cut some of the ropes half in two, but reflected that this might bring harm to somebody else instead of the young major.

“Wonder if I could dope him?” mused the bully. “Let me see, how did that fellow in Paris do that trick? He told me all about it at that boxing match. Ah, I have it! The question is, can I work the game without being caught?”

Ritter knew he must go at what was in his mind with extreme caution. He remembered that Jack was a copious water-drinker, and usually drank one glass of water at least at every meal.

“That’s my cue,” said the bully to himself. “Now, if I can only get the stuff out

of the Hall medicine closet.” He referred to a medicine closet located at the back of the main hall of the school. In this were kept a variety of medicines, to be used in case of emergency.

Once Reff had been sick, and to make him sleep—for he was very wide-awake and nervous at the time—Captain Putnam had given him some kind of powder in water. This had lulled his senses to repose in a short time. He remembered that box with the white powder very well.

It had been arranged that Jack should meet Ritter that evening, shortly after supper—during the off hour of that part of the day. If Reff could only get some of that powder into Jack’s drinking-water during the evening meal he felt certain the young major would soon feel too dull and sleepy to make much of a showing on the flying-rings.

With the craft of a real criminal, Ritter stole into the main hall of the school and looked around. Nobody was in sight, and swiftly he approached the medicine closet and opened it. There were numerous boxes and bottles there, and the appearance of them somewhat confused the rascally youth. He read the various inscriptions and at last picked out a square box containing several spoonfuls of a white powder.

“This is the stuff,” he murmured, and just then he heard somebody coming down the main stairs. He closed the medicine closet swiftly, tip-toed his way across the hall and entered one of the class-rooms. Here several of the windows were open and he dropped from one of these, nobody being in the room at the time. In a few seconds more he had stepped around the corner of the building and then he turned to a side door and entered the mess-room of Putnam Hall.

The mess-room, or dining-hall, was a long, low room, with windows on one side. There were half a dozen long tables and the chairs at these tables were numbered. Jack, as the major of the battalion, sat at one end of one of the tables. At the other end of this table sat Josiah Crabtree when he was at the school, but just now this seat was not being used.

Watching his opportunity Reff Ritter slipped up to the seat the young major usually occupied. On the table in front of this seat was a glass of ice-water, and into this Ritter skillfully dropped a generous portion of the white powder from the box. Then he glided out of the mess-room just as the gong sounded for the

evening parade.

“Now we’ll see what we will see, Jack Ruddy!” he muttered to himself. “If you drink that I don’t think your performance on the flying-rings this evening will amount to much!”

## **CHAPTER X**

### **WHAT HAPPENED TO JACK**

The cadets of Putnam Hall were soon seated for supper. This was usually a plain but substantial meal, and generally all the boys ate well.

Jack marched in at the head of the battalion and took his seat. A minute later he reached for his glass of water. He was thirsty and drank half the contents of the glass before stopping. As he placed the tumbler back on the table he made a wry face.

“That water isn’t good,” he observed to Dale, who sat close to him.

“Perhaps it’s the ice in it,” answered Dale. “I thought yesterday the ice had a peculiar flavor.”

“That may be it,” went on the young major. Then he started to eat and thought no more of the water. But before he had finished the meal he drained the glass and called for more. Somewhat to his surprise the second glass of water tasted much better.

“That’s queer,” he mused. “Maybe there was something in that first glass, although I didn’t see anything. Perhaps one of the fellows put a little salt in, just for fun.” Then he dismissed the subject from his mind.

Word had been passed around that the young major was to meet Reff Ritter in the gymnasium and a crowd of students collected to witness the proposed contest. Jack went down with Pepper and his other chums.

“How do you feel for the trial?” questioned Pepper.

“All right,” was the reply.



“Hope you didn’t eat enough to make you lazy,” came from Andy.

“Sure, an’ ye can thrust Jack to take care av himself,” broke in Emerald. “He’ll beat Ritter all to pieces, so he will!”

Reff Ritter came down with Paxton and Coulter, and lost no time in getting into his “gym. togs,” as the cadets called their athletic outfits. Jack speedily followed.

“Who is to go at it first?” asked Joe Nelson.

“That is for Dave Kearney to decide. He is to be referee and judge.”

“You can toss up a cent for it,” said Dave. This was done, and Reff Ritter obtained first chance to show what he could do. Each contestant was to have three chances.

Ritter leaped up on the flying-rings, and amid utter silence gave an exhibition lasting fully five minutes. As my old readers know, he was really quite a gymnast, and what he did brought forth considerable applause.

“Now, Jack, show us what you can do,” said Pepper, as the young major stepped to the front.

Jack leaped up and grasped the rings. He had been feeling very good, but now a strange sleepiness seemed to be overtaking him. He began to swing and to do various acts done by Ritter, but his efforts were, by comparison, awkward and clumsy.

“What’s the matter with Major Ruddy?”

“That isn’t half as good as what Ritter did.”

“Jack doesn’t seem to be on his mettle at all to-night,” whispered Stuffer to Pepper.

“Brace up, Jack, old boy, and show ’em what you can really do!” cried Pepper, encouragingly.

Jack heard the cries and did all he could to throw off that sleepy feeling. By sheer willpower he made a brilliant turn or two which called for hearty applause.

“That’s the way to do it!”

As Jack dropped to the floor Reff Ritter again mounted, and now the bully “put in his best licks.” There was cheering and hand-clapping. Ritter had already been awarded the first trial, and now it looked as if he would win the second also.

“Now, Jack, brace up and show ’em what you can do when your mind is on it,” said Pepper.

“You can do better than he did, I am sure you can,” said Andy. “Don’t go at it quite so slowly.”

“I—I’m feeling unusually dull to-night,” answered the young major. “I really don’t know what to make of it.”

“Maybe you had better postpone the affair, then?” said Stuffer.

“This isn’t going to be postponed!” cried Coulter, who heard the remark.

“Humph!” murmured Pepper. “Are you running this affair?”

“No, but Ritter is winning, and Jack Ruddy has no right to withdraw.”

“I am not going to withdraw,” answered Jack, gritting his teeth. “I am going ahead, and I am going to win.”

He sprang to the flying-rings and began to swing strongly. Then he made a turn and tried to make another. All at once everything seemed to dance before his eyes. He felt his grip relaxing. Then all became dark, and he felt himself falling—falling—falling—and he knew no more.

“What’s the matter with Jack?”

“He is falling!”

“Catch him!”

Such were some of the cries which rang through the gymnasium as the young major was seen to let go with one hand, swing limply for a few seconds, and then let go with the other. Pepper, Andy, and Dale rushed forward, and between

them they broke the fall that otherwise might have proved serious.

“He has fainted!” said Pepper. “Let us carry him into the open air,” and this was done.

“I guess he is only shamming,” grunted Gus Coulter.

“That’s it,” added Paxton. “He was afraid of losing.”

“Major Ruddy isn’t that kind of a boy, and if you say he is I’ll punch your head!” exclaimed Dale, indignantly.

“Sure, an’ something is wrong wid him,” was Hogan’s comment. “He’s as pale as a ghost, so he is!”

Jack was placed on a bench outside of the gymnasium, and while Pepper ran for some water Andy fanned him vigorously. In the meantime, some small boys ran off to tell Mr. Strong and Captain Putnam of what had occurred.

“Jack! Jack!” cried Pepper, bending over his chum. “Jack, what is the matter with you?”

But Jack did not answer. His eyes were closed and now his arms and legs seemed to be getting stiff.

“This is something more than a mere faint,” said Stuffer. “I think we had better call Captain Putnam.”

“Here he comes now,” said Bart Conners. “Mr. Strong is with him.”

“What is the trouble here?” demanded the master of the Hall, as he and his assistant came up almost on the run.

“Something is wrong with Jack,” explained Pepper. “He was on the flying-rings—in a contest with Ritter, when all of a sudden he acted queer-like and fell.”

“Perhaps he had a rush of blood to the head,” suggested Mr. Strong.

“He didn’t act like that,” said Dale.

As Jack showed no signs of reviving, he was carried to the Hall, and Peleg

Snuggers was sent off for Doctor Fremley, of Cedarville, who was the regular school physician. In the meantime Captain Putnam did what he could for the sufferer. His army experience had taught him a great deal, yet he was much puzzled by the case before him.

“I cannot understand this,” he said to George Strong. “He looked to be the picture of health this afternoon.”

“I know it, sir,” answered the assistant teacher.

“Maybe he ate or drank something that didn’t agree with him,” suggested Andy.

“He complained of the water at supper,” came from Dale. “I told him it might be the ice in it.”

“Our ice is of the best,” answered Captain Putnam. “It may have been the food, but if so, why has not somebody else been taken sick?”

After what seemed to be an unusually long time, Doctor Fremley appeared. He had driven at top speed to the Hall, and the team was covered with lather. By this time Jack had been removed to a private bedroom and undressed. He lay like a log, breathing heavily.

The physician was almost as much puzzled as were the others. But acting on the theory that Jack might have been poisoned by something he had eaten the doctor used a stomach pump. This brought up something of a peculiar bluish color, which surprised the medical man a great deal. He nodded his head knowingly and then proceeded to give Jack a dose of medicine from the little case he carried. In a short while the young major gasped loudly and opened his eyes.

“What is it, doctor?” asked the master of the Hall.

“I am not quite sure, but it looks to me like an overdose of French headache powders.”

“You mean the Saligne preparation?”

“Yes—then you know it?”

“I have some in our medicine closet.”

“Could this young man get at the stuff?”

“Yes. I will go and see if the box has been tampered with,” continued Captain Putnam and hurried off. He came back quickly.

“Well?” queried the physician.

“The box is gone.”

“You are sure you had it?”

“Positive. I gave a small dose to one of the servant girls only night before last. She complained of a severe headache, and it aided her in getting to sleep.”

“I see. Well, this looks as if this young man had gotten the box and taken an overdose.”

“Will he get over it?”

“Yes. But, let me add, he has had a close call from death. If I had not used the pump and given him that medicine to counteract the effect of the powder he might never have regained consciousness.”

This plain statement from Doctor Fremley made all present shudder.

“I don’t see why Jack should take the powder,” said Pepper. “He didn’t say anything to me about a headache. He told me he was feeling fine.”

“And he told me the same thing,” declared Dale.

“Perhaps he was a bit nervous over this gymnastic contest and thought to quiet his nerves,” suggested George Strong. “But I must admit that doesn’t look like Major Ruddy. I never knew him to be nervous.”

“He doesn’t know what nervousness means,” declared Andy. “If he took the powder I guess he did it by mistake. Maybe he thought it was for indigestion, or something like that.”

While this talk was going on in the bedroom, Reff Ritter was downstairs in the library, surrounded by a number of his friends. The bully was ill at ease. He had

not expected the grave turn affairs had taken. Jack was certainly in bad shape. What if the young major should die? A shiver ran down Ritter's backbone, which he tried in vain to conceal.

"What's the matter, are you cold?" asked Coulter.

"No, I—er—I'm a little upset," answered the bully.

"Well, you needn't be," declared Paxton. "It wasn't your fault that Ruddy fainted and fell."

"Oh, I know that."

"It's a pity he had to faint," went on Coulter. "You would have won that contest beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"Oh, I know that," answered Reff Ritter, listlessly. He hardly heard what was said—his mind was in the bedroom where Jack lay. He wanted to go up—to learn the actual truth—but he did not dare.

"Shall we go back to the gym.?" asked Paxton.

"No, I—er—I think I'll go up to my room," answered Ritter, and started for the doorway before anybody could stop him. The others had never seen him act so strangely, and they looked at each other in surprise.

Ritter gained the hallway just as Billy Sabine was coming down the stairs. Sabine was greatly excited.

"What's the news?" asked the bully.

"Ruddy took an overdose of headache powders," was the reply. "The doctor is working over him, but they all think he is going to die."

"Die!" gasped Reff Ritter, hoarsely. Then he staggered backward, clutched at the stair-rail, and sank heavily on a nearby seat.

## **CHAPTER XI**

### **A CHALLENGE FROM PORNELL ACADEMY**

It was not until midnight that Jack began to feel something like himself. He was still weak, but he could now breathe regularly, and Doctor Fremley pronounced him out of danger.

Pepper and Andy had begged to be allowed to remain with their chum, and they were in the room with Captain Putnam. Leaving some medicine to be taken regularly every hour, the physician departed.

“Major Ruddy, the next time you take any medicine beware and not take an overdose,” said Captain Putnam.

“I haven’t taken any medicine, Captain Putnam,” answered Jack.

“Didn’t you take some powder for headache, or for nervousness?”

“No, sir.”

“What!”

“I haven’t taken a thing, sir. Why should I? I felt first-rate up to the time I went to the gym. Then, all of a sudden, I seemed to get dizzy and sleepy,” explained the sufferer.

“I knew he hadn’t taken anything,” broke in Pepper. “I mean knowingly,” he hastened to add.

“Do you mean to say, Ditmore, that you think Major Ruddy took the powder without knowing what it was?” demanded the master of the Hall.

“Doesn’t it look like it, sir?”

“I didn’t take a thing, I tell you,” declared Jack. “Why do you say I did?”

He was told of what the doctor had discovered and was much astonished. He laid back on the bed, but suddenly sat up.

“That water! I felt funny right after I drank that water!” he cried, and then explained what had occurred at the supper table.

“I will inquire into this in the morning,” said Captain Putnam. “If somebody played a trick on you——” He did not finish, but his usually pleasant face grew hard and stern.

The school was very quiet that night when the door of one of the dormitories opened and a cadet crept forth and tip-toed his way through the semi-dark hallway. He advanced with caution, trembling greatly for fear of being discovered. The midnight prowler was Reff Ritter.

The affair at the foot of the stairs earlier in the evening had astonished Billy Sabine, but Reff had quickly recovered and said it was due to a cramp in the stomach, brought on by a false twist when performing on the swinging-rings. Then the bully had gone to bed—but not to sleep. Only one thought filled his mind—that Jack might die and that he might be accused of the awful crime. He shivered and shook under the bedclothes and could scarcely conceal his fear from his cronies when they came in.

Now the others were asleep and he was determined to find out the truth about Jack. If the young major was really dying—well, perhaps it would be best to run away from Putnam Hall rather than run the risk of exposure and arrest. This showed that at heart Reff Ritter was a thorough coward.

Scarcely daring to breathe, the bully tip-toed his way along one hallway after another until he came to the door of the room in which Jack lay. Listening, he heard a murmur of voices.

“He is alive, he is talking, he is not going to die!” he thought, and a wave of relief swept over him. Then, with bated breath, he listened to what the cadets and Captain Putnam had to say. When the captain prepared to retire, he sped back to his dormitory and got into bed.

“Where have you been, Reff?” came from Gus Coulter, who had awakened.



“I—er—I went for a—er—a drink,” stammered Ritter, not knowing what to say.

“Why didn’t you drink the water in the pitcher on the stand?”

“Oh, that’s stale and warm. I got a fresh drink out of the tank in the main hall.”

“Humph! I just drank from our pitcher and thought it was all right. Hear anything more about Ruddy when you were out?”

“No,” growled Reff, and turned over and pretended to go to sleep.

He felt relieved in one way, but not in another. His enemy was not going to die, but on the other hand Captain Putnam had promised a rigid investigation. What if he should be discovered? What if somebody had seen him taking the powder from the medicine closet, or seen him putting it in the glass of water?

“I’ve got to face it out,” he told himself. “I’ve got to face it out, no matter what comes. My word is as good as anybody’s.”

Captain Putnam’s investigation revealed but little. No person had been seen near the medicine closet for several days back, and what had become of the box of headache powder nobody seemed to know. Regarding the glass of water drunk by Jack, and the food eaten at supper, the cook and the colored waiters declared they knew of nothing wrong.

“Was any cadet in the mess-room just previous to supper?” asked the master of the school.

At first the waiters said no. But presently one scratched his head thoughtfully and said he now remembered that somebody had passed through the dining-hall after everything was in readiness for the evening repast. It had been somebody in uniform, but who he could not remember.

“I believe that person doctored that drinking-water, or my food,” said Jack, when he heard of this.

“Do you suspect anybody?” asked the master of Putnam Hall.

At this Jack shrugged his shoulders. Yes, he could suspect several—Coulter, Paxton, Ritter, and their cronies—but what good would that do if he could not

prove somebody guilty?

The next day the young major felt quite like himself again and rejoined his chums. All went for a sail on the *Alice*, and on the trip they talked the affair over from every possible standpoint.

“If it was a trick—and I don’t see how it could be anything else—it is the most dastardly thing I ever heard of,” declared Pepper.

“That’s true,” answered Andy, “and the fellow guilty of it ought to be run out of Putnam Hall.”

“I suspect Ritter,” said Stuffer, “for he wanted to win that contest.”

“You may be right,” answered Dale. “But it is one thing to suspect a fellow and another thing to prove the crime. I wouldn’t say anything about it until I could prove it.”

“Wonder if it is possible those fellows with the green masks and hoods had anything to do with this?” mused Andy.

“I don’t think so,” answered Pepper.

Out on the lake they met Fred Century and a number of the boys from Pornell Academy. Century was sailing his sloop and told them he had had little trouble in righting the capsized craft and in getting her into trim for use.

“I still think the *Ajax* can beat the *Alice*,” he declared.

“Well, I’ll give you a regular race in the near future,” answered Jack.

“How soon?”

“I can’t tell you now—I want to have my mainsail altered a bit, and get a new tiller. As soon as I’m ready I’ll let you know.”

With Century were Will Carey, the youth who had lost the blue tin box, and Roy Bock, and a student named Grimes. Bock and Grimes had caused the Putnam Hall boys much trouble in the past, and Jack and Pepper did not like them in the least.

“Say!” cried Roy Bock, presently. “You fellows are so full of challenges I’d like to know if any of you can bowl?”

“I can,” answered Dale, promptly.

“So can I,” added Stuffer.

“Well, we’ve got a brand-new alley at our gym., and any time you want to get up a team and bowl we’ll be ready for you.”

“And we’ll wipe up the alley with you,” added Grimes.

“Maybe you will,” retorted Dale, who did not fancy this style of talking.

“Come over next Saturday afternoon,” said Roy Bock. “Bring over the best team Putnam Hall can put out. We’ll show you how to bowl.” And he laughed.

“Perhaps we will come over,” answered Stuffer; and then the two sloops separated.

“Bock makes me tired,” said Pepper. “I’d not bowl with him, even if I was good at knocking over the pins.”

“I’d like to beat the Pornell team,” answered Dale. “They are such blowers!”

“They like to blow because they are all rich boys,” said Andy. “I’d certainly like to bowl against them and defeat them.”

“We could put Emerald on our team,” said Dale. “I know he can bowl real well.”

“All right, go ahead if you want to,” said Jack. “I’ll root for you.”

“Then you don’t want to bowl, Jack?” asked Andy.

“No, you and Dale and Stuffer can manage this. With Emerald you’ll make four, and you’ll only want one more man.”

“Harry Blossom said he could bowl—and so did Bart Conners.”

“Well, then you’ll have the pick of them,” said Pepper. “I’ll do like Jack, root.”

There was a bowling alley in the Putnam Hall gymnasium. It was not a very elaborate affair, but some of the cadets got much enjoyment from knocking over the pins. Dale was something of an expert, often getting a strike or a spare, and it was but natural, therefore, to make him the captain of the bowling team.

When spoken to on the subject, Hogan readily agreed to join the team and so did Bart Connors. Harry Blossom said he was not in good condition, but would go along as a substitute.

On the following day Roy Bock sent a formal challenge by special messenger. He asked for a game on the Pornell Academy alleys on the following Saturday at two o'clock. He said the bowling room would hold about one hundred persons and half the space would be reserved for the Putnam Hall cadets and their friends.

Permission to accept the challenge was readily granted by Captain Putnam, and George Strong was placed in charge of the cadets to visit the rival school.

“When you are at Pornell Academy I want you all to act like gentlemen,” said Captain Putnam. “I want no tricks played, for Doctor Pornell does not approve of them.”

“Oh, we’ll be as meek as lambs,” whispered Pepper, and grinned to Jack.

Some of the students to visit the rival institution went over on their bicycles while others took the carriage and the carryall. Pepper went in the carryall, and on the sly concealed under one of the seats a fair-sized box.

“Hurrah, we’re off!” shouted Andy, as the carryall with the team and half a dozen others moved away from Putnam Hall.

“Everybody sing!” cried Pepper, and started up a song one of the students had composed some time previous:

“Do you want to know who we are?  
We are boys from Putnam Hall,  
We can row, we can swim, we can skate,  
And we can play baseball!  
Our school’s the best in the land,  
Believe it, it’s no mistake!

You'd better come and join,  
For we are wide-awake!"

This was sung to a lively air composed especially to fit the words. Then followed something new, made up by Pepper himself:

"Zip! Zam! Here we am!  
Hikeadoodle din!  
Give a cheer, for we are here  
And we are bound to win!"

## **CHAPTER XII**

### **THE BOWLING MATCH**

Cheering loudly and blowing their horns, the cadets of Putnam Hall swept into the grounds of Pornell Academy. They expected the students of the rival academy to be lined up, waiting for them, but in this they were disappointed. Only a few lads were outside, and they took but little interest in the newcomers.

“Hullo, what’s this, a frost?” queried Jack.

“Looks like it,” answered Pepper. “I told you to beware of Roy Bock and his crowd. They may be rich, but they are no gentlemen.”

“Where is your bowling team?” demanded Dale of the first student he met.

“Down at the gym. I believe,” drawled the student, and walked leisurely away.

“Now wouldn’t that freeze you stiff?” cried Andy. “Say, for two pins I’d turn around and go back.”

Some felt as Andy did, yet the crowd leaped to the campus and walked towards the gymnasium, located some distance away.

“Hi! hi!” yelled a gardener, who was fixing up a flower bed. “You can’t walk on this grass!”

“Oh, yes, I can,” answered Pepper coolly.

“No! no! It’s against the rules,” insisted the gardener.

“Oh, that’s it,” said Jack. “Will you kindly point out the way we can walk?” he added, sarcastically.

“Keep to the paths. This grass is only to look at, not to walk on.”

“Glad you told us,” said Pepper. “I might have picked a blade for my buttonhole. Andy,” he went on, “don’t look at the grass plot sideways, you may be taxed for it.”

The crowd hurried over to the gymnasium. There they found the Pornell students assembled. All the best seats facing the bowling alleys were filled.

“So you’ve got here, eh?” said Roy Bock, with no show of cordiality.

“Yes,” answered Dale, shortly. “Where are the seats you promised us, Bock?” he added, rather sharply.

“Why—er—I guess you’ll find them somewheres.”

“You promised us half the room here, and we want it,” put in Andy.

“You have always had half of our grandstand, at baseball and football,” put in Stuffer.

“You’ll have to take what seats you can get,” said Grimes.

“Not at all,” answered Dale, the sharpness in his voice increasing. “We are young gentlemen, and we came here expecting to be treated as such. Either we get half the best seats, or we don’t bowl.”

“That’s the talk,” said Andy.

“Don’t bowl?” cried Roy Bock.

“Sure an’ that’s the plain truth av it,” cried Hogan. “We came over to play wid gintlemen, not wid hogs!”

“Don’t you call me a hog!” cried Bock, in a rage.

“Sure an’ if the boot fits yez can wear it,” answered the Irish cadet coolly. “Me own opinion is that ye are afraid to mate us fer fear av losing the match, an’ so yez want to git us mad an’ dhrive us home.”

“I reckon that’s the size of it,” said Bart Connors. “They know we can walk all

over them.”

A rather heated discussion followed, but Dale and his men insisted that they would not play unless given half the seats in the place and at last Roy Bock and his followers had to give in. Some who had seats had to give them up and they started to hiss the Putnam Hall cadets in consequence. But then Doctor Pornell appeared on the scene and quietness was speedily restored.

As already told, the team representing Putnam Hall was made up of Dale, Andy, Stuffer, Hogan and Conners. The Pornell Academy team was composed of Bock, Grimes, Sedley, Carey and a tall, heavy-set youth named Noddingham. It may be remarked that Noddingham was an expert bowler and had helped to win many matches. Bock relied on him to make a big run and turn the score in favor of their side.

The match was to consist of two or three games and the side winning two games was to be the victor. Of course if one side won both the first and second games, a third game would not be necessary.

Dale and Bock were the first to bowl in the initial frame. The Pornell student was perfectly familiar with the alleys and was fortunate enough to make a strike on the first ball bowled.

“Hurrah! that’s the way to do it, Bock,” was the cry.

“Keep it up and you’ll get three hundred!”

On his first ball Dale got six and on his second he knocked down two more, netting a total of eight. The Putnam Hall boys cheered at this, but not very loudly. Then Andy followed with a spare, and Grimes did the same. When Noddingham came up he got a strike, and once more the Pornell boys cheered lustily.

After that the game became pretty well “mixed.” The Putnam Hall cadets managed to get several spares in the seventh and eighth frames, and likewise two strikes and these helped somewhat. But Noddingham was there with four strikes, and Grimes and Carey had several spares, and as a result when the first game came to a close the score stood, Pornell 834, Putnam Hall 789.

“Hurrah for Pornell!”



“Putnam Hall wasn’t in it for a minute!”

“Told you we could beat them!”

And the cheering was loud and long, while many waved their caps and handkerchiefs.

“Boys, we’ve got to take a brace,” whispered Andy.

“We should have insisted on some practice on the alleys,” answered Stuffer. “Three trial balls was not enough.”

The second game was soon started and now the Putnam Hall boys began to score a little better. But so did the Pornell team, and during the sixth, seventh and eighth frames it was nip and tuck. But in the ninth Dale got a strike and so did Hogan, while the others got spares, and in the tenth Hogan added another spare and Dale got a strike. On the other side Noddingham, with a spare in the ninth, dropped to but seven in the tenth frame, and only one player got a strike.

Score in the second game, Putnam Hall 918, Pornell Academy 862.

“That’s the time we did it!” cried Pepper enthusiastically.

“Keep it up, boys!” shouted Jack. “You’ve got ’em on the run now!”

“Nothing but strikes and spares now, nothing but strikes and spares!” yelled Harry Blossom.

The Pornell Academy boys looked very glum, but they revived with the opening of the third game, when two of their side made strikes and one a spare. The Putnam Hall team did not do so well, but Dale covered a difficult “bridge” that won him loud applause.

“Sure an’ that’s a bridge wan man in a hundred couldn’t make,” was Emerald’s comment. “’Twas foin, so ’twas!” And he slapped Dale heartily on the back.

Both teams were now on their mettle and bowled with great care. Bock was very swift in his movements and twice Andy caught him overstepping the mark when delivering his ball.

“Say, Bock, we want none of that,” he said to the Pornell player.

“What?” demanded Bock, innocently.

“You overstep the mark when you run. You keep back, or I’ll claim a foul.”

“I didn’t overstep the mark.”

“I say you did.”

“So do I,” added Bart Conners. “I saw it as plain as day.”

“Humph! Maybe I did go over an eighth of an inch,” sneered Bock.

“You went over half a foot,” said Andy.

“Play fair!” shouted a score of Putnam Hall students. “Everybody watch the foul line!”

After that Roy Bock did not dare to overstep the line. As a consequence his delivery was not so good, and his score dropped behind a dozen points or more.

At last the two teams reached the ninth frame. Pornell was leading by seventeen points. They got two spares, one made by Carey and the other by Noddingham.

“Do your very best, fellows!” cried Jack, to his friends, and they bowled with such care and swiftness that they got three strikes and two spares.

“Hullo, it’s almost a tie!” cried Harry Blossom. “Go in and win!”

“Make every ball count now, fellows!” yelled Pepper. He was so excited he could not keep his seat.

Everybody was talking or cheering and the din was terrific. In the midst of the excitement the Pornell students made one spare and a seven, two eights and a nine. Putnam Hall came to the front with two strikes and two spares. Then the extra balls were speedily bowled.

Score of third game, Putnam Hall 1042, Pornell Academy 982.

“Hurrah! Putnam Hall wins the match!”

“Wasn’t that last frame great!”

Then a wild cheering ensued, in the midst of which the cadets from the Hall surrounded the victors and shook hands over and over again. It was certainly a moment of great triumph.

“I’m proud of you, boys,” said George Strong. “You did very well indeed.”

“Silence!” came suddenly from Roy Bock, as he climbed up on a bench.

“What’s the matter?” asked several, pausing in the midst of the general excitement.

“I claim a foul. Putnam Hall did not win that last game fairly.”

“What do you mean, Bock?” demanded Dale, indignantly.

“I say you did not win the game fairly,” repeated the Pornell student stubbornly.

“We did win it fairly.”

“Explain yourself, Bock!” called out several.

“I will. In the ninth and tenth frames three of their bowlers overstepped the foul line. I saw them do it, and so did Carey, Gussic and Grimes.”

“That charge is absolutely false,” cried Andy. “I for one did not come within three inches of the mark.”

“Nor did I,” added Stuffer, and the others of the team said practically the same thing.

“This is very unfortunate,” said George Strong. “You should have had an umpire for the line.”

“I was watching the line,” said a Putnam Hall student named Barton. “I saw none of our bowlers overstep the mark. But the Pornell men went over—until Andy and the others protested.”

“I say they did go over,” insisted Roy Bock. “You may call this match yours, but I’ll not give it.”

“Nor I,” added Carey.

“As you please,” answered Dale, with a shrug of his shoulders. “We won it, and did so fairly, and that is all there is to it,” and turning on his heel he walked off.

In the meantime Pepper had gone outside to the carryall. Now he came around to a back door of the Pornell gymnasium carrying the box he had brought along.

“Help me, Jack!” he called to his chum.

“What have you got?”

“A surprise for the Pornell boys. I was sure they’d treat us meanly, so I planned to get square.”

With great caution the two cadets took the box to a corner of the building and opened it. Then they took the contents up to a small gallery.

“Now then, let ’em go!” cried Pepper, and Jack obeyed the command.

Soon around the gymnasium half a dozen big black crows were flying. Caw! caw! caw! they cried in their bewilderment.

And as they flew around each crow dropped some cards which had been loosely attached to its wings.

And the cards read:

*We are to be eaten by the Pornell Bowling Team.*

## CHAPTER XIII

### FUN WITH PELEG SNUGGERS

“What’s this?”

“Crows, I declare!”

“They are dropping cards!”

“Say, this is the limit, isn’t it?”

“Hurrah, Pornell has got to eat crow to-day!” cried one Putnam Hall cadet.

“That’s right,” added another. “Hope they enjoy it.”

The trick Pepper had played made all the cadets laugh loudly. As for the Pornell students they looked dark and sour.

“This is an outrage!” stormed Roy Bock. “Eat crow indeed! I say we didn’t lose the match. They didn’t play fair.”

“We did play fair—and that’s the end of it,” answered Dale, and walked towards the carryall. Others followed, and soon all the Putnam cadets were ready to depart. Some bitter things were said on both sides, and several of the rivals came close to getting into a pitched battle.

“I will have no fighting,” said George Strong. “Come, we will depart at once.”

“But we won fairly, Mr. Strong,” pleaded Dale.

“I feel sure you did, Blackmore, and I give Doctor Pornell no credit for allowing his scholars to treat you in this style. But I want you to act as young gentlemen.”

At last the carryall, the carriages, and the cadets on bicycles were on their way. The bowling team was in the carryall and with them were Jack, Pepper and a number of others. Mr. Strong was in one of the carriages ahead.

“I declare, I think they were too mean for anything!” cried Andy. “I wish I had punched that Roy Bock’s head for him!”

“Yes, and Grimes ought to be thrashed, too,” added Pepper.

“I noticed that Fred Century kept rather quiet,” said Jack. “I don’t believe he liked the way Bock acted. When Bock claimed a foul he looked bored.”

“I guess he’s as nice a fellow as there is at that Academy,” was Stuffer’s comment. “Say, anybody bring any fruit along?” he added. “I’m half starved.”

“Was there ever a time when you weren’t half starved?” asked Jack, grinning. “Here’s something I brought for your especial benefit,” and he handed out an orange.

“Good! You have saved my life!” And Stuffer began to eat the fruit with great gusto.

“I had a sneaking idea they might provide a little lunch,” said Jack. “I think Captain Putnam would have done so.”

“Sure an’ Docther Pornell is too mean to do that same,” answered Hogan. “I’ve been told he’s only liberal when there’s money to be made by it.”

“That’s the way of some would-be high-toned folks,” said Dale.

“I want to know about those crows,” came from Harry Blossom. “Where did they come from?”

“Pepper set them loose—I saw him do it—he and Jack,” answered Bart.

“I’ll have to own up that I’m responsible,” said the Imp, with a broad smile. “I took the crows along because I felt almost sure Bock’s crowd would do something dirty—I know Bock so well.”

“But where did you get the crows?”

“I was talking with a young farmer one day and he told me how he had been trapping crows in his cornfield. As soon as this match was arranged I got the farmer to catch the crows and boxed ’em up. Then I wrote out the cards and fastened them on the crows’ wings.”

That evening the Putnam Hall cadets had a little celebration on the campus in honor of the victory. In this Ritter, Coulter and Paxton took no part, but all the other students did and they had a jolly time. Pepper and some others captured Peleg Snuggers and told him he had to make a speech.

“I don’t know nuthing about no speech,” said the general utility man. “You better let me go—I’ve got some work to do down to the barn.”

“We want you to tell us about your experience as a soldier,” said Pepper.

“I never was a soldier—I was a fireman.”

“That’s the talk!” cried Andy. “Tell us how you became a fireman, and rescued four live kittens from a ten-story burning building, Peleg.”

“Didn’t rescue no kittens. But once I rescued——”

“A three-legged bedstead,” finished Stuffer.

“No, it was a——”

“Broken-backed clothes horse,” suggested Dale. “Did the horse get over it, Peleg?”

“Now see here, I didn’t say nuthing about a hoss. When I was a member o’ the Cowtown Volunteer Fire Company, Mr. Glasby’s house burnt down, and I saved ——”

“Two pair of overalls and a box of gumdrops,” finished Pepper. “Very brave, Peleg, very brave! It’s a wonder they didn’t give you a tin medal.”

“It wasn’t no overalls nor no gumdrops nuther,” cried the general utility man. “I saved——”

“A lady and her sixteen small children!” exclaimed Jack. “Hurrah for Peleg

Snuggers, the fireman-hero of Cowtown! Peleg, they ought to erect a monument in the public square in your honor for such heroic endeavors!”

“Say, look a-here,” gasped Snuggers. “If you want to hear what I saved——”

“We do! We do!” was the cry. “Tell us!”

“I am really dying to know!” simpered Stuffer.

“It’s meself that can’t wait a minit longer, Peleg, me brave b’y!” sighed Emerald.

“I saved a sick dog,” yelled the general utility man, in desperation.

“A dog!”

“Well, I never!”

“Peleg, that’s one on us right enough!”

“He was a valuable dog—wuth two hundred dollars,” explained the general utility man. “He was up on the second floor. I brung him down on the ladder. We tumbled half the way, but it didn’t hurt the dog none, ’though it did skin my nose. Mr. Glasby give me five dollars fer a-doin’ of it,” added Peleg, proudly.

“What, for skinning your nose?” questioned Jack, innocently.

“No, fer savin’ the dog from the fiery elements—thet’s wot Mr. Glasby called ’em—’though I didn’t see no elements—it was jest a big, red-hot fire,” added the general utility man, and then, watching his chance, he slipped away and kept out of sight for the rest of the evening.

During the past Summer and that Spring the bicycling craze, as it was called, had struck Putnam Hall hard, and now fully twenty of the cadets had wheels. As a consequence a number of the lads organized the Putnam Hall Bicycle Club. Every lad who had a wheel was eligible to membership, and our friends were not long in joining. Ritter was a member and Coulter and Paxton also joined. Bart Conners was the leader of the club.

“I move we get up a long distance race,” said Bart, one day. “We have had several small contests, but a race of fifteen or twenty miles would show just



what the fellows can do.”

His proposal interested some of the cadets at once. Of course there were many who did not feel they could ride in a race that was so long, but Pepper, Jack and Andy went in and so did Ritter, Coulter and Paxton. Bart, of course, entered, and six others followed.

It took a little study to lay out the course, but at last this was accomplished, and the time of the race was set for a Wednesday afternoon a week later, Captain Putnam agreeing to close the school an hour earlier than usual, if the weather was right for the contest.

Reff Ritter was a good bicyclist, and as soon as the race was assured he went around trying to make wagers on the outcome of the contest. The majority of the cadets would not bet—it being against their principles, nevertheless the bully found some willing to put up their money, and he staked all he had—thirty dollars—on his chance of winning.

“If you are so sure of winning there isn’t much use of our going in the contest,” said Paxton to Ritter, as he and the bully and Coulter met.

“Well, I am bound to win,” answered Ritter. “I think you can help me to do it, too. You’d like to see me beat Ruddy and Ditmore and Snow, wouldn’t you?”

“Very much!” answered Coulter, with emphasis.

“Well, here is the chance. And another thing—what’s the matter with your betting that Ruddy, Ditmore and Snow will lose? Then, if they do lose, you’ll stand to win something.”

“But they may win,” said Paxton, who was rather cautious when it came to putting up his money.

“Yes, and I’ll tell you I haven’t a dollar to spare,” added Coulter, who was the poorest of the three. On more than one occasion he had borrowed spending money from Ritter and Dan Baxter.

“I’ve got a plan,” answered Ritter. “Come on out on the lake in a rowboat. Then we’ll be sure that nobody will overhear us,” and he led the way to where the rowboats were tied up. Ever since the scare over the use of the French headache

powder Ritter had been more or less nervous and afraid of exposure.

All unconscious of any plot being hatched out to make them lose the bicycle contest, Jack, Pepper and Andy spent their spare time in exercising on their wheels. A prize of a fine story book had been put up by the club for the winner, and all three were determined to do what they could to come in ahead.

“One of us must win,” said Jack. “I don’t care who it is. But I do want to see Ritter and his cronies defeated.”

“Just what I say!” declared Pepper.

“Same here!” added Andy. “The way Ritter goes around blowing makes me sick!”

“Well, Brag is a good horse, but Win-out is it,” declared Jack.

Fortunately the roads in the vicinity of Putnam Hall had been rolled in the Spring and were, consequently, in good condition. The route laid out took in two small hamlets and also passed Point View Lodge, the Summer residence of a rich gentleman named Rossmore Ford. The boys were fairly well acquainted with Mr. Ford and his family, and they had on two occasions done the Ford girls, Laura and Flossie, great service.

“What do you say if we stop at the Lodge and pay our respects?” said Jack one afternoon, as he and his chums reached that neighborhood on their bicycles.

“I’m willing,” answered Pepper. “I saw Laura Ford in Cedarville not long ago and she wanted to know why we hadn’t been up.”

“And he never said a word about it!” cried Andy. “Say, Pepper, did you want to call alone? I knew you were sweet on those girls, but——”

“Oh, quit it, Andy. I was going to mention it, but it slipped my mind, really it did.”

“Maybe he was afraid we’d meet another tiger up here if we came,” suggested Jack. “Say, we had a lively time nailing that beast, eh?”

“That’s what,” answered Pepper. “No more runaway circus tigers for me,” he

added, with a grave shake of his head.

The boys were less than half a mile from Point View Lodge and it did not take them long to wheel that distance. Then, leaning their bicycles against some trees, they walked up the piazza and rang the bell. A servant answered the summons, and led them into the wide and cool hallway.

“Mrs. Rossmore has gone out,” she announced a minute later. “But the young ladies will be here shortly.”

“Oh, how do you do!” came a cry an instant later, and Laura Ford rushed down the broad stairs, followed by her sister. A warm handshaking followed, and then the girls asked the cadets all about how they had been, and invited them to come out on the lawn and have a game of croquet.

## **CHAPTER XIV**

### **THE MYSTERY OF A BRACELET**

“We have been wondering why you didn’t come and pay us a visit,” said Flossie, tossing back her curly hair.

“Well, you see, we have been very busy with our studies,” answered Pepper, before his chums could speak. “We’ve been thinking about coming, I can assure you.”

“I heard down in Cedarville that you had a bowling contest with the Pornell Academy team,” said Laura. “I understand that you won.” And she smiled brightly.

“I wasn’t in that,” answered Jack. “But Andy was, and he made a fine score, too.”

“Oh, the other fellows did as well as I did,” said the acrobatic youth, modestly.

“I am so glad you beat the Pornell boys,” exclaimed Flossie. “Do you know, I think some of them too horrid for anything!” And she drew down the corners of her pretty mouth.

“Oh, yes, we remember Roy Bock and his crowd,” answered Pepper. “I trust they haven’t annoyed you lately.”

“Oh, the most of them keep their distance now,” said Flossie.

“Flossie has had trouble with one of the boys,” went on Laura. She turned to her sister. “Shall I tell them about it?”

“Oh—well, I don’t care!” murmured Flossie, and blushed deeply.

“Maybe they can help you to get it back,” continued the sister.

“Get what back?” asked Jack.

“Flossie’s bracelet. Have you ever met a Pornell student named Will Carey?”

“Yes.”

“Do you like him?”

“No,” came from Jack and Pepper simultaneously.

“He has Flossie’s bracelet—one papa gave her last Christmas. He called here once and when they were fooling on this croquet lawn he took the bracelet away from her and carried it off. Ever since that time she has been trying to get it back, but he won’t bring it or send it.”

“The mean fellow!” cried Jack. “Of course he isn’t base enough to steal the bracelet, is he?”

“I hardly think that,” spoke up Flossie. “I guess he is just trying to tease me. Once he said——” She broke off short and blushed deeper than ever.

“He said he’d give it back for a kiss,” finished Laura.

“And I said I’d rather box his ears!” cried Flossie, “and I would, too! Oh, I wish I had that bracelet back! I’d never speak to him again!”

“He certainly is no gentleman to keep the bracelet when you want it back,” was Pepper’s comment. “You ought to send a constable after him, or something like that,—just to scare him.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t dare!” cried the girl who had lost the jewelry. “Papa would be very angry, I am sure, if he found out I had allowed the bracelet to go out of my possession, and mamma wouldn’t like it either. No, I’d like to get it back as quietly as possible, if I can.”

“Wonder if we could get it back for you?” mused Jack. “We might try it, anyway, if you say so.”

“Do you think you could?” questioned the girl, brightening up. “Oh, if you could I’d be so thankful!”

“Let us try it anyway,” said Pepper.

“But you will go at it quietly?” pleaded Flossie.

“Yes, nobody shall know of it but Carey himself,” answered the young major.

“He acted real nice first,” explained the girl. “But the second time he called I saw he was of the Roy Bock stamp and I treated him real cool. I was very foolish to let him call at all. I cannot bear such rude boys.”

The cadets remained to play several games of croquet, and to partake of some lemonade and cake. They told the girls about the proposed bicycle race, and the latter said they would be on the watch to see the contestants pass.

“We’ll have cold milk or lemonade ready for you,” said Laura. “So if you want to drink it won’t take you long to do it.”

“Thanks awfully!” cried Andy. “That will be fine. I guess we’ll be pretty dry after climbing the hill below here, especially if the road is dusty.”

On the way back to Putnam Hall the three chums discussed the question of getting back Flossie’s bracelet. They had learned that the bracelet was of solid gold, with five small diamonds set in a row. It had cost at least a hundred dollars, if not more.

“If that rascal really means to keep the bracelet he ought to be horsewhipped for it!” declared Andy.

“I think he is only teasing Flossie,” answered Jack. “But he has no business to do that. She is terribly worried.”

“The idea of Will Carey wanting to kiss her!” said Pepper, almost savagely. “I’d like to—to—thrash him!”

“I think I’ll write Carey a letter, asking him to meet me in Cedarville,” said Jack, after thinking it over. “When he comes I’ll tell him he must return the bracelet at once, or take the consequence, and I’ll hint at the law. Most likely that will fetch

him.”

“Want us along?” asked Pepper.

“I think it may be better if I met Carey alone, Pep. If all of us got at him he might get stubborn, thinking we wanted to have the laugh on him.”

“Well, if he doesn’t give up, we’ll all get after him, and good and hard, too,” said Andy.

Jack wrote the letter to the Pornell Academy student that evening. It was short and to the point, and informed Carey that he must meet the young major without fail. He was told to come alone, and was informed that Jack would also be unaccompanied. The next day brought a brief answer, as follows:

“Do not know what you want, but will be there.

WILL CAREY.”

“He’ll be astonished when you tell him what brought you,” said Pepper, when the young major showed him the communication.

There was a small village green in Cedarville, with a number of benches and a bandstand, and Jack had requested Carey to meet him there. The young major was on time, but he found the Pornell student ahead of him.

“Well, what do you want that is so mysterious?” demanded Carey, abruptly. “I haven’t much time. I’ve got another engagement inside of an hour.”

“What I’ve got to say, Carey, won’t take an hour,” answered Jack. “In fact, it won’t take me five minutes.”

“All right—let’s have it.”

“You have a bracelet belonging to Flossie Ford.”

At this announcement Will Carey was startled and showed it. He gazed at the young major hesitatingly.

“Who told you that?” he asked slowly.

“She did—and she wants it back.”

“Humph! Did she send you to me?”

“No, I volunteered to come.”

“Want to worry me into doing something, I suppose,” and the Pornell Academy student tried to put a sneer into his tone.

“I simply want you to give the bracelet back, that’s all. You’ve got to do it.”

“I did give the bracelet back.”

“You did! To-day?”

“No, two or three weeks ago. I didn’t want her old bracelet. I simply took it to tease her, that’s all.”

“You gave the bracelet back two or three weeks ago?” said Jack, slowly. “She told me yesterday that you still had it.”

“It isn’t so! I returned it to her three or four days after I took it.”

“How did you send it?”

“I didn’t send it. I put it in a box of chocolates and gave it to her.”

“It’s queer she didn’t say anything about that,” mused Jack. Carey’s statement mystified him a good deal.

“Is that all you wanted to see me about?” demanded the Pornell youth.

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll be going,” and without another word Will Carey walked away across the green and down the street leading to the steamboat landing. Jack made as if to follow him, then changed his mind and turned in the direction of Putnam Hall.

“There is a mistake somewhere,” he told his chums. “I guess I had better see



Flossie Ford again before I go further in this matter.”

“You might write her a letter,” suggested Pepper.

“Mrs. Ford might not like us to be sending her daughters letters, Pep. No, I’ll talk it over, the first chance I get.”

The chance came sooner than expected. The chums were out on Monday practicing for the bicycle race when they saw a buggy ahead of them. They spurred up, intending to pass the vehicle, when they discovered that it contained the Ford girls, who had been down to the Cedarville post-office.

“Glad we met you,” said Jack, when the greetings were over. “Please stop, I want to ask you something.”

Then, when all had come to a halt by the road-side, he told the particulars of his meeting with Will Carey.

“He never returned that bracelet at all!” cried Flossie, indignantly. “He said it was in the box of chocolates—if he hadn’t said that I never should have taken the box—but when I opened it all there was in it were the candies and a note asking me to meet him for a row on the lake.”

“You are positive it wasn’t in the box?” asked Pepper.

“Yes, I am. I dumped all the chocolates into my lap, for I wanted my bracelet and not the candy. When I saw that he had fooled me I was so angry I threw the chocolates away.”

“Was he there at the time?” asked Andy.

“No, he went away just as soon as he gave me the box.”

“You didn’t go rowing, I suppose,” said Jack.

“No, indeed! I tore up the note and didn’t answer it. Then I didn’t see him for a week. When I did I asked for the bracelet, and he began to tease me and said he had put it in the box of chocolates, under the tissue paper.”

“And you are perfectly positive it wasn’t in the box?” insisted Jack.

“Why, Jack, don’t you believe me?” asked Flossie, reproachfully.

“Yes, but I want to make certain there was no mistake. You looked through the box carefully?”

“I surely did. All that was in it besides the candy was a sheet of tissue paper and a tiny tin tongs. Oh, I am positive the bracelet was not there.”

“Well, I must confess I don’t know what there is to do,” said Jack, biting his lip meditatively. “He declares he gave the bracelet back. Even if you went to law, his word would be as good as yours.”

“Oh, we are not going to law!” cried Laura, horrified.

“I understand. But I don’t see how you are going to get the bracelet back.”

“I’ve got a plan,” put in Pepper.

“Oh, what is it?” asked Flossie, eagerly.

“I don’t think I’ll mention it just now. I’ll tell you about it later,” was the reply. “But you can rest assured of one thing. If Will Carey has got that bracelet we’ll get it for you.”

“I think I know what Pep’s plan is,” broke in Andy. “And if so, I think it’s all right,” and he winked at his chum.

“I trust I get the bracelet soon,” said Flossie, soberly. “Every day I am afraid papa or mamma will ask me about it. And when they do I won’t know what to say! Oh, I wish I had never met that horrid Will Carey!”

## **CHAPTER XV**

### **THE GREAT BICYCLE RACE**

“Now, what is this plan of yours, Pep?” questioned Jack, on the way back to Putnam Hall.

“Make Carey a prisoner somewhere and scare him into giving up the bracelet,” was the prompt answer. “I am sure we can do it, for I feel he must be a coward at heart.”

“But he will not be likely to have the bracelet with him.”

“That is true,” put in Andy. “But we can fix that by making him give up something else—his watch, for instance,—to be exchanged for the bracelet later.”

“I suppose it could be done,” mused Jack. “But it would be a ticklish proceeding, for he might have us arrested.”

“We can do it on the sly.”

“He would recognize us.”

“Not if we were masked. Hurrah, that is the way to do it! We’ll wear masks and gowns, and scare him out of his wits—make him think the Whitecaps or Klu Klux Klan are after him.”

This proposal suited everybody, and the three boys decided to carry out their plan as soon after the bicycle race as possible.

The day for the proposed race dawned cloudily and up to noon the cadets were doubtful if they would be able to go out—it looked so much like rain. But by one o’clock the sun was shining brightly and their spirits revived.

Ten cadets who had wheels were sent out ahead, to station themselves about two miles apart on the course. They were to keep tally of every rider and see to it that nothing was done contrary to the rules laid down.

The contestants lined up in front of the Hall in fine style. Then came a pistol shot, and off they went in a manner that elicited much cheering.

“Hurrah! May the best rider win!”

“Take it easy, boys, twenty miles is a long distance to cover!”

So the cries ran on as the bicyclists sped down the roadway, their safeties gleaming brightly in the sunlight. Everybody was in fine condition, and the race promised to prove a spirited one. Each racer wore a blue sweater with the letters P. H. on the breast.

Jack, Andy and Pepper started in a bunch, directly after the leaders. Not far away were Ritter, Coulter and Paxton. They kept close behind our friends for all of a mile.

“I guess they want us to set the pace for them,” cried Pepper.

“Well, we can do it,” answered Andy. “Pump up, fellows, we want to break some records to-day.” And he spurred ahead.

Jack and Pepper were not to be left behind, and they speedily caught up to the acrobatic youth. Than another mile was covered and they passed the first of the guards along the road.

“You’re doing well!” shouted the guard, as he waved his hand at them. “Keep it up!” And then his voice was lost in the distance.

“Some of the others are coming up,” said Jack a minute later, and then came a flash of wheels and Reff Ritter went past them at top speed.

“Ritter can’t keep up that pace,” said Pepper. “If he tries it he’ll wear himself out before he covers ten miles.”

“Here come some more,” said Andy, and a few seconds later Coulter and Paxton flashed past.

The riders were now coming to a narrow part of the road. On either side were low-hanging trees, so the bicyclists were forced to keep almost in the middle of the highway, to avoid the branches. All in the race were now ahead of the three chums, who were saving a good portion of their strength for the last half of the run.

As Jack and his friends turned a curve in the highway they saw Coulter and Paxton directly ahead of them. The two contestants were side by side and riding now in anything but racing fashion.

“Clear the track!” sang out Andy, as he and the others came closer.

Neither Paxton nor Coulter paid the slightest attention to the call. They kept on as before, at a pace of about six miles an hour.

“Hi, you, give us some room!” cried Jack. “Don’t block the road in this fashion.”

“If you are going to race, race,” said Andy.

“We are racing,” drawled Paxton, without increasing his speed.

“We are not going to kill ourselves at the start,” added Coulter.

“Well, let us pass,” said Pepper, impatiently.

“You can pass for all of me,” answered Paxton. “I am not holding you back.”

“Yes, you are.”

“Nonsense!” cried Coulter. “Go ahead if you want to—the road is wide enough.”

“You know that the trees are in the way,” answered Jack. “Now, either go on or steer aside.”

“Humph! Are you running this race?”

Coulter and Paxton continued to keep to the middle of the road and it was utterly impossible for the others to pass them.

“This is a trick—to keep us in a pocket and hold us back,” muttered Jack. “It’s the meanest thing I ever heard of.”

“We ought to bump into them and send them flying,” growled Pepper.

“If you do that you’ll be disqualified,” said Andy.

Paxton and Coulter now spurred up a little. They did this just to pass the next guard in good form. But as soon as the guard had been left behind they dropped down to their six-mile-an-hour gait once more.

“If we can’t pass them we might as well give up right now,” declared Pepper. “I declare, I never felt so much like punching a fellow in my life!” he added, vehemently.

“I think I know a way out of this!” cried Jack, suddenly. “Let me get a little ahead of you and watch me closely.”

The others were willing to try anything and dropped behind as the young major desired. About an eighth of a mile more was covered and they came to another turn, where the road ran slightly down hill. Here the trees were thicker than ever, so that to pass Coulter and Paxton would have been utterly impossible.

“Wonder what Jack has up his sleeve,” mused Andy.

The question was speedily answered. As the turn of the road was gained there appeared a foot path between the trees, running parallel to the highway and distance from it less than five yards. Onto this foot path spun Jack, and Pepper and Andy came directly after him. The path was smooth and spongy and the bicycles flew over it “like greased lightning,” as Jack said afterwards.

“Hi! they are off the road!” yelled Paxton, looking around.

“They are on the path!” yelled Coulter. “Come, we mustn’t let them get ahead of us!” And he pedalled forward with vigor.

“Follow me and be quick!” cried the young major to his chums. “This path comes out into the road at the foot of the hill!” And away he sped.

It was a dangerous proceeding, for a jar of any kind might throw them headlong into a tree or a rock. But they were on their mettle, and willing to take chances, and Andy and Pepper stuck to Jack’s trail like shadows. On and on they went over the foot path, and out in the roadway Coulter and Paxton did their best to

outdistance them and block their chances of winning the race.

At last the bottom of the hill was less than a hundred feet away. Jack saw a straight stretch ahead of him and put on all power. Like an arrow from a bow his wheel swept on and gained the road well in advance of Coulter and Paxton. Andy followed, with Pepper overlapping his back tire by three inches.

“Come on, we’ve got to catch them!” screamed Coulter, in a rage. “Remember the narrow road at Dunham’s farm.”

“All right, set the pace and I’ll keep up if I can!” cried Paxton.

Jack and his chums were fifty feet in the lead. They watched Coulter and Paxton narrowly and saw them trying to steal up.

“It won’t do to let them pass us—they’ll only pocket us again,” said Andy.

“Yes, but they’ll wear us out trying to keep them back,” answered Pepper. “I must say, they ride well.”

“They can’t keep it up more than ten or twelve miles,” said Jack. “But they may make us lose, nevertheless.”

Another guard was passed and then came a new spurt by Coulter and Paxton. They had almost reached Andy when there followed a crash and a yell.

“Coulter is down!” said Jack.

“Yes, and Paxton smashed into him!” added Andy.

“It serves them right,” came from Jack. “Now, boys, I don’t think they’ll bother us any more.” And he was right. Coulter had a broken handle bar and Paxton received a badly-skinned shin, and the two misguided ones had to give up the contest.

Free to do as they pleased, Jack and his chums now set their own pace and four miles were reeled off in quick but easy fashion. On the way they met one other rider who had broken down and given up, and they passed two more who were almost winded. Then they came in sight of several others. Reff Ritter was in the lead of the bunch.

“Now is the time for us to make good!” cried Jack.

“All right,” answered Pepper. “Everybody for himself!” and he commenced to spurt along the level stretch before them.

The three chums had soon passed all but Reff Ritter and Joe Nelson. Of these two, Ritter was in the lead, with Joe clinging to him stubbornly.

“Good for Joe!” sang out Andy. “I didn’t think he could ride so well.”

“He looks less used up than anybody,” declared Andy.

It was now a fierce grind. They were on the road leading to Point View Lodge and Jack and his chums looked out eagerly for the Ford girls. They were at the gateway, holding a pitcher of lemonade and glasses.

“Awfully sorry, but if we stop we may lose the race!” shouted Jack, slackening his speed a bit. “It’s nip and tuck!”

“Then don’t stop!” called both girls. “Good luck to you!”

Jack passed on, followed by Ritter and Andy. Pepper had dropped behind, for the awful pace was beginning to tell on him.

“I’ve got to have some of that lemonade,” he said, as he took a glass. “My mouth is full of cotton.”

“I hope Jack wins,” declared Laura. “He was in the lead.”

“Come some time and tell us all about it!” called Flossie, and then Pepper leaped into the saddle again and made after the flying contestants.

On and on sped the leading ones, Jack in advance, Ritter second, Andy third and Joe Nelson fourth. Then Andy and Joe spurted and passed Ritter. But the bully clung to them like grim death, and thus another mile was left behind.

“Three miles more and it will be over,” cried Jack presently. “Now to put in some of my best licks!” And he rode harder than ever. “Good-bye, Andy!”

“Oh, you can’t lose me!” called out the acrobatic youth. “I’m not quite all in



yet!”

It was a tremendous burst of speed on the part of the young major and his chum and it speedily carried them ahead. They reached a down grade and descended with the speed of an express train. Then they rushed over a small bridge spanning a brook, and took a turn leading to the lake road.

“Help! help!” came a sudden cry from ahead. “Help! Robbers! Help!”

“What’s that?” asked Jack.

“Somebody calling for help!” answered Andy. “It comes from yonder cottage!”

“Look!” ejaculated Jack. He could scarcely credit his eyesight.

“Those fellows with the green masks and green hoods!” burst out the acrobatic youth.

“Yes, and they are holding a boy and robbing him,” came from Jack. “Andy, we’ve got to stop this!”

And leaping from his wheel he ran toward the cottage, followed closely by his chum.

## **CHAPTER XVI**

### **AT THE CHETWOOD COTTAGE**

The cottage mentioned by Andy was located about a hundred and fifty feet from the road. It was set among some small trees, and a roadway led to the front door. Along this roadway dashed Jack and the acrobatic youth.

The boy who had uttered the cry for help was a tall, thin lad, with a shock of black hair and deep, black eyes. He was a cripple, walking with a crutch, one leg being bent at the knee. He had come out of the cottage hopping on his good limb and flourishing his crutch menacingly at the two individuals in the green masks and hoods.

“Give up the wrench!” cried one of the strange individuals, shaking a barrel stave in the boy’s face.

“We must have it!” shouted the second masked person. “We need it for opening the treasure chest!”

“Go away!” cried the boy. “Go away, I tell you!”

As he spoke he swung the crutch around and hit one of the masked men on the shoulder. At this the fellow leaped back and uttered a wild laugh.

“Stop that!” cried Jack, as he leaped from his wheel. “Let that boy alone!”

“Ha! ha! The police have arrived!” cried the second masked man, who was armed with a small section of a garden hose.

“We must vanish!” cried the other masked fellow. “They want to put us in jail for a thousand years!” and he began to retreat towards the woods behind the cottage.

“Here, hold up!” called out Andy, a sudden thought flashing into his mind. “I

think I know those chaps,” he added to Jack.

“They have robbed our home!” called out the cripple. “Please stop them!”

By this time the two masked men were running for the woods with all the speed at their command. Jack and Andy rushed after them, leaving their bicycles at the cottage door.

“What do you mean by saying you think you know those chaps?” asked Jack.

“Don’t you remember Mr. Strong’s two crazy relatives—Bart Callax and Paul Shaff? I believe the masked fellows are the same.”

“By jinks, I think you’re right, Andy! But I thought Mr. Strong had those relatives of his cared for.”

“They must have broken away again—crazy people have a way of running off, you know.”

“Well, those rascals acted as if they were half loony,” was the young major’s comment.

All this while the cadets were racing after the two strange individuals, who were now crashing along between the trees and bushes of the woods. The men were fleet of foot, and slowly but surely they drew out of sight of their pursuers.

“It’s no use,” panted Andy at last. “After such a ride as we’ve had on our wheels I’ve no wind left for a foot race,” and he came to a halt and leaned heavily against a tree for support.

“I wish I knew for certain that the two rascals were really those crazy men,” was Jack’s comment, as he, too, halted. “That would clear up the mystery of the hold-up you and Pepper experienced the time the tire was punctured.

“Well, we can tell Mr. Strong about this, when we get back to Putnam Hall. He can telegraph to the folks who had the men in charge and learn if they have escaped.”

Having rested, the chums retraced their steps to the cottage. They had run into the woods the best part of half a mile, and just before they came in sight of the

cottage they met the crippled boy, who had walked after them as well as his condition would permit.

“Did you catch them?” he asked, anxiously.

“No, they ran too fast for us,” answered Jack.

“We might have caught them had it not been that we were tired out from bicycle riding,” explained Andy. “We were in a race. But I guess that’s all over now, eh, Jack?”

“It certainly is so far as we are concerned,” was the acrobatic youth’s answer.

“I saw some boys on wheels ride past, just after you came up,” said the crippled youth. He heaved a deep sigh. “Wish you had caught those two men.”

“Don’t you think they were crazy?” asked Jack.

“To be sure they were—crazy as loons. But I didn’t know that at first. You see I was alone—father and mother went to Ithaca yesterday and they won’t be home till Saturday. Those men came along just as I was locking up to go fishing down to the lake. They came up quietly and didn’t speak until they were right behind me. I can tell you they scared me pretty well with those green masks!”

“What did they do?” asked Andy.

“At first they demanded that I get them some dinner. I said I had very little in the house. Then one of them said he’d take some oysters on toast and some baked liver. I thought he was fooling, and that the two of ’em might be some of my friends who had come to our house thinking they could scare me while my folks were away. Then they went inside and began to rummage around and I told them to quit—that a joke was a joke, but they were carrying it too far. Then they took a vest from my father’s trunk and I got scared and pulled one of ’em back. Then both of ’em knocked me down and one pulled out a big butcher knife. Then I got scared and ran outside. I saw you coming on your wheels and I yelled like an Indian. I am very thankful you came to help me,” concluded the crippled youth.

After that he told them his name was Nat Chetwood and that his father owned a vineyard and a small shop where baskets were made. He said his parent had gone to Ithaca on business and that his mother was off to pay a relative a visit.

“Did they steal anything of value?” questioned the young major.

“That I can’t say,” answered Nat Chetwood. “You see, I don’t know exactly what my father had in his trunk. All they took out of the house was a small looking-glass, an empty inkwell, and a big, tin wash-basin. But they threw the wash-basin away when you came. I know they took one of my father’s vests, for the big man of the two stuffed it under his coat. While they were at the trunk one of ’em asked me to whistle Yankee Doodle and said he’d take me to the circus next week. Oh, they were certainly crazy,—and dangerous.”

“I am sorry we didn’t catch them,” said Andy. “We’ll have to report this, and without delay,” and he looked at Jack, suggestively.

“That’s right,” returned the young major. “And maybe we’ll come back soon.”

“I wish I had somebody to stay with me until my folks get back,” said the cripple, wistfully. “I hate to stay alone, for fear those fellows will come back.”

“Can’t you get some neighbor?” asked Andy.

“We haven’t any very-near neighbors. But maybe I can get Jake Dengert. He works for my father,” added Nat Chetwood.

It was not long after this that Andy and Jack left the cottage. They mounted their wheels and rode slowly in the direction of Putnam Hall. They had covered only a short distance when they heard a well-known whistle behind them and looking back beheld Pepper.

“Hullo!” cried the Imp. “I thought you had won the race!” And his face showed his disappointment. “My handle bars got loose, that’s what’s bringing me in so late,” he explained.

“We’ve had a bit of an adventure,” answered Jack, and he and Andy related what had occurred. Of course Pepper was intensely interested.

“It surely is no joke,” said he, when the others had finished. “We can be thankful we got off so easily that time we had the breakdown and those fellows tackled us.”

“Just what I think of it,” answered Andy. “One thing is sure, though, those men

have got to be rounded up and captured. Nobody will be safe so long as they are at large.”

“Who won the race, I wonder,” said Pepper, as they drew close to the school grounds.

“There is one of the boys—I’ll ask him,” replied the young major, and wheeled toward the cadet.

“The race was won by Joe Nelson,” said the youth. “He came in about quarter of a minute ahead of Reff Ritter.”

“Hurrah for Joe!” cried Andy. “I really didn’t think he could do it.”

“I am glad to know he beat Reff Ritter,” said Jack. “Had Reff won we should never have heard the end of it.”

The chums were soon in the midst of the riders and their friends. Many wanted to know how it was that Jack and Andy had dropped behind so unexpectedly, but the latter gave evasive answers, for they did not want the truth to become known just yet. First of all they wanted to talk matters over with George Strong and learn what he might have to say.

“Paxton and Coulter came in quite broke up,” said Dale.

“Serves them right,” answered Andy promptly.

“They say you three fellows knocked them down on purpose and they are going to make a formal complaint against you,” added the other cadet.

## **CHAPTER XVII**

### **AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE STRONG**

“Knocked ’em down!” cried Andy.

“What a whopper!” added Pepper. “Coulter went down for some reason we don’t know, and Paxton ran into him.”

“And we were all ahead of them at the time,” put in Jack.

“Well, I don’t know anything more than what I heard,” said Dale.

“You had nothing at all to do with it?” questioned Harry Blossom.

“No. But I can tell you something worth knowing,” said Jack, and related how Ritter’s cronies had tried to keep them in a “pocket,” as it is termed, and how they had slipped out. “They are mad because of that I guess,” he continued.

“I know they lost money on this race,” said Bart Conners. “I just learned that they made bets that either they or Ritter would win.”

“To my mind, it is nothing but a put-up job,” said Andy flatly. “They really bet on Ritter and they plotted to hold us back, knowing we really stood a good chance to come in ahead.”

“But none of us reckoned on Joe,” said Jack, with a grin. “I don’t begrudge him the victory.”

“Not for a minute!” answered Andy.

None of the chums did, for Joe was a prince of good fellows, even though rather quiet and studious. All went up to shake him by the hand and congratulate him.

“I don’t know how I did it myself,” said Joe. “I didn’t think I could win at the start, but after I had gone a couple of miles I found that I was in prime condition, and then I just let myself out, that’s all.”

Ritter had retired, thoroughly disgusted with the outcome of the race. Without loss of time he sought out Paxton and Coulter.

“Well, I’ve lost, and I’ve got to hand over every dollar I can scrape up,” he said, uglily.

“You needn’t blame me,” answered Coulter. “We did our best to keep the others back.”

“You didn’t keep Joe Nelson back. He was at the front nearly all the way.”

“You told us to keep Ruddy, Ditmore and Snow back—you didn’t say a word about Nelson,” growled Paxton.

“Well, who imagined he’d come in first? I didn’t think he’d last more than six or seven miles.”

“If your money is gone, so is mine,” sighed Coulter. “And I’ll be about ten dollars in debt in the bargain.”

“I am in debt, too,” added Paxton. “And besides, look at both of us,” and he pointed to their numerous scratches, now covered with court-plaster.

“Somebody said you were going to make a complaint against Ruddy and his chums?”

“So we were—when we thought one or another of ’em would come in ahead,” answered Paxton. “But as none of them won, what’s the use? We don’t want to get into a row if we can’t gain anything by it. If one of ’em had won, we might have raised a kick and had the winner disqualified—and saved our cash.”

“Were they to blame at all?” asked Ritter, curiously.

“No—but you needn’t tell outsiders so,” answered Gus Coulter.

While this talk was going on Jack and Andy sought out Mr. Strong. They found



the assistant teacher in one of the classrooms, marking some lesson papers.

“Mr. Strong, we would like to speak to you for a few minutes in private,” said the young major.

“I am at your service, Major Ruddy,” answered George Strong, with a smile.

“We want to ask you about those insane men,” continued Jack. “We hate to bring the matter up, but something has happened of which we think you should be informed.”

“You mean my relatives, Mr. Shaff and Mr. Callax?” questioned George Strong, quickly, and now he was all attention.

“Yes,” said Andy. “Are they in custody?”

“I think so. I left them in care of a relative in Malone, in the upper part of this state. They went to Malone, you know, after they left Ithaca. The relative, a party named Spelterly, caught them with ease, and he promised me to put them in a private sanitarium. But why do you ask about this? Have you seen or heard of them?”

“We think we have, although we are not sure,” answered Jack, and then he and Andy told of what had occurred at the Chetwood cottage and when the bicycle had broken down. At the recital George Strong shook his head slowly and sorrowfully.

“This looks very much as if they were at large again and up to their old tricks,” he said. “I’ll have to look into it without delay.”

“If you go out to hunt the men up, won’t you let us go with you?” asked Andy.

“Perhaps. But I want to make certain they are at large at first.”

“Well, those men ought to be rounded up, no matter who they are.”

“That is true. But if they are not Mr. Callax and Mr. Shaff then I think I’ll allow the regular authorities to do the work,” answered the teacher.

The great bicycle race was the talk of Putnam Hall for several days and Joe

Nelson was warmly congratulated over his victory. Pepper, Jack and Andy waited for the proposed “kick” from Paxton and Coulter, but it did not materialize.

“They know better than to make such a complaint,” said Andy, at last. But Jack guessed the truth.

“They found out we didn’t win,” said he, “so a complaint wouldn’t help them, so far as the outcome of the contest is concerned.”

Jack had already turned his sloop over to the shipbuilders to have the necessary repairs and alterations made, and now received word that the *Alice* would be ready for him on the following Monday afternoon.

“Now you can get ready for that race with the *Ajax*,” said Pepper, when he heard of this. “I hope you beat the Pornell craft all hollow.”

“I hope so myself, but I heard yesterday that Fred Century had his boat in A1 condition and was doing wonders with her.”

“Well, you’ll do wonders with the *Alice*, and I know it,” said Pepper encouragingly.

On Friday night Jack and Andy were called into Mr. Strong’s private room. The assistant teacher looked much worried.

“I have just received word from my relative in Malone,” he said. “It appears that Bart Callax and Paul Shaff were confined in a private sanitarium in Syracuse. But they escaped some time ago, and though the keepers have hunted everywhere for them they have not been found.”

“Then the men in the green masks and hoods must have been them,” cried the young major.

“I am afraid you are right, Major Ruddy, and it worries me greatly. I really do not know what to do. I hate to make a public affair of this—especially in view of what has occurred in the past.”

“Why not start a private hunt for the two men?” suggested Andy. “We are willing to do all we can to aid you.”

“I know you are and I am thankful to you for it,” said the teacher warmly.

“To-morrow is Saturday,” said the young major. “Why not organize a party and search the woods back of the Chetwood home? We may be able to get on the trail of the pair.”

The matter was talked over for half an hour, and in the end George Strong said he would go out the next morning, and take Andy and Jack with him.

“Can’t you take Pepper Ditmore, too, and Stuffer—I mean Paul—Singleton?” asked Jack. “I know they won’t say a word to anybody, and you may need them—if we find the men and they show fight.”

“I want no violence, Major Ruddy. I think we made a mistake before by not treating Mr. Callax and Mr. Shaff very gently.”

“You can’t treat a man gently if he wants to club you,” answered Andy bluntly.

“That is true, and we’ll have to arm ourselves, I suppose, in case of emergency.” George Strong mused for a moment. “Yes, you may include Ditmore and Singleton in the party—but tell them to keep quiet about it. I do not wish this affair to become the talk of the whole school.”

It was arranged they should leave Putnam Hall directly after breakfast. They would first visit the Chetwood cottage and from that point endeavor to trace the flight of the insane men.

“They must be stopping somewhere,” said the teacher. “Maybe they have some sort of hut in the woods.”

“And they wanted that looking-glass to furnish it with,” added Andy and started to laugh, but quickly subsided, for he did not want to give George Strong pain.

“It is a terrible thing to be out of one’s head,” said the teacher. “I can remember when both of those men were as clear-minded as anybody. But after they lost their money they seemed to let their brains go with it.”

“It certainly is strange that they were both affected,” said Jack.

“Yes, that is something I can hardly understand myself,” answered the teacher.

“Although they are closely related and have the same blood flowing in their veins.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SEARCHING THE WOODS

As the party did not know how long they would be away, they took a lunch with them. A number of the cadets were curious over their departure.

“Wonder where they are bound?” said Ritter to his cronies. He met them at the end of the campus, striding along at a rapid gait.

“Oh, it’s one of Strong’s object-lesson walks, I guess,” sneered Coulter. “He’ll show them how some plants grow, and get some specimens of rocks, and all that.”

“Humph! that’s too dead slow for me,” drawled Ritter. “I’d rather skin down to Dollon’s in town and play pool and have a smoke.”

“You’re right,” said Paxton. “Only, I haven’t any money with which to pay for such fun.”

“I heard something at breakfast,” went on Reff Ritter, as the three cronies walked down to the lake. “Jack Ruddy is going to get his sloop back soon, and he is going to arrange for a regular race with that new Pornell boat, the *Ajax*.”

“I hope he loses,” growled Coulter.

“Ditto here,” joined in Paxton.

“He will lose—if I have anything to do with it,” continued Ritter in a whisper, so as not to be overheard.

“What do you mean?” came from both of his followers.

“I mean just this, and I have no hesitation about telling you, for I expect you to

stand by me. It will be a chance to get back some of the money we lost.”

“I think I see your plan,” said Coulter. “You want to fix it so Ruddy loses the race.”

“Exactly, and I think it will be dead easy, too.”

“How?”

“Will you stand in with me if I tell you?”

“Most likely we will,” said Paxton. “Of course we don’t want to do something and get found out.”

“Nobody will be found out. We can make Ruddy lose, and if we lay some good bets on the Pornell boat we can make all kinds of money—win back what we lost and make a pile besides.” And then the three cronies went out on the lake, to row and to talk over the plan that Reff Ritter had in mind to carry out.

“That bicycle race has made Ritter and his crowd as sour as lemons,” said Andy, as he and Stuffer walked on behind the others, on the way to the Chetwood cottage. “Every time they pass me they glare at me like wild animals. They don’t pretend to be the least bit civil.”

“You’ve got to be on your guard, Andy. If they have anything up their sleeve you want to be ready for them.”

“I think they are down on Jack more than on any of us.”

“That’s because he is major of the battalion, I guess. Ritter said once that he thought there ought to be a change of officers every month. I reckon he wanted to carry a sword for a change.”

“I don’t believe the cadets will ever elect him—he hasn’t friends enough.”

“Oh, he might be able to buy up some votes—among the fellows who love to be taken out for a good time. He has lots of spending money.”

“Not now. He lost about all he had, so I understand, on the bicycle race.”

It did not take the party headed by Mr. Strong long to reach the Chetwood cottage. They found the cripple there and also the working man, Jake Dengert.

“I expect my folks by noon,” said Nat Chetwood. “Then I’ll find out if the men took anything valuable from the trunk.”

“I believe you said they took a vest,” said George Strong.

“Yes, but that wasn’t of much account, although it did belong to a suit.”

The cripple had seen nothing further of the strange men and had no idea what had become of the pair. The hired man had tramped out into the woods for a short distance, but had been unable to get on their trail.

“Perhaps we’ll not find them either,” said George Strong, with a sigh. “But we can try it anyway.” He did not deem it necessary just yet to mention the fact that he thought the men might be his relatives.

With the cadets beside him, the teacher struck out into the woods, in the direction Jack and Andy pointed out. They passed a fine spring and stopped long enough for a drink. Then they took to a trail that led up a small hill away from the lake. On either side of the trail were trees and dense brushwood.

“I think they must have come along this trail—or else they lost themselves in the woods,” declared the young major.

“It is a wonder they have not hopelessly lost themselves before now,” said the teacher. “How far is it from here to the spot where you met them the day your bicycle broke down?”

“Must be all of three miles,” answered Andy, and Pepper nodded.

“They must keep more or less to the woods,” continued George Strong. “Otherwise more folks would see them and spread the alarm. I asked that man at the cottage and he said he had heard nobody mention them.”

“They must have some hiding spot in the woods, where they lay off their masks and hoods,” said Stuffer. “They must fancy themselves regular highwaymen.”

“If they are my relatives, and I capture them, I’ll take good care that they do not

get away again,” said George Strong.

The boys tramped on with the teacher until all calculated they had covered fully a mile. Then they came out of the woods at a point where a babbling brook ran over some rocks. Here was a good-sized clearing and at the farther end a hut that had once been used by lumbermen or charcoal burners.

“They may be in that hut!” cried George Strong. “Let us spread out and surround the building. Use no violence if it can possibly be avoided.”

They scattered as he advised, and approached the lonely hut from all sides. The door stood wide open and with great caution George Strong looked inside. Much to his disappointment nobody was present.

“But they have been here!” cried Jack, as he and his chums entered the dilapidated structure. “See, there are the remains of a fire and of a roast chicken.”

“Must have been living on the contents of some farmers’ hen-houses,” murmured Pepper. “This looks as if they had been here last night if not this morning.”

“Here is the looking-glass that was stolen,” cried Andy, pointing to the object, hanging on the wall.

All searched the old hut with interest and came across a collection of curious objects such as only two crazy men would think of collecting. There were several pots with the bottoms knocked out, a tufted easy chair with the back gone, three shoes for the right foot and none for the left, a bundle of at least forty old neckties, several articles about airships cut from Sunday newspapers, a box of face powder, four hammers, three plumb lines, a dictionary with the words beginning with B and M cut out, and six broken ice skates. Around one skate was a watch chain that appeared to be of solid gold.

“That’s one thing of value,” said Jack. “If it is solid gold it ought to be worth forty or fifty dollars.”

“It is certainly a very fine chain,” answered George Strong. “And unless I am very much mistaken, it belongs to Mr. Callax. It runs in my mind that he used to wear just such a chain as this. They once tried to take it away from him for safe



keeping, but he raised such a row they let him keep it.”

“Perhaps they’ll come back to this hut this afternoon or to-night,” suggested Stuffer.

“It is possible. I hope they do,” answered the teacher.

They searched the woods until the middle of the afternoon, stopping only long enough to eat their lunch, which they washed down with a drink from a spring. Then they went back to the hut. Here it was arranged that Pepper, Andy and Jack should go out to the other side of the woods, while the teacher and Stuffer remained at the hut, to await the possible coming of the crazy men.

The three chums soon reached a portion of the woods overlooking a fair-sized stream that flowed into the lake. They were seeking for some means of crossing the brook when Jack suddenly pulled Andy and Pepper back into the bushes.

“What is it?” whispered the Imp.

“I just saw somebody standing on the other side of the brook,” answered the young major.

“One of the crazy men?” queried Andy.

“No, I think it was somebody we wish very much to meet—and in just such a place as this.”

“Who?”

“Will Carey.”

## **CHAPTER XIX**

### **THE BONE AND BLOOD CLUB**

“If it is Carey, and he is alone, we are in luck,” said Pepper.

“Do we want him to recognize us?” asked Andy.

“I don’t know as it will make much difference,” returned the young major, thoughtfully. “Perhaps we can scare him better by disguising ourselves.”

“Let us make certain it is Carey first and that he is alone.”

They walked up the brook a short distance and reached a bank that was several feet higher than that opposite. From this point it was an easy matter to clear the watercourse at a bound. Then they hurried down in the direction of the lake.

“There he is!” whispered Jack, a few minutes later, and pointed through the trees to where a youth lay sprawled out on the seat of a small rowboat. Beside him were the oars and some fishing tackle and also a long pole which appeared to have a drag-net attached to it.

“He is certainly alone,” said Pepper. “But he may be waiting for somebody.”

“Then the quicker we act the better,” returned Jack.

They decided to cut holes in their handkerchiefs through which to see and then tie the articles over their faces. Then they turned their cadet coats inside out, and rubbed a little dust on their necks and hands.

“He won’t recognize us very easily,” said the young major, “especially if we disguise our voices.”

“I move Jack be made our general spokesman,” said Pepper. “He knows just

what we want.”

“We want to get Flossie Ford’s bracelet for her, that’s all,” said Andy. “Incidentally if we can scare Carey half to death for annoying Flossie, so much the better.”

“We’ll scare him right enough,” answered Jack, grimly.

Will Carey was dozing away when of a sudden he felt himself in the grasp of three strong pairs of hands. In a twinkling he was turned over and his hands were bound behind him with a piece of his own fishing line.

“Stop!” he cried out. “Help!”

“Silence, if you don’t want to get hurt!” was the command, in a deep, rough voice, and now he saw that his assailants were three masked persons. They jerked him to his feet, made him step ashore, and in a jiffy compelled him to march a short distance into the thickest of the woods.

“Wha—what do yo—you want of me?” he faltered. He was far from being brave and his present predicament filled him with terror.

“We want you to behave yourself,” was the answer, delivered in the deep voice previously employed by Jack.

“I—I am behaving myself.”

“You are not, Will Carey. You have done an innocent person a great wrong—and the Bone and Blood Club of Cedarville is going to see to it that you right that wrong.”

“Are you the—the Bone and Bone Club?” faltered the Pornell Academy student.

“We are some of the members of that club—chosen to right this great wrong you have done.”

“I—I hav—haven’t done any wrong.”

“You have—do not dare to deny it—or the vengeance of the Bone and Blood Club shall descend upon your head like a fiery serpent and a stroke of lightning,”

answered Jack, making his voice as deep and menacing as possible.

“Wha—what have I done?” asked Carey. He was now shaking so he could scarcely speak.

“You have turned thief—yes, and you have told lies. Is it not so, Brothers of the Worthy Bone and Blood Club?” asked Jack, turning to his chums.

“It is so!” exclaimed Andy and Pepper, nodding slowly and solemnly.

“What? Me?” gasped Will Carey.

“Yes.”

“Wha—what did I steal?”

“You took from one of the fairest maidens of Cedarville a golden bracelet, and you have persistently refused to return the same.”

“Oh!” gasped the prisoner, and the others saw him turn pale.

“You must return the bracelet,” went on Jack. “Otherwise it will be our painful duty to chastise you severely and then hand you over to the police.”

“No! no! Don’t do that!” shrieked the Pornell Academy student. “Let me go! Please let me go!”

“Will you return the bracelet?”

“I—I did return it.”

“That is not true.”

“I put it in a box of chocolates and——”

“That story is absolutely false, prisoner. You have the bracelet still.”

“No, I have not,” and Will Carey began to tremble. “Oh, please let me go, please do!”

“You have the bracelet and must give it up,” continued Jack. He turned to his

chums. “Is the fire burning well?”

“It is burning well, your Highness,” answered Andy and Pepper.

“Then take the prisoner and warm him up. He appears to be cold, for he is shivering.”

“No, no—you shan’t put me against any fire and blister me!” yelled Will Carey, trembling from head to foot. “Oh, please let me go, please do! I’ll—I’ll give you all I’m worth!”

“We want nothing but the bracelet you took,” answered Jack, firmly.

“And that we must and shall have!” came in a deep chorus from the others.

“I—I haven’t got the bracelet, I tell you,” said the prisoner, desperately.

“What did you do with it—sell it?”

“No, I—I gave it back.”

“You did not give it back, and if you say so again we’ll put you on the fire to roast.”

“Mercy! Mercy!” screamed the Pornell Academy student and fell on his knees. He thought he was in the hands of three rough persons who would be only too willing to carry out the dire threat made.

“What have you done with that bracelet?” demanded Jack, again. “Come, out with the truth at once.” And he raised a stick he had picked up, as if to strike Carey to the ground.

“Don’t hit me! I—I lost the bracelet!” screamed Will Carey. “Oh, don’t hurt me, please don’t! I couldn’t help it. I—I had the bracelet in a blue tin box in my pocket and I went for a ride on a sloop, and the wind knocked the sloop over and the box dropped out of my pocket. That’s the honest truth, I give you my word on it. I’d give anything to get the bracelet back.”

“You dropped it out of your pocket while on the lake,” said Jack, with deep interest. “Was that the day the *Ajax* raced with the *Alice*?”

“Yes.”

“Have you hunted for the tin box since?”

“Half a dozen times. Why, I came out to-day to look for it. The water is rather shallow where the sloop went over, and I made a net and dragged the bottom, but I couldn’t find the box or the bracelet. The net is in my boat now.”

The chums were now convinced that Will Carey was telling the truth, for Jack and Pepper well remembered how concerned Carey had been over the loss of the blue tin box and how he had not told what it contained. The presence of the drag-net also added color to his tale.

“Why didn’t you give Miss Ford her bracelet long ago?” demanded Pepper.

“I—I wanted to—to tease her a little, that’s all,” answered the Pornell Academy student. “I wish I had given it to her now.”

“If you can’t find the bracelet, you’ll have to pay for it,” said Andy.

“I—I know that, but—but——”

“But what?” demanded Jack.

“I—I can’t pay for it right away. My father has cut me down—he says I am spending too much foolishly,—and I lost a lot on a bowling match we had with some Putnam Hall fellows.”

“Yes, we heard something about that bowling match,” said Jack, not to let the prisoner get a clue to his identity.

“Hullo! hullo!” came a shout from a distance. “Where are you, Jack? Where are you, Pepper? Hullo, Andy! Come this way, we have got on the trail of those two crazy men!”

A moment later Stuffer burst into view and came walking toward them.

“Keep back!” shouted Jack, quickly. “Keep back and don’t say anything. We’ll soon be with you.” And then he whispered something to his two chums.

“All right,” answered both.

“We’ll see you again soon, Carey,” said the young major, to the prisoner. “In the meantime, remember you must either find that bracelet or pay for it,” and so speaking he cut the line that bound Carey’s hands and rushed off in the direction of Stuffer, followed by Andy and Pepper.

## **CHAPTER XX**

### **THE END OF THE SEARCH**

“What have you been doing?” demanded Stuffer, as the party of four cadets turned in the direction of the hut in the woods.

“Oh, we’ve been playing a joke on a Pornell Academy student,” answered Jack, quickly. He thought it best to keep the affair of the bracelet a secret. All had taken the handkerchiefs from their faces.

“Wasn’t that Will Carey?”

“Yes,” said Andy.

“Where are the crazy men?” asked Pepper, to change the subject.

“Why, we walked out on a certain foot path we discovered after you were gone and we found a spot where they had been camping. One of them had written a bit of doggerel on a sheet of paper and tacked it to a tree. Mr. Strong says it is in Callax’s handwriting. In the doggerel he bids farewell to this neighborhood.”

“Does Mr. Strong think they have left?” asked Andy.

“He doesn’t know what to think. He wants to follow the foot path.”

It did not take the cadets long to reach the spot where Stuffer had left George Strong. Then the whole party hurried along the foot path, which ran directly through the dense woods. Here the ground was soft and they could see the fresh footprints with ease.

“I believe this leads to the lake,” said the teacher, and he was right. They soon came out on the lake shore, at a point where there was a tiny cove. Close at hand was a boat stake, and they could plainly see where a boat had been tied up and



how it had been shoved off with an oar.

“They have gone,” said George Strong, and the tone of his voice showed his disappointment.

“And there is no telling where they have gone to,” added the young major.

They walked up and down the lake shore for a good distance, but saw no craft containing two men. Not far away was a small boat and this contained Will Carey, who was rowing slowly in the direction of the Pornell Academy dock.

“I suppose we’ll have to give this hunt up,” said the teacher, when it was about four o’clock in the afternoon. “Too bad! I thought sure we’d capture them.”

“Are you going back to the Chetwood cottage?” asked Pepper.

“We may as well—it is not far out of our way.”

When they arrived at the cottage they found that Mr. Chetwood and his wife had returned. The man was looking anxiously for them to appear.

“Git ’em?” he cried, when he caught sight of them.

“No,” answered Jack.

“I am sorry—dreffully sorry,” and Mr. Chetwood heaved a deep sigh.

“I believe they stole a vest belonging to you,” said George Strong. “Anything in it of value?”

“Yes and no,” was the reply. “You see, I had a roll of old Confederate money and I kept it in the vest—why, I don’t know. Well, the roll is gone.”

“What sort of bills did it contain?” questioned Pepper.

“Ten and twenty dollar bills—about two hundred dollars in all. But as they was Confederate I reckon they ain’t wuth ten or twenty cents now. You see I was a Confederate soldier in the war—that’s how I got the bills,” explained Mr. Chetwood.

“Those men are crazy,” said George Strong. “I may as well tell you they are

distant relatives of mine—although I am in no wise responsible for their safe keeping. They have been in charge of another relative, who put them in a sanitarium. I suppose if they try to pass some of those Confederate bills they'll get into more trouble.”

“It may lead to their capture—and that will be something,” was Jack’s comment.

“They sure was crazy—to steal the looking-glass and the inkwell,” said Mr. Chetwood. “I am glad they didn’t harm Nat. Being a cripple, he can’t defend himself very well.”

“I shall do all I can to capture them,” said Mr. Strong.

“You’ll have to capture them,” said Mrs. Chetwood. “Why everybody will be afraid to stir out—with two crazy men roaming the woods.”

The secret could not be kept longer, and by Sunday persons living for miles around knew that the crazy men who had once before been in that vicinity were again at large. A large number of men and boys went out to hunt for the pair, but without avail. George Strong offered a reward of one hundred dollars for their capture, but even this did not bring them to light.

As soon as the young major got his sloop back from the boat builders he tried the craft and found her in prime condition. The new mainsail and the improved tiller worked wonders, to his mind, and he took a keen delight in running the *Alice* up and down the lake in front of Putnam Hall.

“She’s a good deal better than she was,” said he to Pepper. “I am not afraid to match her against anything on this lake.”

“Well, that is saying a good deal, Jack,” returned his chum.

“I know what I am talking about,” was the young major’s confident answer.

During the week Jack met Fred Century, and from the latter learned that the owner of a sloop up the lake was also anxious for a race.

“His name is Bob Anderson,” said Century. “He owns a sloop named the *Neptune*.”

“I have seen the boat,” answered Jack. “Rather a rakish-looking craft.”

“So she is. Well, Anderson is very anxious for a race, and I was wondering if we couldn’t make ours a three-handed affair.”

“I am willing if you are,” said Jack, promptly. “I am not afraid of anything on the lake.”

“Then supposing we see Anderson and have a talk with him?”

A meeting was held, and the upshot of the conference was that a race between the three sloops was arranged for the following Saturday, weather permitting. Some gentlemen from the New York Yacht Club, who were stopping at Ithaca, volunteered to judge the race and were accepted by all interested.

“Well, now you’ll have two sloops to beat,” said Dale to Jack after the race had been decided upon. “They tell me the *Neptune* is a splendid craft.”

“Dale, do you think they can beat the *Alice*?” demanded the young major.

“I hope not. But you don’t want to be too sure of this race, Jack.”

“I am sure of the *Alice*.”

As Bob Anderson was well known in local society, his coming into the race created quite a stir. As a consequence the race became a social affair, and hundreds of people said they would attend. Many boathouses along the lake were to be decorated.

“We are going out—in papa’s yacht,” said Laura Ford to Andy when they chanced to meet near the Hall one afternoon.

“I am glad to hear it,” said Andy. “But you must be careful and not go overboard again—as you did when we had the rowing races.”

“Oh, we’ll be very careful,” answered the girl. And then she gave Andy a warm look, for she had not forgotten what a great service he and his chums had done her and her sister on that occasion.

“I only hope we have a spanking breeze,” said Jack to Pepper, as they and Andy

took a short sail in the *Alice* on Friday afternoon. “If there is one thing I despise in a race it is a drifting match.”

“Maybe you’ll get too much wind,” said Pepper.

“Can’t get too much for me—I know how to handle my boat. She’ll not go over with me, as the *Ajax* did with Fred Century.”

“Does Century think he can beat the *Neptune*?” asked Andy.

“In a breeze, yes. But he told me the *Neptune* was such a rakish sloop she could drift well when the wind died down. So if we don’t get much wind Anderson’s craft may win.”

“Sure the boat is in the best possible condition,” went on Pepper, with a sharp look around.

“Doesn’t she look it?”

“She certainly does.”

“If I were you, I’d keep a close eye on my boat until that race is sailed,” said Andy, after a few minutes of silence.

“What do you mean, Andy?”

“Well, you know we’ve got our enemies in this school. Ritter and his crowd would rather see you lose than win.”

“Paxton and Coulter certainly wanted us to lose that bicycle race,” said Pepper.

“Do you think they’d try to injure the boat?” asked the young major.

“Possibly—I don’t know.”

“If I thought that I’d—I’d stay on board to-night,” said Jack.

“No, you want a good night’s sleep,” said Pepper. “One of us can stay on board as well as you can.”

“Let us both stay,” came from Andy. “We’ll be company for each other.”

“Maybe you can’t get permission to stay?” said the owner of the *Alice*.

“We won’t ask for permission,” answered Pepper. “We’ll just come down here after lights are out and bunk till morning. Then we’ll watch our chance and slip back into the Hall some time before breakfast.”

And so it was arranged.

## CHAPTER XXI

### SURPRISES OF A NIGHT

Ritter, Paxton and Coulter had arranged their plans with care, and they were practically certain that the *Alice* would lose the boat race. As a consequence the three unworthies did not hesitate to go around and lay wagers that either the *Ajax* or the *Neptune* would win. As they did not wish to bet openly against their own school, so to speak, they made the most of their wagers through a man in Cedarville named Crosby—a fellow who kept a variety store, including sporting goods and fishing tackle.

“We’ll make Jack Ruddy and his chums feel sick, and rake in some good shekels in the bargain,” said Reff Ritter.

“We must be careful in our work,” cautioned Paxton. “If we get caught there’s no telling what they’ll do to us.”

“Oh, don’t croak before you’re hurt, Nick.”

“Do you want to get caught?”

“Certainly not—and we won’t be. This work is to be done in the dark and while we are disguised. At the first alarm we can skip. But I don’t look for any alarm,” concluded Ritter.

It was well that Andy and Pepper pretended to go to bed with the others, for Ritter and his cohorts were on the watch.

“I told you the coast would be clear,” said Ritter. “All the same, I guess we had better lay low until about midnight.”

It was nearly eleven when Andy and Pepper arose, donned their clothing, and taking their shoes in their hands, stole from the dormitory and crept downstairs

to a side door of the Hall. Nobody saw them, and in a moment more they were walking rapidly over the school grounds in the direction of the lake.

“This may be a fool’s errand after all,” said Pepper. “But it is better than running the risk of having somebody injure the sloop.”

“We should have come armed,” returned his chum. “Anybody who would injure a boat just before a race ought to be shot.”

“We’ll arm ourselves when we get down to the boathouse.”

Reaching the building, they went inside and procured some old hockey sticks that chanced to be handy. Then they entered a rowboat at the dock and poled over to the *Alice*. Clambering aboard, they tied the rowboat to the stern. As chance would have it, the gentle breeze that was blowing sent the small craft around to the lake side of the sloop, so the rowboat was not visible from the shore.

The two cadets had put in rather a strenuous day and were consequently sleepy. They wanted to get what rest they could for the morrow and so decided to watch by turns, two hours at a stretch. It was a clear night, with countless stars overhead, and the day for the great race promised to be all that could be desired.

The *Alice* had a little cuddy, just large enough to accommodate two, and into this the boys crawled, to get out of the night air, which was damp. Andy was the first to rest, while Pepper sat up, his eyes trained on the dimly-lit shore.

An hour passed and the Imp was growing decidedly sleepy. He scanned his watch closely by the light of the stars and saw it was not yet time to awaken his companion. Then he trained his eyes on shore once more.

What was that, a dog or a person, crawling steadily forward from behind the trees which lined that side of the campus? He sat up and peered forth eagerly. Then another figure appeared and soon a third. They were coming straight for the boathouse.

“Something doing,” he mused. “Wonder if I had better call Andy?”

He decided to wait. The three figures came closer and soon stood beside the boathouse. He now saw that they were three persons wearing black gowns and

black hoods.

“Andy!” he whispered, and pinched his chum’s arm. At once the acrobatic youth awoke and started to speak. But Pepper put his hand over his chum’s mouth.

“Three persons are coming—let us lay low and see what they want to do,” whispered Pepper. “Don’t make any noise.”

Andy understood. “Who are they?” he asked, after a few seconds of silence, during which he peered over the guard rail of the sloop at the three figures.

“I don’t know—but I guess we’ll soon find out.”

After that the two cadets on the *Alice* kept quiet. In the meantime Ritter and his cronies walked up and down the boat dock, inspecting the sloop from that point.

“Anybody on board?” asked Paxton, in a voice which trembled slightly.

“Don’t see anybody,” answered Ritter.

“Thought we weren’t to do any talking,” came from Coulter.

“We’ll shut up—if anybody appears,” said the leader of the unworthies.

With great caution they got out a rowboat and entered it. Then they poled silently to the side of the *Alice* and peered over the guard rail. Andy and Pepper were out of sight, under some sailcloth. But their eyes and ears were on the alert in the semi-darkness.

“I guess the coast is clear,” they heard Ritter say. “Come on aboard. We can doctor up those ropes and the rudder in no time if we get right at them.”

“Did you bring your file?” asked Paxton.

“Yes. I hope you didn’t forget yours.”

“I’ve got it.”

“And I’ve got mine,” put in Coulter. “And here is the pot of stuff for the rudder.”

“I’ll put that drag on the keel the last thing,” said Ritter. “I’ll have to strip to do



it, I suppose.”

“Will it hold?” questioned Paxton.

“Trust me for that,” answered Reff Ritter.

Not without difficulty he crawled aboard the sloop and his cronies followed. They gave a brief look into the cuddy, but did not discover those in hiding.

“Now, let us go at the ropes first,” said Ritter. “Mind, don’t file them too thin. We don’t want them to break until the race is on.”

“I’d like to put a hole in the sloop’s bottom and sink her,” growled Gus Coulter.

“If you did that, the race would be off,” said Ritter. “No, we want her to go in and lose.”

The three plotters moved to various parts of the *Alice* and with large files began to saw on several of the ropes used for hoisting the mainsail and jib.

“I guess we have heard enough,” whispered Pepper. “You recognize them, don’t you?”

“Ritter, Coulter and Paxton,” said Andy, promptly.

“Correct.”

“Shall we dash at them with our sticks?”

“Let us scare them first—make out we are officers of the law.”

“All right.”

Throwing the sailcloth aside Pepper and Andy leaped to their feet, brandishing the hockey sticks over their heads.

“Surrender, in the name of the law!” shouted the Imp, in the most manly tone he could command.

“Throw up your hands, or we’ll fire on you!” yelled Andy, and pointed the handle of a bailing dipper at Ritter.

“We’re discovered!” screamed Paxton, and dropped the file he was using. “Oh, what shall we do?”

“It’s the police!” faltered Gus Coulter. “We have been trapped!”

“Don’t fire!” gasped Ritter, falling back at the sight of the dipper handle, which gleamed slightly in the starlight. “We don’t mean any harm. This is—er—only a joke.”

“You’ll find it a joke, when you are in the Ithaca jail,” said Andy, in a bass voice.

“Oh, they are going to lock us up!” screamed Paxton. Then he gave a closer look at who was before him. “Why, it’s Andy Snow!” he gasped.

“Andy Snow and, yes, Pepper Ditmore!” said Reff Ritter, and his voice showed how disgusted he felt over being deceived.

“That’s only a dipper!” came from Coulter. “Think you are great to scare us, don’t you?” he sneered.

“You get off of this sloop, and in a hurry, too!” cried Pepper. “If you don’t we’ll give you the thrashing of your lives.”

“Thrashing, eh?” demanded Reff Ritter, throwing back his black hood. “Perhaps two can play at that game.”

“That’s right—and the two will be Pepper and myself,” put in Andy. “Leave this sloop at once, or take the consequences.”

“How many of you on board?” asked Coulter, trying to look into the cuddy.

“None of your business.”

“I believe they are alone,” said Ritter. “And if so we are three to two. What’s the matter with capturing ’em?” he added, struck by a sudden idea.

“Capturing ’em?” repeated his cronies.

“Exactly. Then we’ll fix it so they won’t squeal on us.”

“That’s the talk!” cried Coulter. “Let us capture ’em by all means!”

And then the three unworthies advanced on Andy and Pepper to make them prisoners.

## **CHAPTER XXII**

### **PRISONERS ON THE SLOOP**

A short, sharp fight followed, and Ritter and Coulter were struck over the head with the hockey sticks. But then Andy slipped and fell and Ritter pounced upon him. Then Coulter attacked Pepper from the front and Paxton came up in the rear. Suddenly Paxton pulled the Imp's legs from under him, and as he went down his head struck on the guard rail and he was momentarily stunned. He was thrown into the cuddy and Andy was thrown after him, and then the tiny door was shut and bolted. To make the temporary prison more secure the Ritter crowd ran a heavy rope around the cuddy, just as one would put a rope around a big box.

"Hi, let us out!" shouted Andy and began to pound on the door loudly. "If you don't we'll make it hot for you!"

"You've got to stay in there for awhile," answered Ritter, coolly.

Paxton and Coulter were much excited over the turn affairs had taken and wanted to know what was to be done next.

"Let us talk it over," said Ritter. "I didn't expect this any more than you did." And he rubbed the lump one of the hockey sticks had raised over his left ear. "I'll pay Ditmore back for that crack, see if I don't," he added, bitterly.

"I got one, too, from Snow," growled Coulter.

"We had better move the sloop from shore," went on Ritter. "If we don't some others may come down and make it warm for us."

The anchor was hoisted and the line attached to the dock cast off. Then they raised the mainsail and stood out into the darkness of the lake. Soon Putnam Hall and the boathouse were lost in the gloom.

“Now lower the sail and let her drift while we talk,” said Ritter.

“She may go on the rocks,” warned Coulter.

“If she does she won’t hit hard enough to hurt. The breeze has about died out.”

In the cuddy Pepper had regained his senses. With the door shut the place was suffocating, and all the two cadets could think of was to get out. They pounded and kicked on the door, but this brought no response.

“We can’t stay in here!” gasped Pepper.

“We’ll have to stay—unless we can break out,” returned his chum. “And I’d hate to damage the sloop to that extent—right before the race, too.”

“But they’ll damage her more yet, Andy!”

“If they dare!”

“I believe Ritter would do anything. He is bound to make the *Alice* lose that race.”

Several minutes went by, and the two prisoners heard those outside walking from end to end of the sloop. Then came a sudden jar, followed by another.

“Hi! Paxton is overboard!” they heard Coulter yell.

“I didn’t think we’d hit those rocks so hard,” answered Reff Ritter.

“Now is our time to get out—if we can!” cried Pepper. “If we break the door we can have it mended.”

Both boys braced themselves against the walls of the cuddy and put their shoulders to the door. It could not stand this strain and in a few seconds began to crack. Then it flew outward, over the rope with which it had been held in, and the cadets followed. They saw Coulter and Ritter at the bow, bending over to assist Paxton, who was wading in water up to his neck.

“They are loose!” yelled Coulter, but ere he could say more Andy grabbed him and pushed him overboard. Pepper caught Ritter and got that young rascal partly

over the rail, but there he clung.

“Help me, Andy!” cried Pepper, and Andy did so by putting his foot on Ritter’s hand. The bully gave a yell, and a moment later went over backward with a loud splash.

The *Alice* had struck several half-submerged rocks, but had not gone upon them. The craft was now drifting further up the lake, leaving Ritter, Paxton and Coulter behind.

“Ho there!” roared Paxton, “don’t leave us!”

“Come back!” added Ritter and Coulter.

“Not to-night!” answered Pepper, grimly. “Maybe we’ll see you in the morning.”

“If you don’t come back, I’ll get square, remember that!” yelled Ritter, in a rage.

“See you to-morrow,” sang out Andy.

The rocks upon which the sloop had struck were several in number and were backed up by a small island situated a hundred feet or more from the shore. Peering into the gloom those on the craft saw the others wade out of the water to the island.

“They are safe,” said Pepper. “But they are a good mile and a half from Putnam Hall.”

“And they can’t get ashore without swimming,” added Andy. “But as their clothing is already wet, that won’t hurt them much.”

“What scoundrels they are—to want to injure this boat!”

“That’s true. We really ought to report them to Captain Putnam and have them expelled.”

“We might do that if it wasn’t for one thing. Remember, we have no right to be away from the school to-night. We should have obtained permission to watch the sloop.”

“I know it—and that will keep us from reporting Ritter and his cronies. Just the same, we ought to let the others know of this—I don’t mean Jack alone, but every one in our crowd.”

“We will let them know it. See, here is one of the files they brought along.”

“And here is the pot of stuff they were going to put on the rudder, and the drag for the keel. This drag alone would have been enough to make the boat lose—in a close race.”

The boys, while talking, had hoisted the mainsail of the *Alice*, and now they tacked and stood back in the direction of the school dock. They did not go close to shore, however, but anchored at a point quite a distance from the boathouse. They had towed the two rowboats along and left them floating at the stern.

“Do you think they’ll dare to come back?” asked Andy, after his excitement had died down.

“I don’t think so. If they do we can fight them off, or sail the boat away.”

The boys lit a lantern that was on board and by its light inspected the damage done to the cuddy door. Fortunately the hinges had given way and these could be renewed with but little cost. The craft had been mussed up a little, but that was all. Where Ritter and his cronies had gone to work on the ropes the damage was slight.

“They struck on the rocks just in time,” was Pepper’s decision. “Had they kept on, these ropes would soon have been ruined, and it would have been too late to refit the *Alice* for that race.”

At last the boys settled down for the remainder of the night. They took turns at sleeping and each got a good nap if nothing more. As soon as the first bell rang Andy went ashore, sneaked into the school, and up to his dormitory.

“Any alarm?” asked Jack, who was just getting up.

“I just guess!” answered the acrobatic youth. “If we hadn’t remained on board your cake would have been dough to-day.” And then he related what had occurred. Not only the young major, but all of the others present listened with interest. Then a rush was made downstairs and to the boat dock.

“The villains!” was all the young major could say. “I really ought to expose them. But as you say, it might get you into trouble,” and he turned to Andy and Pepper.

“I know why Ritter and his crowd are so anxious to make you lose,” said Dale. “I wasn’t going to mention it, but now I think it best. That gang have put money into the hands of Crosby, who runs the store in Cedarville, and he is putting it up against Putnam Hall. They want to win a pot of money, I think.”

“Then the bitterest pill you can make them swallow is to win the race,” cried Joe Nelson.

“That’s the way I figure it,” went on Dale. “Do that and you’ll probably break them.”

“A fellow who bets deserves to lose,” said Joe Nelson, who never wagered on anything.

The chums wondered if they would see anything of Ritter, Paxton and Coulter at breakfast, but those unworthies managed to keep out of sight. From Billy Sabine they learned that Ritter had been excused from getting up because of a headache, and the others had asked for permission to make an early trip to Cedarville.

“They are afraid to show themselves,” said Jack, and he was right; none of the trio mingled with the other cadets until it was time for the great race to come off.

It had been decided that each sloop should carry a crew of five, and Jack had selected Andy, Pepper, Dale and Stuffer to accompany him. This crew went out in the *Alice* during the morning, and learned from the judges of the race just how the contest was to be sailed. The course was a triangular one, exactly twelve miles in length. The start was to be made at exactly two o’clock and if by six o’clock no boat had covered the course the race was to be declared off for the day and was to be sailed the following Saturday, weather permitting.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE RACE OF THE SLOOPS

“This is as fine a breeze as anybody would want,” declared Pepper, as the *Alice* went out to take her position for the race.

“There is Mr. Ford’s yacht,” came from Andy. “The girls are on board and so are Mr. and Mrs. Ford and some others.”

“I’ll sail past them,” said Jack, and did so. All aboard the rich man’s craft waved their handkerchiefs at the cadets.

“I hope you win!” shouted Laura.

“So do I!” added Flossie.

“We’ll do our best!” answered the young major, and then sailed out of hearing distance.

The *Ajax* was already on hand and in a few minutes more the *Neptune* hove in sight. Both of the boats were in the pink of condition and caused a murmur of admiration as they moved majestically down to the starting position.

“I can tell yez wan thing,” said Hogan, who was in a small boat with several others. “Jack has his work cut out for him this day, so he has!”

“Yes, the other boats will surely give him a hard push for first place,” returned Bart Conners.

“Oh, the *Alice* has got to win!” cried Harry Blossom, enthusiastically.

The lake front was lined with spectators and the water was alive with rowboats, motor boats and sailing craft of various sorts. Captain Putnam had hired a good-

sized motor boat for the use of himself, Mr. Strong, and a dozen guests; Doctor Pornell had a small steamer, and the immediate friends of Bob Anderson of the *Neptune* were out in force in a yacht that was a mass of bunting from end to end. Flags were everywhere, and the scene, as the sloops lined up for the start, could not have been more animated.

The last directions were given by the judges, and the three sloops commenced to maneuver for position. Then a cannon was discharged, and over the line shot the *Alice*, the *Ajax* and the *Neptune*; and the great boat race was on.

A shout went up, lasting fully a minute. Then the assembled multitude settled down to watch the struggle with keen interest.

The breeze was what might be termed a smart one, and each sloop had every sail out to its fullest. Each bow cut the water like a thing of life, sending a fine spray over the deck. For the occasion everybody aboard the three boats was dressed in a suit of white duck, with white duck hat.

The triangular course had been laid out to suit the wind. Scarcely had the first half mile been covered when the wind shifted slightly, sending the three boats directly forward to the end of the first leg of the race. All were making splendid time, and when the first half of the leg was finished they were practically abreast of each other.

“The *Ajax* isn’t capsizing to-day,” remarked Pepper, as they bowled merrily along. “Fred Century must have put some extra lead in her keel.”

“I think he is handling her better,” answered Jack. “He has had plenty of practice since the day she capsized.”

“Anderson certainly knows how to handle the *Neptune*,” said Andy. “He brought her around too neat for anything at the start.”

“Somebody told me he was the best sailor on Cayuga Lake,” said Dale. “To my mind, we have more to fear from the *Neptune* than we have from the *Ajax*.”

“Humph! Just now it looks like a tie race all around,” murmured Stuffer. Even the excitement of the race could not make him forget his longing for something to eat, and he was munching on some peanuts he had brought along.

On and on rushed the three sloops, until the end of the first leg of the triangular course was in sight. The *Neptune* was now slightly in advance, with the *Alice* and the *Ajax* close on her heels.

“The *Neptune* is ahead!” was the cry. “She is rounding the stake boat of the first leg!”

“The *Alice* and the *Ajax* are a tie!”

“No, the *Ajax* is ahead—she is rounding inside of the *Alice*!”

So the cries ran on. In the meantime the *Neptune* started on the second leg of the race, with the *Ajax* fifty yards to the rear. As said, the *Ajax* had rounded inside of the *Alice*, thus giving her not a little advantage over the Putnam Hall craft.

“Too bad!” groaned Dale.

“I think Fred Century cut you pretty close,” observed Pepper to Jack.

“He did, and if he does it again I’ll ram our bow into him,” answered the young skipper.

As the wind had shifted, all of the craft had to do considerable tacking on the second leg of the course. Bob Anderson was certainly a master at this and drew steadily to the front. Fred Century kept second place, with Jack not more than fifty yards behind him.

Presently the wind appeared to grow “choppy,” that is, it came and went in gusts. This did not appear to suit the *Neptune*, and soon that craft fell back. In the meantime, as if by magic, the *Ajax* increased her speed and forged to the front. At this came a wild cheering from the supporters of Pornell Academy, and the steamer engaged by Doctor Pornell blew her whistle loudly.

“It’s nip and tuck between the *Neptune* and the *Ajax*,” said some on shore. “The *Alice* doesn’t seem to be in it.”

“Queer, too,” said one man. “I thought she looked as good as any of them.”

“Jack, do you think Reff Ritter put some kind of a drag on us after all?” asked Pepper anxiously.

“No,” was the prompt answer.

“Then why are we falling behind?”

“Fortunes of war I suppose,” and the young major heaved a deep sigh.

“We have got to win!” shouted Andy.

“If we can,” said Jack. “I think we’ll stand a chance on the last leg—if the wind doesn’t shift again.”

The shifting wind had ruffed up the lake bosom not a little, and ever and anon the water dashed over the bow of the *Alice*, wetting every cadet on board. But the youths paid little attention to this—they were willing to be soaked a dozen times over if only they might win the race.

“More wind coming, I think,” said Stuffer, pointing to some clouds that were piling up.

“I hope it does come,” cried Jack. “The *Alice* is a boat for a good, stiff blow.”

When the end of the second leg was reached the *Ajax* rounded the stakeboat first. The *Neptune* followed at a distance of a hundred yards. The *Alice* was now a good eighth of a mile behind.

“Can’t we do something to catch up, Jack?” asked Pepper. To stand still and see the other boats go ahead was maddening.

“Yes,” was the young skipper’s sudden reply. “Stand by to shift the mainsail.”

All sprang to obey his order—for to do anything was better than to do nothing. Jack had his eyes on a spot ahead on the surface of the lake. He was watching the water very intently and at the same time speculating on the clouds that were piling up to the westward.

A moment later he gave the order to shift the sail. Over it went with a crack, and the *Alice*’s rudder came around like lightning. The craft quickly veered, leaving the course taken by the two sloops ahead.

“Why, you are out of the course!” shouted Andy. “Oh, Jack, this won’t do at all!”

“We’ll lose ground,” added Stuffer. “Oh, Jack, you’re going wrong!” And in his excitement he threw several peanut kernels overboard and stuffed the shells in his mouth.

“A soft spot ahead—I am going to keep out of it,” was the young skipper’s answer, and he nodded to show what he meant. “They are in it, thank goodness!” he muttered, a minute later.

Then the others understood—and rejoiced. The *Ajax* had run into a “soft spot,” so called by sailors—that is, a place where the wind had died away. The *Neptune* followed, and the sails of both craft flapped idly against the masts. The *Alice* went wide of the “soft spot,” and though she felt something of the decrease in the wind, yet Jack managed to keep her sails filled and slowly but surely came up on a reach and overlapped the *Neptune*. Then she forged ahead after the *Ajax*.

The excitement was now intense, for only a mile and a half of the race remained to be sailed. The *Ajax* crawled or rather drifted out of the “soft spot,” and then came forward with a rush. The wind clouds now made themselves felt, especially on board the *Alice*. Jack’s face lost its look of worry.

“This is what we want!” he cried.

For half a mile it was now nip and tuck between the *Ajax* and the *Alice*. But then the wind increased so swiftly that Fred Century had to lower his topsail. With all sails set the *Alice* drew ahead, racing through the water like a thing of life.

“The *Alice* wins! The *Alice* wins!” was the cry, and this proved correct, for six minutes later the Putnam Hall sloop came over the line the winner by an eighth of a mile. The *Ajax* beat the *Neptune* by less than a hundred yards.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### FRED CENTURY MAKES A CHANGE

It was a great victory for Jack and his chums, and when they came ashore they were almost hugged to death by their friends.

“When I saw you drop behind my heart went down into my shoes,” said Harry Blossom. “But when you came in ahead my heart——”

“Climbed out of your cap, I suppose,” finished Pepper.

“Just about. Oh, it’s a dandy victory,” and Harry’s face fairly beamed.

“Boys, you did very well—very well indeed!” exclaimed Captain Putnam, coming up and extending his hands. “Major Ruddy, you have a sloop to be proud of.”

“I am proud of the *Alice*,” answered Jack. “She did all that I expected of her.”

Bob Anderson took his defeat calmly, but the Pornell Academy students were very bitter, Roy Bock and his cronies especially. Bock and the others had lost considerable money on the contest and this galled them exceedingly. They could not understand how the *Alice* had forged ahead when it looked as if she was beaten.

“Guess Century must have stood in with the Putnam Hall fellows,” growled Bock.

“That is absolutely false!” cried one of the students who had helped to sail the *Ajax*. A wordy war followed, and in the end Roy Bock got his nose punched, which made him more angry than ever.

Ritter, Paxton and Coulter were much downcast by the way the race had

terminated. All their plans to do Jack's boat an injury had failed, and how they were going to meet their money obligations they did not know.

"We are up against it good and hard," said Ritter.

"I've got a plan," said Coulter. "Roy Bock is dead sore over this. He thinks there was some understanding between Century and Jack Ruddy. Let us see if we can't get him to make some kind of a protest, and we can back him up in it. Perhaps we can have the bets declared off."

This plot met with instant favor at Reff Ritter's hands and he lost no time in interviewing Roy Bock. Bock did not want to run the risk of another encounter with the Century crowd, yet he, too, could not afford to lose the money he had staked on the contest.

"Let us talk this over all around," said he, and called in several of his cronies. Later he and his friends, with Ritter, Paxton and Coulter, went to one of the judges of the contest.

"We think this race ought to be declared off," said Bock.

"For what reason?" demanded the gentleman, in astonishment.

"We think the *Ajax* lost the race on purpose," went on Bock, and then he told of how Jack and Fred Century were friends, and how the young major had assisted those on the *Ajax* when that craft had capsized.

"Fred Century does not like it at Pornell Academy and is going to leave at the end of this term," Bock went on. "I am certain he threw the race into the hands of the Putnam Hall cadets."

"So am I," added Ritter boldly, and then he spoke of a talk he had overheard between Jack, Pepper and Fred Century. He said that there could not be the slightest doubt but what Century had played into Jack Ruddy's hands, and Coulter and Paxton said the same.

This statement aroused a hot discussion, in which all the judges and several outsiders took part.

"I consider every sloop was sailed honestly," said one judge. "If ever a race was

won fairly this was won by the *Alice*.” Bock and Ritter continued to talk, but the judges would not consider their protest, and at last they had to withdraw much crestfallen.

Bock’s actions made a large number of the Putnam Hall cadets very bitter, and on Saturday night there was something of a pitched battle between Andy, Pepper, Dale and six other of the Putnam Hall boys and Roy Bock and his gang. Blows were freely exchanged, and sticks and stones were used, and Bock and his cohorts were forced to run away. Bock got a black eye and Grimes had two of his front teeth loosened, while Gussic had his coat split up the back from bottom to top. Of course the Putnam Hall cadets suffered somewhat, but they went back to the school happy, having driven the enemy from the field.

“We must get square for this,” said Grimes. “I’ll never rest until I pay them back.”

“Right you are,” returned Roy Bock. “I wish I could get back at the whole school.”

“That’s the talk,” added Gussic. “We ought to do something that will make the whole crowd sore.”

“I’ll think up something,” said Bock. “Just give me a couple of days to do it in.”

The report that Fred Century was going to leave Pornell Academy was true. Fred was a bright, clean-hearted lad, and the manners of such fellows as Bock and Grimes did not please him. More than this, when he went to Doctor Pornell that individual treated him coolly.

“I have heard what Roy Bock has said,” said the doctor. “And I must confess I am inclined to think that you sailed the race in such a fashion as to please Putnam Hall.”

“Doctor Pornell, this is—is infamous!” cried Fred. “If you are going to side with Bock I am going to leave this school at once!”

“As you please,” answered the master of the academy. He was in a particularly bad humor that morning.

Fred Century was as good as his word. He walked to Cedarville that noon and



sent a special message to his father, relating what had occurred. Mr. Century arrived at Pornell Academy the next morning, and a warm discussion between him and Doctor Pornell followed, lasting an hour. Then Fred packed his trunk and left the academy never to return.

“This disarranges my plans, Fred,” said his father, on the way to Cedarville. “Your mother and I were going to Rome, you know. I do not know what to do with you.”

“I know what I’d like to do,” answered Fred. “I’d like to go to Putnam Hall. The fellows there are bright and up-to-date, and not such cads as Bock and Grimes.”

“Hum!” mused Mr. Century. “Well, that might be arranged. I know Putnam Hall has a fine reputation. I thought of sending you there in the first place.”

The carriage was halted, and soon it was turned around and driven in the direction of Putnam Hall. Arriving at that institution, Mr. Century went in to interview Captain Putnam. When he came out to call his son he was smiling.

“It is arranged, Fred, and you are to be a cadet here from to-day on.”

“Good enough!” cried the youth. “That suits me right down to the ground, father!”

“In taking you as a pupil I think Captain Putnam is making something of a sacrifice,” continued Mr. Century. “You know of this talk about the boat race. Well, now some folks will cry ‘fraud’ louder than ever. But Captain Putnam says he is willing to stand by what the judges decided, especially as he has received word from Bob Anderson that he thinks the race was a fair one.”

Fred was taken to the private office, and he shook hands warmly with Captain Putnam.

“I know you are doing me a favor, Captain Putnam,” said the boy. “In return I shall do all in my power to make myself a credit to your school.”

“That is all I ask, Century,” answered the master of the Hall. “I presume it will not be necessary for anybody to introduce you,” he added, with a faint smile.

“No, sir—I know about a dozen of the boys already.”

“I will have your measure taken for a uniform—and have you assigned to one of the dormitories,” went on Captain Putnam, and called in one of his assistants. After Fred had been measured and his trunk had been taken upstairs, Captain Putnam called in Jack.

“Major Ruddy, allow me to acquaint you with a new pupil, Frederic Century,” he said.

“A new pupil!” cried the young major. “Why—er—is Fred coming to school here?”

“I am, Jack. Aren’t you glad to have me?”

“I am delighted!” cried Jack, and smiled warmly. “But this is the greatest surprise yet,” he continued. “I thought you were at Pornell.”

“Quit yesterday—and mighty glad to do it. I’ll tell you all about it some other time.”

Fred Century was warmly welcomed by Pepper, Andy and the others. He was put in a dormitory next to that occupied by Jack and his chums, the two apartments being connected by a door which was rarely locked. He was made to feel at home, and said over and over again he was more than pleased over the change he had made.

“Doctor Pornell is as great a cad as some of his pupils,” said he to Pepper. “How some of the better class of boys can stand him is more than I can comprehend.”

“Well, some folks have more money than brains,” answered the Imp. “And that’s the case with many of the Pornellites, I imagine.”

“Bock is down on Putnam Hall,” went on Fred. “He vows he will get square.”

“We’ll watch out for him,” answered Pepper. “I reckon we can give him as good as he sends.”

## **CHAPTER XXV**

### **A CANNON AND A FLAGSTAFF DISAPPEAR**

“Jack!”

“What is it, Andy? You look as excited as if you had met a lion face to face.”  
And the young major sat up in bed in wonder.

“Hustle into your clothing and come downstairs. Something awful has happened.”

“What’s up?” asked Pepper, who had overheard the talk.

“The cannon is gone, and so is the flagstaff!”

“What!” came in a chorus from several cadets. “The cannon and the flagstaff gone?”

“Exactly.”

“Do you mean the new cannon?” queried the young major.

“To be sure I do. The old one is back in the barn.”

“Where has it gone to?” asked Stuffer.

“Nobody knows. It disappeared during the night—and so did the flagstaff.”

“Did somebody chop the flagstaff down?” asked Dale.

“Sure, an’ anybody mane enough to do that ought to be hung, so they ought!”  
growled Emerald.

“No, they didn’t chop it down—they dug it up.”

“And carted it off?” asked Pepper.

“Yes. Come on down. You never saw Captain Putnam so excited in his life. Peleg Snuggers just called him up. I got up ahead of time because I couldn’t sleep any longer,” concluded Andy.

The news spread like wildfire, and soon cadets were hurrying downstairs in droves, some but partly dressed. The alarm was as great as if the school had been on fire.

The beautiful brass cannon, purchased by Captain Putnam but a few weeks before, was gone. So was the noble flagstaff which from sunrise to sunset floated a large American flag. On the grass of the campus were the marks of the cannon wheels, leading to the roadway. From the hole left by the flagstaff there was a long, straight mark over the grass leading to the lake front.

“It is easy to guess what was done,” said Jack. “The cannon was carted off by the aid of boys, men, or horses. Men or boys dug up the flagstaff, hauled it down to the lake, and floated it away.”

“Major Ruddy, assemble the battalion at once,” cried Captain Putnam. And a minute later came the well-known rattle of the drum. But this was not needed, for all the cadets were already at hand, looking at the spots where the cannon and the flagstaff had stood, and asking a hundred and one questions.

“Young gentlemen,” began Captain Putnam, when the two companies of the battalion stood at attention, “a grave lot of mischief has been done here. You all know what that mischief is. If any of you are guilty I want such guilty party or parties to stand forth.”

There was a pause. The cadets looked at each other, but not a boy budged.

“I want no hanging-fire in this,” went on the master of the Hall. “Fun is fun, but this is going too far. Is anybody guilty or not? If guilty, take two steps forward.”

Nobody moved.

“The quartermaster will call the roll. As each name is uttered the cadet will

answer 'Guilty' or 'Not guilty,' as the case may be. Quartermaster, are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" was the prompt reply of the cadet who held the position of quartermaster of the battalion.

The roll was speedily called and every cadet present answered "Not guilty," in a loud, clear voice.

"This is strange," mused Captain Putnam. "Can this have been done by some outsiders?"

"Captain Putnam, will you allow me to say something," said Fred Century.

"Certainly. Come here."

Fred marched to the front and close to the master of the Hall.

"If this is the work of outsiders I think you can blame some of the fellows of Pornell Academy," said Fred. "They are very bitter against the cadets here and would be willing to do something like what has been accomplished to make trouble."

"Humph!" murmured Captain Putnam, and his face became a study. "Have you any proofs against them?"

"No, sir—only I know they wanted to play some kind of a trick."

"This is a mighty poor trick."

"I think so myself."

The battalion was paraded and marched into the mess hall, and Captain Putnam jumped into his buggy and drove over to Pornell Academy. He received a very cold reception at Doctor Pornell's hands.

"My pupils are young gentlemen, never guilty of such rascality," said the doctor, haughtily. "I do not deem it necessary to question them concerning it." And that was all the satisfaction the master of Putnam Hall got.

The cadets had to go to their studies after breakfast, but directly the school sessions were over for the day, many formed searching parties and went forth hunting for the missing cannon and the flagstaff. Jack headed a party composed of Pepper, Andy and Dale, to look for the cannon, while Fred Century took out Bart Conners and Emerald in the *Ajax*, to look for the flagstaff.

For a short distance along the road Jack and his chums could see the marks of the cannon wheels quite plainly. But further on the road was rocky and hard, and there the tracks could not be told from those made by wagons and automobiles.

“This is a good deal like looking for a pin in a haystack,” observed Pepper, as they came to a halt at a cross roads. “The question is, Did they keep straight on, or turn to the right or left?”

“I don’t think they’d dare to take the cannon to Cedarville,” said Andy. “Somebody would be sure to see them and tell Captain Putnam.”

“I believe Andy is right,” put in Dale. “They must have gone to the right or the left with the piece.”

“The road to the right runs down to the lake front, and it is soft and muddy. They’d not be likely to go that way.”

“Not unless they dumped the cannon into the lake,” answered Jack.

“I don’t believe they’d dare do that,” said Dale. “They’d be afraid of arrest if found out.”

“Then they must have gone up into the woods,” said Jack. “Let us hunt in that direction first anyway.”

The cadets were now joined by others, until a crowd of at least twenty were following the road leading through the woods to Benson Pond. For a distance the road was rocky and hard, then it grew soft, and they beheld the tracks made by the cannon quite plainly.

“Hurrah! we are on the right road!” cried the young major.

So anxious was the crowd to locate the cannon that nearly all started on a run. They had to pass directly under some heavy, overhanging trees, and then came to

where there was a stony cliff and something of a shale road.

“I don’t see the tracks of the cannon any more!” cried one cadet, and soon the others said the same.

“Wait till we reach some spot where the road is soft,” suggested Dale, and trudged along hopefully for quarter of a mile. Here they came to the edge of Benson Pond and the roadway was muddy; but the cannon tracks were nowhere to be seen.

“We’ve missed it,” said Jack, with something of a groan.

“Let us retrace our steps and look on both sides of the road,” suggested Pepper. “Maybe we’ll find out just where they left the road. They may have hauled the cannon right into the middle of the woods.”

They walked back slowly, scattering to both sides of the highway. But not a sign of the cannon tracks was brought to light.

“This is certainly a mystery,” sighed Dale. “The tracks seem to fade into thin air. Now they couldn’t make the piece disappear like that.”

“Not unless they blew it up,” said Jack.

“Oh, Jack, do you think they did that?” cried Andy.

“No, I don’t. I’ve got an idea and I am going back to where we saw those tracks last.” And the young major stalked off, followed by the majority of the others.

Reaching the place mentioned, Jack began a close inspection of the ground. Then he moved on slowly, looking first at the ground and then at the trees overhead. Thus he covered several hundred feet, stopping at a spot where the roadbed was a solid mass of rock.

“I’ve found the cannon!” he cried suddenly.

“Found it?” came from a dozen others, and they rushed to his side.

“Yes.”

“Where is it, Jack?”

“Up in yonder tree. They hauled it to this spot, tied it to two big ropes, and pulled it up into the tree. There it is now, shining out between the leaves!” And the young major pointed in triumph to the discovery he had made.



## **CHAPTER XXVI**

### **A CONFERENCE OF IMPORTANCE**

The cannon was there, true enough, and as they viewed the piece the cadets present set up a cheer.

“It must have been quite a job to hoist the cannon into the tree,” observed Pepper, as he gazed at the object, which was suspended fully fifteen feet over his head.

“Not so difficult as you think, Pep,” answered Andy. “All they had to do was to throw the ropes over a couple of strong limbs, tie the ends to the cannon, and hoist away. If they had horses—and I think they had—it was easy.”

“The question is, How are we to get the cannon down, now we have found it,” said another cadet.

“Wait till I see if the ropes have been cut short or simply wound around the tree limbs,” answered Jack. “Somebody give me a boost into the tree.”

He was soon up in the branches, and then he announced that the ropes were sufficiently long to lower the cannon to the ground.

“But we’ll have to work with care,” he said. “For if the cannon should slip somebody may get hurt,—and, besides, the cannon would be damaged by falling on the rocks.”

Half a dozen cadets climbed up into the big tree. The cannon weighed seven or eight hundred pounds and was dangling by several feet of the two ropes. The ropes were slipped into two crotches of the tree and then wound around a part of the trunk. With care the boys loosened the fastenings.

“Now let down an inch at a time,” ordered the young cadet. “If you find the rope

slipping catch it in the crotch and wind tight at once. Don't take any chances, for Captain Putnam would never forgive you if you smashed the cannon. It cost a neat penny, I am sure."

Slowly and cautiously the cadets in the tree, assisted by some who had hold of the ends of the ropes below, lowered the cannon to the rocky roadbed. Then all gathered around to inspect the find. It seemed to be in perfect condition, for which they were thankful.

### THEY LOWERED THE CANNON TO THE ROCKY ROADBED.

#### THEY LOWERED THE CANNON TO THE ROCKY ROADBED.

With all the boys pulling on the rope it was an easy matter to haul the cannon in the direction of Putnam Hall. As they approached the campus they set up a loud yell, which speedily brought many cadets and teachers to the scene.

"Well done!" cried George Strong, as he looked the cannon over. "Captain Putnam will be delighted to know you have found it."

"Where is he?" asked Jack.

"Out on a hunt for it."

"Let's fire a salute," suggested Pepper. "That will let everybody know the cannon is found."

The teacher was willing, and the piece was quickly cleaned and loaded. Jack touched it off, and the report echoed far and wide across the lake and the hills around.

"There, that will tell everybody we're on deck," cried Andy, with a happy laugh.

"I hope they heard it at Pornell Academy," said Dale.

"They must have—unless they are all deaf," said Stuffer. "Gosh! say that work makes a fellow hungry, doesn't it?" he added, and hurried off to get a bite to eat.

Captain Putnam came in shortly after the cannon was fired and viewed the piece with pleasure. He had to smile when he heard how the cannon had been

discovered swung up in the tree.

“Certainly a schoolboy’s prank,” he said. “But not the kind I admire.”

Fred Century and the others on the *Ajax* did not come in until dark. They had hunted along the lake shore for several miles, but without success.

“Maybe they hung the flagpole in a tree, too,” suggested Pepper, with a grin.

“It is not likely,” answered Bart Connors. “They’d be more apt to weight it down with stones and sink it.”

“Did you look in the water along shore?” asked Andy.

“We did in some spots, but not in all. We can go out again,” said Fred.

To keep the flag afloat that day Captain Putnam had a rope run from the school building to a nearby tree. He said he would wait a week and see if the flagstaff could not be found and then would order a new one.

“And if I can find out who took the old one I’ll make them pay for it,” he added.

Several days slipped by, and then Staffer came to Jack and Pepper while the others were in the gymnasium exercising.

“I’ve discovered something,” said Staffer, and then related how he had been down to Cedarville on business and had overheard Roy Bock and several other students talking at the steamboat dock. He had not overheard all that was said, but had heard enough to make sure that Bock and about twelve other students from Pornell Academy had come over to Putnam Hall at midnight and removed the cannon and the flagstaff.

“They think it is a mighty good joke,” said Paul. “I wish we could pay them back for it.”

“We’ll do it, Staffer!” cried Pepper. “I was just waiting to make sure Bock and his gang were guilty.”

“Did you learn anything about the flagstaff?” asked Andy.

“They took it somewhere down to Rock Point and sunk it.”

“In that case, the best thing we can do is to go after it and tow it back,” said Jack.

They visited the Point the next afternoon and after some trouble located the flagstaff. It was in several feet of water, and held down by two old doors loaded with stones. Once the stones were rolled away, doors and flagstaff came to the surface instantly. Then the big pole was fastened to the stern of the *Alice* and towed to the Putnam Hall dock.

“Let’s fire another salute, to celebrate the return of the flagstaff!” cried Andy, and this, with Captain Putnam’s permission, was done. The cadets insisted upon planting the flagstaff themselves, just as it had been before, and the work was accomplished under Captain Putnam’s personal directions. Around the foot of the pole they dumped some rocks and poured in a quantity of cement to bind them.

“Now, they’ll never take that pole up again,” said Jack, and they never did, for the flagstaff stands on the campus of Putnam Hall to this day.

That night a special meeting was called in the dormitory occupied by Jack, Pepper and others. About a dozen cadets were invited to be present, including Fred Century, and not a one was absent.

“This meeting is called for the purpose of discussing ways and means of squaring accounts with the Pornell Academy students,” said Pepper, who presided. “They had the audacity to come here at midnight and steal our cannon and our flagstaff. We owe them something. Are we going to pay ’em back or not?”

“Pay ’em back!” was the cry.

“With interest,” added Andy.

“Compound interest,” said Dale, and this made everybody laugh.

“We have here a fellow cadet who was once a student at Pornell,” continued Pepper. “He knows the buildings and the grounds thoroughly. He is willing to tell us all he knows, and will even lead us if we say so.”

“Good for Fred Century,” cried one cadet. “May he live as long as his name implies!”

“I have been at some pains to question Fred concerning Pornell Academy and he says they have in the building one room devoted to trophies of all sorts—flags, banners, silver cups, a statue, and so on, which the various teams and clubs of the school have won from time to time. It has been suggested”—here Pepper drew down the corners of his mouth in such a fashion that everybody knew the suggestion was his own—“It has been suggested that somebody might go over there some night and——”

“Clean the room out!” cried Andy. “Just the cheese!”

“It’s as good as done,—provided Fred will show us where that room is,” said Dale.

“With the greatest of pleasure,” was Fred Century’s answer. “It is on the north side of the building, next to Doctor Pornell’s private office.”

“Of course we don’t want to hurt any of the things,” said Jack. “We can’t run off with them as they did with the cannon and the flagstaff.”

“We can take sacks along and some excelsior,” said Pepper. “No, I don’t go in for breaking or scratching anything myself. And, oh, say!” he cried suddenly. “I’ve got a dandy hiding place for them!”

“Where?” asked several.

“I’ll tell you that after we have the stuff out of the school. I am sure you will all agree with me the hiding place will be the best ever.”

“In a tree?” queried Andy.

“Not much! This is something better,” said the Imp.

The matter was talked over for half an hour, and then it was decided that the raid on the Pornell Academy trophy room should take place the following night.

## CHAPTER XXVII IN THE TROPHY ROOM

“Are we all here?”

“We are.”

“Then come along. And don’t make any noise on your life!”

These words were spoken in whispers. Following them came silence, and like so many shadows fourteen forms crept downstairs and out of a side door of Putnam Hall. They made directly for the boathouse dock. The boys were in their socks, and did not attempt to don their shoes until safe in the boathouse.

Three rowboats were in readiness, and as quietly as possible the cadets entered them and shoved off. Into the water dropped the oars; and the three craft were headed for Pornell Academy.

“We might have gone in the sloops, but there is no telling about the wind,” said Jack, when he felt it would be safe to talk.

“We can row as well as not,” answered Andy. “The exercise will do us good.”

“I only hope it stays clear until we get back,” said Pepper, with an anxious look at the sky, where the clouds were beginning to hide the stars from view.

“Say, fellows, are you sure Mumps or some other sneak isn’t on to our game?” asked Stuffer.

“That’s a risk we had to run,” answered Bart Connors. “I don’t believe Mumps knows of this, though.”

Nearly all of the boys were good oarsmen, and by their united efforts the three

boats moved swiftly over the bosom of Cayuga Lake. Not another craft seemed to be stirring, and the night was as quiet as a graveyard.

“We are coming in sight of the Pornell dock,” said Jack, at last. “Now, Fred, you’ll have to lead the way, for you are the only one who knows all about this place.”

“I’ll do it,” answered the youth who had once been a Pornell Academy student.

The midnight prowlers left their rowboats tied up at the dock and followed Fred Century to the campus of the school and then to a doorway leading to the basement.

“This door is locked, but the servants usually leave the key on the window,” whispered Fred. “Here it is.” He took the key and unlocked the door. “Shall I go in alone and open the window to the trophy room, or do you want to come in this way?”

“You had better go in alone,” answered Jack. “We might stumble over something in the dark and make a noise. Where is the room?”

“Down there—the fifth window from here. You had better hide until I open the blinds.”

“We will,” whispered Pepper.

Carrying the bags and the excelsior they had brought along, the cadets retreated, leaving Fred to enter the school building alone. Fred closed and locked the door after him. Then the cadets outside crouched down behind some bushes.

“I hope he isn’t caught,” whispered Andy. “Somebody might take him for a burglar and shoot at him!”

“I see a light in one of the upper rooms,” said Jack. “That looks as if somebody was up.”

“There goes the light out,” answered Dale, a moment later.

With their hearts beating rapidly, the cadets waited. Now that they had really embarked on the midnight expedition they began to realize what a great

undertaking it was.

“If we are caught, Doctor Pornell may have us all locked up,” said one boy who was extra nervous.

“If you want to withdraw you can do so,” answered Jack. “Everyone to take part here must do so of his own free will.”

“I’ll tell yez what we’ll do,” said Hogan. “If an alarm comes run for the lake for all ye are worth!” And this was agreed upon by all.

Five minutes passed—to the waiting cadets it seemed much longer than that—and still they heard nothing from Fred. They gazed at the blinds of the trophy room anxiously.

“Maybe he has been caught and those inside are waiting to collar us, too,” suggested Harry Blossom.

“He may have had to wait for somebody,” returned Jack. “Remember that light we saw upstairs. That might have been a monitor or teacher going around.”

A few minutes later they saw one blind open softly and then the other. Then Fred’s head appeared in the semi-darkness and he beckoned to those outside.

“Keep quiet!” he whispered. “Don’t make a sound. I think one of the teachers is still up. I heard him talking to somebody and he said something about a toothache.”

“Confound his toothache!” murmured Pepper. “Why can’t he go to bed and go to sleep?”

“I guess he would if he could,” said Andy. “You don’t suppose he is staying up with a toothache for the fun of it?”

As silently as possible one cadet after another climbed in at the window. When all were inside, the blinds were closed and the curtain drawn and then lights were lit.

“Did you lock the door to the hall?” asked Jack of Fred.



“I did—and hung a bit of paper over the key-hole, too,” was the answer.

Without delay the midnight visitors unfolded their bags and got ready the excelsior. In a very few minutes—for all worked with nervous haste—they had packed away nearly every trophy the room contained. These included three flags, four banners, four silver cups, a gold tankard, a bronze statue of a bowler, a marble statue of an oarsman, a bronze tablet containing the names of the school champions for several years back, two decorated canoe paddles, and several other trophies of more or less importance.

“Moving day! moving day!  
Now is the time to get away!”

sang Pepper softly, as he tied up his bag of stuff.

“Hush!” whispered Jack, sternly. “Remember, we are not out of it yet. You can sing when we are on the lake.”

“I’ll be as mum as a mule with the lockjaw,” said Pepper, with a grin.

The trophy room was now totally bare excepting for several small rugs and a table. The rugs Andy began to roll up.

“Might as well finish up the job in first-class style,” said the acrobatic youth.

“Shall we leave a card behind?” asked Dale. “Compliments of Putnam Hall, or something like that?” questioned Stuffer.

“I have something better than a card,” answered Jack. “Just set that little table out in the middle of the floor.” And as some of the others did as requested he took from his pocket two small objects and placed them side by side on the table top. One was a toy cannon about two inches long and the other was a lady’s hatpin with a small American flag attached.

“Good! just the thing!” cried several.

“Couldn’t be better,” added Andy. “They’ll know where they came from right enough!”

“Hush!” came suddenly from Hogan. “I think I’m afther hearin’ footsteps in the

hall. Douse the glim!” And he suited the action to the words by putting out the lights.

All became as silent as ghosts and listened intently. They heard footsteps outside, coming nearer and nearer. They fully expected somebody to try the door, and wondered what would happen after that. But presently the footsteps died away in the other direction.

“Somebody going to the kitchen!” whispered Fred. “Guess it is the teacher who had the toothache. Maybe he wants to get some boiling water, or something like that.”

“Well, we are about ready to go, so why linger?” asked Stuffer.

With caution the blinds were again opened. The coast looked to be clear and they dropped to the campus outside, one at a time, and each with a bundle. Fred was the last to come out, and before doing so he unlocked the door to the hallway.

“There will be a surprise there in the morning,” he said.

“I reckon they’ll find out they have been paid back in their own coin,” answered Pepper.

Closing the window and the blinds, the cadets hurried to their boats and were soon out on the lake. Then Pepper told them of the place he had in mind for storing the trophies. That was a deserted house half way between Pornell Academy and Putnam Hall, and on the lake shore.

“The best possible place,” said Jack. “The house is supposed to be haunted and nobody ever goes there.”

Rowing swiftly, the cadets soon reached the vicinity of the so-called haunted house. They took their bags ashore and carried them up to the old dwelling, which was almost ready to fall down. In an upper room they found a big clothing closet and in this they placed all the trophies and closed and barred the door on them.

“Now let the Pornellites find them—if they can,” declared Pepper. “I rather think they’ll have a long hunt to do it.”

Then the cadets hurried back to the lake, rowed to the Putnam Hall dock, and lost no time in creeping into the school and up to their dormitories. Five minutes later all were in bed and trying to get to sleep.

## **CHAPTER XXVIII**

### **AN UNLOOKED-FOR DISAPPEARANCE**

The excitement at Putnam Hall over the disappearance of the cannon and the flagstaff was fully duplicated at Pornell Academy when it was discovered that the trophy room had been looted of its entire contents.

“This is an outrage!” stormed Doctor Pornell. “An outrage! I shall put somebody in prison for it!”

“Something has been left behind,” said a teacher who chanced to be with the doctor. “A toy flag and a toy cannon.”

“What!”

“See for yourself, Doctor.”

“Ha! I understand! A flag and a cannon indeed! This must be some of Captain Putnam’s work—to pay me back for the loss of his cannon and his flagstaff,” stormed Doctor Pornell. “I’ll see about it! I’ll have somebody in jail before night!”

The news soon spread, and great was the indignation among the students and especially among those who had helped to win the trophies.

“Well, we have only been paid back for what we did,” said one pupil, who had aided Roy Bock in the removal of the cannon and the flagstaff. “Those who play with fire mustn’t complain if they get their fingers burnt.”

“We must find those trophies,” declared another.

A hunt was made that day and also the next. In the meantime Doctor Pornell sent a decidedly sarcastic letter to Captain Putnam. This angered the master of

Putnam Hall exceedingly, and he sent an equally sarcastic letter in return; and there, for the time being, the matter rested,—so far as the Putnam Hall students were concerned.

But it did not rest with Roy Bock and his immediate cronies. In some manner Doctor Pornell learned that Bock had concocted the scheme to take away the cannon and the flagstaff, and consequently he considered Bock responsible for the removal of the trophies.

“You and your friends who took part in this disgraceful affair must get back those trophies,” said the doctor to Bock. “If you do not I shall punish you severely.”

“I—I will do what I can,” stammered Bock, who was so chagrined over being found out that he knew not what to say. That afternoon he and his cronies went out on another hunt for the missing things, but without result. They passed the deserted house, but did not go inside. Had they done so they might have seen something which would have amazed them exceedingly, for the old building now had strange visitors.

Some days after the trophies were removed from Pornell Academy Jack and Pepper were out in the *Alice* when they saw a youth in a rowboat pulling up the shore.

“That is Will Carey,” cried Pepper. “Let us sail over to him and find out if he has done anything about Flossie Ford’s bracelet.”

They caught Carey just as he was starting to fish. It was a favorite amusement with the Pornell Academy student and he took every available opportunity to indulge in it.

“Hello, Carey!” sang out the young major, as he brought the sloop around and told his chum to drop the mainsail.

“Hello yourself,” returned the other youth, not particularly pleased over the meeting.

“How is everything at Pornell Academy?” questioned Pepper.

“Guess you fellows know well enough. Did a big thing, didn’t you, to steal all

our trophies?”

“Are your trophies gone?” asked the Imp, innocently.

“Sure they are—and you fellows know it. You cleaned us out nicely I must say.”

“I am very, very sorry, Carey,” and Pepper grinned.

“You look it.”

“The trophies, eh?” said Jack. “When did Pornell ever win any trophies?”

“Oh, he means the trophies they bought at some junk shop,” said Pepper. “You know you can buy all kinds second-hand, for about twenty cents apiece.”

“These were trophies our school won!” exclaimed Will Carey.

“From who—some primary school, or kindergarten class?” asked the Imp.

“Oh, we can win ’em—and you’ll find it out some day,” growled the student from Pornell Academy.

“See here, Carey, we didn’t come over here to ask you about your trophies,” said Jack, earnestly. “We want to know what you have done about Flossie Ford’s bracelet.”

“Oh, can’t you drop that!”

“We could—but we are not going to,” declared the young major. “You must find that bracelet if you possibly can. Have you fished for it any more?”

“Yes, but——” Will Carey paused and looked at Jack and Pepper doubtfully. “Say, did I hear something about your meeting two masked men around here?” he went on earnestly.

“Perhaps you did—but what has that got to do with the bracelet?”

“Everything. Did the men have green masks and hoods?”

“Yes.”

“Then they must be the same.”

“The same? What do you mean?”

“They robbed me of the bracelet.”

“Robbed you!” cried Jack and Pepper in chorus.

“Yes.”

“But you said you had lost the bracelet—that it fell in the lake,” said the young major.

“Humph, I thought so.”

“Thought what?”

“You’re the Bone and Blood Club, ain’t you?”

“We are. Now what about this bracelet and the two masked men?”

“Why, a couple of days after you caught me I went fishing for the blue tin box again and found it. The bracelet was inside and all right. I took it out and started for the Ford place, intending to give it back to Flossie. On the road I met those two masked men, and they held me up and took the bracelet and a ruby ring away from me.”

“Is this true?” asked Pepper. “You are sure you are not fooling?”

“It is the positive truth—hope to die if it isn’t. The men had clubs and one had a butcher knife, and I admit they scared me half to death. They acted as if they were about half crazy. One said he was going to give the bracelet to the queen of the North Pole, or something like that.”

After that Will Carey did not hesitate to give the particulars of the encounter on the road. His description of the two insane men was so perfect it left no doubt in the minds of his hearers regarding the truth of the recital.

“I wish I could catch those chaps,” he added. “But they said if I told anybody they would come to the school and butcher me some night, so I haven’t dared to

open my mouth. Besides, I didn't want to let Doctor Pornell know about the bracelet."

"You say they had clubs and a butcher knife," said Jack.

"Yes, and each of 'em had a couple of white bags over his shoulder, stuffed with excelsior and other things."

"What!" almost yelled Jack and Pepper in concert.

"White bags. They had something in 'em wrapped in excelsior."

"Where was this?"

"On the back road—over yonder," and Will Carey pointed with his hand.

"Humph! We'll have to look into this," said the young major and looked meaningly at his chum. "We are in a hurry now. We'll see you later, Carey."

"But about those crazy men?" began the Pornell Academy student. He did not understand the sudden haste of the others.

"The authorities are already watching out for them," answered Jack. "Run up the mainsail again, Pep," he continued to his chum, and the *Alice* moved away from that locality.

"Jack, do you imagine those bags were our bags?" demanded Pepper, when they were out of hearing of the Pornell student.

"We'll soon know. I am going to sail for the deserted house at once."

"He said they were stuffed with excelsior."

"Yes, that is what made me suspicious."

The run to the vicinity of the old mansion did not take long. Reaching what was left of an old dock, they tied up, and almost ran to the building.

"Nobody around now, at all events," observed the young major, as they glanced through the lower rooms.



“No, but somebody has been here, Jack—by the muddy footprints.”

Wondering if their suspicions would prove correct, they mounted to the second story of the old mansion and ran into the room in the closet of which the trophies had been stored.

“Empty!” gasped Pepper, peering inside the closet.

“Every bag gone!” echoed Jack. “Those crazy men must have carted them all away!”

“Where did they take the things to?”

“That remains to be found out. And if we can’t find the things——” The young major paused. “Well, somebody will have a fine bill to pay, that’s certain!”

## **CHAPTER XXIX**

### **THE HILL CLIMBING CONTEST**

That night Jack called a special meeting of the cadets who had participated in the removal of the trophies from Pornell Academy. This took place in the gymnasium, and every possible care was taken to exclude outsiders.

“We are in a pickle,” admitted the young major. “Events have taken an unexpected turn, and what we had best do I do not know.” And then he told everything, how Will Carey had been robbed of the bracelet and his ring, and how the crazy men had carried off all the bags of trophies.

“Pepper and I did our best to trace the men, but we could not do it,” Jack went on. “We found some whisps of excelsior on the road, and some footprints, but not enough to follow to the end.”

The loss of the trophies carried consternation to everybody present, and the boys felt more than blue as they discussed the situation. They had expected to return the trophies to Pornell Academy in secret in the near future. Some were in favor of going to George Strong with their story.

“The crazy men are his relatives,” said one. “He ought to do all in his power to locate them.”

“If we go to him Captain Putnam will find out that we took the trophies,” said Andy. “And we don’t want that to happen—at least not yet.”

“I move we wait before we do anything,” said Dale. “Let us all go out into the woods and hunt for those men.”

“We don’t want to get killed,” said Stuffer.

“If we find them we needn’t show ourselves. The best plan would be to watch

'em until they go to sleep for the night and then run for help and bag 'em before they move in the morning."

"Dale talks as if he had spotted them already," said Bart, with a laugh.

"Well, you offer a better plan," retorted Dale.

It was finally decided that the cadets should wait at least a week before going to Mr. Strong or the authorities. In the meantime all were to make a strong effort to locate Bart Callax and Paul Shaff.

"I am going out every time I can get the chance," said Pepper, and many others said the same. Although they did not care to admit it, they were much worried over the disappearance of the trophies and wondered what they would have to pay to get out of the scrape if the things were not recovered.

"I suppose Doctor Pornell can make it hot for us," sighed Andy. "Hang it all! I almost wish we hadn't touched the things!"

Just as the meeting was breaking up a noise was heard in one of the lockers of the gymnasium. Pepper rushed to the door and flung it open and confronted Mumps, who looked too scared to speak.

"Playing the sneak, eh?" cried Pepper and yanked Mumps out on the gymnasium floor.

"I—I went into the—the locker to—to—er——"

"To pick violets, I suppose," said Andy. "Boys, he has been spying on us!"

"Down the sneak!"

"Make him promise to keep his mouth shut!"

"I—er—I won't say a word!" cried Mumps. "I promise you I won't. Oh, let me go, please let me go!"

"This way with the sneak!" cried Dale, and pointed to the shower bath at one end of the building.

“No, no!” yelled Mumps. “Don’t turn the water on me, please don’t! I—er—I didn’t come here of my own free will.”

“You didn’t?”

“No, Reff Ritter and Coulter and Paxton made me come,” whined the sneak.

“Were you going to report to them?” demanded Pepper.

“Yes. They made me do it.”

“Then we’ll let you off on one condition—and only one,” said Jack.

“What is that?”

“That you don’t breathe a word to anybody about what has been said.”

“All right, I promise.”

“If you break your promise——”

“We’ll make you wish you had never seen Putnam Hall,” finished Andy.

“That’s the talk,” cried several.

“I won’t say a word—positively I won’t,” answered Mumps, and then he was led to the door and fairly kicked out on the campus. It may be added here that he was so scared he never did say a word until long afterward. Ritter and his cronies tried to “pump him,” but the sneak put them off by stating the meeting was held to consider baseball matters for the coming season.

For three days, including Sunday, the cadets roamed around the vicinity of Putnam Hall, on the lookout for the two insane men. Occasionally they were watched by Ritter and his cronies and this once led to something of a fight between Jack and the bully. Ritter received a black eye and after that, for the time being, kept his distance.

Wednesday of that week was a half-holiday, and a number of the cadets arranged a hill-climbing contest. This was to consist of reaching the top of Devery Hill, three miles from the school. The contestants were not to go by the road, but must

travel in a straight line from Putnam Hall, over two small hills before Devery was reached.

“That is something to take the wind out of a fellow,” said Stuffer.

“You wouldn’t lose your wind so quickly if you didn’t eat so much,” replied Andy. “I am going into the race.”

“So am I,” said Pepper. “Jack says he will go, too.”

Sixteen cadets were to participate, and they were to start from the Hall campus at one o’clock in the afternoon. It was a cloudy day and some were afraid it was going to rain.

“Never mind, who’s afraid of a little rain,” said Jack.

“I am not,” answered Pepper.

“Do we take a lunch along?” inquired Stuffer anxiously.

“Certainly,” said Andy. “Onion cakes with liver syrup.”

“Well, I’m going to take a sandwich anyway,” declared the youth who loved to eat.

Promptly on time the sixteen cadets lined up for the race. All were lightly clad and in the best of spirits.

“Now remember,” said George Strong, who had been selected to start the racers off. “The boy to reach the flat rock on the top of Devery Hill first wins the race. Are you all ready? Then go!”

Away they went, pell-mell, across the campus, leaping a small hedge and running up a footpath leading to the top of the first hill. The teacher gave them a cheer and so did Captain Putnam, and Peleg Snuggers waved his big red handkerchief after them. The other cadets yelled wildly and ran along a short distance, but soon dropped behind.

Ritter and Paxton were in the race. Coulter had thought to enter, but was suffering from a sore toe. There were to be two prizes, and the cronies thought

they could win, for both were good runners and knew how to climb.

The distance over the first hill was a mile and over the second hill another mile. Then came the third mile, up to the top of Devery, a steep incline, covered with rocks and brushwood.

By the time the first hill was left behind some of the cadets were showing signs of becoming winded. Two dropped out of the race and three others were left far in the rear before the top of the second hill was gained. The pace was a smart one, and Jack, Pepper and Andy found themselves perspiring freely.

“No more of this for me!” came from Stuffer, after two-thirds of the distance had been covered. “I am going to stop off to rest,” and he threw himself down on the grass under a tree. Another cadet did likewise.

At the foot of the last hill Jack, Andy and Pepper found themselves pretty well bunched. In front of them were Ritter and Paxton. The rest were a good bit behind.

“I am going to get ahead of those fellows!” cried the young major, and commenced to climb with renewed vigor. Soon he passed Paxton, who scowled darkly at him, but said nothing.

Pepper was close behind Jack and Andy, but a few yards to one side, when the three heard a noise above them. Looking upward, they saw several stones of good size rolling down the hillside.

“Beware of the rocks!” sang out Jack, and leaped aside just in time. Pepper was grazed on the shoulder and Andy got a pinched foot. Then they heard a yell from Paxton.

“Oh, my foot! The rock has mashed my foot!”

“It was Ritter’s fault!” called back Jack. “He sent the rocks down on us! I guess he wanted to injure me.”

He had hardly spoken when he heard a sudden exclamation of terror. Ritter had slipped and was rolling over and over down the hillside. He passed Jack and Pepper and then came toward Andy. The latter reached out and caught the bully by the arm and held him.

“Don’t let me go down!” screamed Ritter, in fright.

“You are safe,” answered Andy. “Pick yourself up and take care of Paxton—he needs you. Some of the rocks you rolled down struck him.”

“I—I didn’t mean to do it,” stammered the bully. But the look on his face showed that he was not speaking the truth. He had played a mean trick, but Fate had paid him back almost instantly. His face was much scratched, his wind was gone, and he had to withdraw from the race.

## **CHAPTER XXX**

### **A CAPTURE—CONCLUSION**

It had begun to rain and from a distance came the rolling of thunder. But Jack, Andy and Pepper paid no attention to this—their one thought was to reach the top of Devery Hill first.

They had spread out along the hillside, each seeking the easiest way up the steep rocks. Pepper was slightly ahead, with Jack and Andy an equal distance behind him. The other contestants were considerably to the rear.

“We are in for a big thunderstorm!” cried Andy.

“Who cares?” flung back Pepper. “I am going to win this race no matter what happens.”

“Not if I know it!” came from the young major.

“The fellow to win will be the one to get there first,” said Andy. And then no more was said just then, for the hill was becoming steeper and they wanted to save their breath.

At last, just as it began to rain in torrents, the three cadets saw, fifty feet above them, the top of the hill. To reach it each had to climb some rocks that were now wet and slippery.

“Don’t break your neck, whatever you do!” cried Jack. “The race isn’t worth it.”

“I am safe enough!” panted Pepper, as he pulled himself up with vigor. “Hurrah, I’m up!” he added, a moment later. “Where’s the rock?”

“There it is!” shouted Andy, coming to the top and racing off. Jack was beside him, and away the three started for the flat rock less than twenty yards away.



They came up abreast, and all three flung themselves on the rock simultaneously.

“Here!” gasped Andy.

“Here!” panted Pepper.

“A tie!” said Jack, when he could speak. “Creation, but wasn’t that last climb a corker!”

“So it was,” answered Pepper.

“Talk about rain,” came from Andy. “Say, we’ve got to get under shelter or we’ll be soaked.”

“There is something of a cliff,” said Jack, pointing with his hand. “That ought to afford some protection. Phew!”

The last exclamation followed a vivid flash of lightning and a crack of thunder that made all the cadets jump. They leaped in the direction of the cliff and crouched under it. Then came another flash and a crack, and the rain came down in a deluge.

“Here is an opening, under the cliff,” said Pepper, looking around among the brushwood growing at the base of the rocks. “Let us get in that. It will be some protection against the lightning as well as the rain.”

None of the youths liked the vivid flashes of lightning and all were glad to turn into the opening, which was a cavern between the rocks. As they looked around them Jack’s eye saw something on the flooring which immediately attracted his attention. It was some loose excelsior and he pointed it out to his chums.

“Oh, Jack, can it be possible those crazy men came here?” exclaimed Andy.

“I don’t know, but I think it will pay us to investigate, as soon as the storm clears away.”

“Let us investigate now,” said Pepper, impulsively. “I don’t believe I could get much wetter than I am if I tried.”

The trail of the loose excelsior led around the base of the cliff and to a much

larger opening than the first they had discovered. Jack was in advance, and of a sudden he put up his hand as a warning.

“What is it?” asked his chums, in a whisper.

“The two crazy men—in a cave. I think they are sleeping.”

With extreme caution the cadets moved forward, so all could look into the cave beyond. The young major was right, there on the ground, near a small campfire which was almost burnt out, lay Bart Callax and Paul Shaff. Both were sound asleep in spite of the fierce thunderstorm that was raging.

“They must prowl around so much in the night that they have to sleep in the daytime,” said Pepper, and guessed the truth.

The boys looked behind the sleepers and saw a number of bags piled in a corner of the cave. On a rock lay the green masks and hoods and also a butcher knife, a hatchet, and several other things.

“Can we capture them?” questioned Andy.

“We must do it,” answered the young major.

“But they may show fight—and they say crazy folks are very strong.”

“Let us take some ropes and tie them up while they are asleep,” suggested Pepper. “We can take the ropes on the bags.”

This was agreed to, and in nervous haste the three cadets procured the ropes and advanced on the two men who were, fortunately, sleeping heavily. One had his hands up over his head and it was an easy matter to tie his wrists together. Then they secured his feet. After that they secured the feet of the second man and turned his arms so they could tie his wrists. At this he awoke, but before he could collect himself and offer any resistance he was a close prisoner.

“What does this mean?” asked Callax, and then of a sudden he began to weep. Shaff began to talk wildly and offered them the Presidency of the United States if they would set him free.

“We mean to do you no harm,” said Jack, gently. “We want to take you to your

relative, Mr. George Strong. He wants very much to see you.”

“Will he let me play the organ?” demanded Paul Shaff, sharply.

“Certainly,” said Pepper.

“Then I’ll see him.”

“I am the king of this mountain, and he must come to me,” said Bart Callax, stubbornly.

By talking kindly the cadets managed to soothe the two prisoners, and then, as the thunderstorm was passing, Andy ran out and part of the way down the hill after some of the others who had taken part in the race. In the meantime Jack watched the insane men and Pepper examined the stuff in the cave.

“All of the trophies seem to be here,” announced Pepper. “And here are the Confederate bills and the vest taken from Mr. Chetwood.”

“See anything of Flossie Ford’s bracelet?” asked the young major.

“No.”

“I have a bracelet in my pocket,” announced Bart Callax. “It belongs to the Empress of China.”

“Where is it?” asked Jack, and when told, brought the bracelet forth. By its appearance he knew it was the one belonging to Flossie.

“That clears up that mystery,” said Pepper. “Won’t she be glad to get it back, though!”

“Yes, and Will Carey will be glad it is found,” added the young major.

Later they discovered Carey’s ruby ring on Shaff’s finger.

It was some time before Andy returned,—with five cadets who were in the secret concerning the Pornell Academy trophies. Those boys took the sacks containing the things and marched off with them in the slight rain that was falling. Then Jack and his chums started off with Shaff and Callax, taking the other things

along.

Two hours later the two insane men were placed in the keeping of George Strong. The teacher was delighted to learn that they had been found and promised to see to it personally that the men be placed in an asylum from which escape would be practically impossible.

“I will take them to the asylum myself,” he said, and left Putnam Hall the next day for that purpose.

The reader can imagine how delighted Flossie Ford was to get back her precious bracelet. She was amazed when she learned the true story concerning it.

“After this I shall take care that it never gets away from me again,” said she.

“Oh, you’d lend it to me, wouldn’t you?” asked Pepper, with a twinkle in his eye.

“Maybe; but I’d not lend it to anybody else,” answered Flossie.

Will Carey was also delighted and glad to get back his ring, and when the boys asked him to assist in getting the trophies back to Pornell Academy he readily consented. As a consequence the trophies were taken back one night and placed in a row on the main dining room table of the school, much to Doctor Pornell’s amazement.

“Somebody shall suffer for this!” he thundered. “Wait till I get at the bottom of this trick!” But he never got at the bottom of it, for Will Carey kept his secret, being afraid that if he did not the cadets would tell all about the bracelet.

“Well, we’ve had some warm times this season,” remarked Jack, one day, when talking matters over. “But things seem to be quiet now.”

“And I hope they stay so,” said Andy, but his wish was not realized. Very strenuous times were close at hand, and what they were will be told in the next volume of this series, to be entitled “The Putnam Hall Rebellion; or, The Rival Runaways.” In that volume we shall learn what the absence of Captain Putnam from his school led to, and how Reff Ritter once again tried to do Jack and his chums serious injury, and how his rascally use of the French headache powder was exposed.

“Some day we’ll have to run that tie race off,” said Pepper. “As it is, we don’t know who is the best runner and climber.”

“Why not leave it as it is?” suggested Andy.

“Just what I say,” came from the young major. “By the way, Paxton got hurt quite badly by the stone Ritter rolled down on him.”

“Yes, but he thinks we are to blame,” said Pepper. “He will try to get square some day, I suppose,” and in this surmise the Imp was right.

The next day came a surprise that pleased the boys very much. The Fords were to give a lawn party and they invited about a dozen of the cadets over. The chums went and had “the time of their lives,” as Andy declared.

“Tell you what, they are all right folks,” said Pepper.

“I agree with you,” answered Jack.

And here we will leave the young cadets, wishing them well.

THE END

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