

Stratemeyer Edward

The Putnam Hall Rebellion



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Arthur M. Winfield

The Putnam Hall Rebellion or, The Rival Runaways

INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys:

This story is complete in itself, but forms the fourth in a line known under the general title of "Putnam Hall Series."

As I have said before, this series was started at the request of numerous boys and girls who had read some volumes of my "Rover Boys Series," and who wanted to know what had taken place at Putnam Hall Military Academy previous to the arrival there of the three Rover brothers.

In the first volume of this series, called "The Putnam Hall Cadets," I related how Captain Putnam came to found the institution and also told of the doings of Jack Ruddy, Pepper Ditmore and their chums. The young cadets were whole-souled and full of fun, and enjoyed themselves to the utmost.

In the second volume, entitled "The Putnam Hall Rivals," more of the doings of the cadets were chronicled, and the particulars were given of a queer balloon ride, and of an odd discovery in the woods.

The third volume, "The Putnam Hall Champions," brought Jack and Pepper once again to the front, in a series of stirring athletic contests. They had some bitter rivals, and one of these played Jack a most foul trick, which came close to having a serious ending.

Ever since the opening of the school the scholars had had much trouble with an overbearing teacher named Josiah Crabtree. When the Hall was left in charge of Crabtree and a new instructor named Cuddle, matters rapidly grew worse, until there seemed nothing for the lads to do but to rebel. How this was done, and what the rebellion led to, I leave for the pages which follow to relate.

Once more I thank my young friends for the interest they have shown in my books. May this tale please you in every way.

*Affectionately and sincerely yours,
Arthur M. Winfield.*

CHAPTER I

OUT ON THE CAMPUS

“Boys, we are to have target practice to-morrow.”

“Good!” cried Pepper Ditmore. “That suits me exactly. Just wait, Jack, and see me make half a dozen bull’s-eyes, handrunning.”

“Why don’t you make it a dozen, Pep, while you are at it?” answered Major Jack Ruddy, with a smile.

“If Pep makes one bull’s-eye he will be lucky,” came from another of the cadets gathered on the Putnam Hall campus. “The last time we had practice, instead of hitting the target he almost killed a cow in the next field.”

“Hold on, Andy Snow!” cried Pepper. “I shot straight enough, but the wind blew so hard it sent the bullet the wrong way. Now if – ”

“What a pity the wind didn’t shift the target to meet the bullet,” cried Paul Singleton. “Now when I shoot – ”

“You’re too fat to shoot, Stuffer,” interrupted a youth who spoke with a strong Irish accent. “Sure, if you had to crawl up on the enemy, like in war, you’d tip over on your nose!” And at this sally from Joseph Hogan a laugh arose.

“I’d rather be fat than skinny,” retorted Paul, whose waist measurement exceeded that of any other cadet of the Hall.

“Where are we to do the practicing?” asked another boy, who was somewhat of a newcomer, having been a pupil at the Military Academy for less than a term.

“I understand we are to go to Rawling’s pasture, Fred,” answered Jack Ruddy. “Captain Putnam is going to make the test a very thorough one, too, for he says all of the students here ought to be first-class marksmen.”

“Well, I’d certainly like to know how to handle a rifle,” answered Fred Century. “I’ve used a shotgun, in the woods, but never a rifle. I’m afraid I’ll make a rather poor showing at first.”

“Many of the fellows will,” returned the young major. “It isn’t given to everybody to become a good shot, no matter how hard a fellow tries.”

While the others were talking, a big, broad-shouldered youth joined the gathering. He was Dale Blackmore, the captain of the Putnam Hall football team, and a general leader in all kinds of athletic sports.

“Talking about the rifle practice, eh,” said Dale. “I just heard the other fellows talking of it, too. One of ’em said he was going to show your crowd how to shoot,” and he nodded toward Jack Ruddy.

“Who was it?” questioned the young major.

“Reff Ritter.”

“Oh, that bully makes me tired!” cried Pepper Ditmore. “Every time anything is going on he tries to push himself to the front – and nobody wants him – at least I don’t want him.”

“Nor I,” came from Andy Snow and Paul Singleton.

“Sure, an’ I doubt if he’s any better shot nor Major Jack,” remarked Hogan.

“Not half as good, Emerald,” interposed Pepper quickly. “Jack’s a soldier through and through. If he wasn’t the fellows wouldn’t have elected him major.”

“Perhaps Reff Ritter is a good marksman,” said Jack. “He has made some fair scores and he may have been practicing up for this contest. Who was he talking to, Dale?”

“Oh, his usual crowd of hangers-on, Gus Coulter, Nick Paxton, Billy Sabine, and that bunch. Coulter thinks, too, that he can make a big score.”

“Well, I’ll bank on Jack – and on Bart Conners,” said Pepper. “Bart is a good shot and always was.”

“Say, here comes Reff Ritter now,” whispered Andy, as a youth with a somewhat sour-looking countenance put in an appearance. “Gus Coulter is with him.”

“Hello, Reff!” sang out one of the boys, Dave Kearney by name. “I hear you are going to wax us all at target practice to-morrow.”

“Who told you?” demanded Reff Ritter, coming to a halt.

“Oh, I heard it.”

“Yes, Reff and I are going to make star records,” came from Gus Coulter.

“Perhaps you think you can shoot better than Major Ruddy and Captain Conners?” questioned Andy Snow.

“We can,” came from Reff Ritter promptly. “When it comes to handling a rifle I don’t take a back seat for anybody.”

“Must have been practicing a tremendous lot lately,” was Pepper’s comment.

“Never mind what I’ve been doing,” growled Reff Ritter. “I’m willing to bet anybody here a new hat that I come out ahead to-morrow.” And he gazed around with a “you don’t dare to take me up” look.

“I’d take that bet,” answered Pepper dryly. “Only a new hat would do me no good – since I have to wear the regulation cap here. Just the same, Reff, my boy, you won’t come out ahead of Jack and Bart, and I know it – and neither will you, Gus.”

“Huh! just wait and see,” grumbled Coulter.

“You fellows think that because you have won a few races and things like that you can win everything,” said Reff Ritter, sourly. “Well, to-morrow you’ll find out differently. After the shooting is over you’ll see where I and Gus and Nick Paxton stand.” And with this remark he strutted off, arm in arm with Coulter.

“Say, but he is in a bad humor,” observed Andy Snow. “Somebody must have brushed his fur the wrong way.”

“He has been behind in his lessons for over a week,” answered a boy named Joe Nelson, a quiet and studious lad. “Yesterday Captain Putnam called him into the office for a talk. When Reff came out he looked pretty glum.”

“Must have gotten a strong lecture,” said Pepper. “And lectures don’t agree with such fellows as Ritter.”

“Do they agree with you, Pep?” asked the young major of the school battalion, with a twinkle in his eye.

“Me? Not much! I’d rather write a composition in Latin than face the captain for a lecture! But, just the same, you can be sure Ritter didn’t get it harder than he deserved.”

“There is nothing like blowing one’s own horn,” observed Fred Century. “And certainly Reff Ritter knows how to do that to perfection.”

“Time for drill, boys!” cried Jack Ruddy, as a bell rang out. “Now, do your best on the parade ground, even if you don’t know how to hit the target.” And off he ran to get ready to assume command of the Putnam Hall battalion.

The bell had hardly ceased to ring when there followed the rolling of a drum, and out on the school campus poured the students, in their neat military uniforms, and with their guns and swords polished to the highest degree. Major Jack Ruddy was at the head of the battalion, which consisted of Companies A and B, under the commands of Bart Conners and a youth named Henry Lee.

“Battalion attention!” commanded Major Jack, after the rattle of the drum had ceased. “Shoulder arms! Forward, march!” And then the drums beat, the fifes struck up a lively air, and the cadets began a march around the school grounds.

To those who have read the previous volumes of this “Putnam Hall Series,” the lads mentioned above will need no special introduction. For the benefit of others let me state that Putnam Hall Military Academy was a fine institution of learning, located on the shore of Cayuga Lake, in New York State. It was owned by Captain Victor Putnam, a retired army officer, who, in days gone by, had seen strenuous military service in the far West. It was modeled somewhat after West Point, our great national school for soldiery, but, of course, on far less pretentious proportions. The school building proper, located not far from the lake, was of brick and stone, and contained many classrooms, a big mess hall, a business office, library and sitting room, and, on the upper floors, many dormitories. Besides this building there were a gymnasium, a boathouse, a barn, and half a dozen minor structures. The location was ideal, exactly suited to such a school as Captain Putnam had established.

Jack Ruddy and Pepper Ditmore were chums, hailing from the western part of New York State. Jack was a little the older of the two and was inclined to be studious. Pepper was full of fun, and on this account was often called The Imp, a nickname that did not bother him in the least.

When Jack and Pepper first arrived at the school, as related in the initial volume of this series, called “The Putnam Hall Cadets,” they found that no regular military organization had yet been effected. After some time spent in drilling and studying, the cadets were permitted to ballot for their own officers, with the result that Jack became the major of the battalion, Henry Lee captain of Company A, and Bart Conners captain of Company B. Jack wanted Pepper to try for an official position, but The Imp declined, stating he thought he could have more fun as a private.

At that time there was an overbearing lad at the school named Dan Baxter. He bribed Coulter and some others to vote for him, but nevertheless was defeated. Baxter was now away on a vacation, and Jack and his chums wished he would never come back.

It was not long before Jack and Pepper made many friends, including Andy Snow, who was an acrobatic youth, used to doing marvellous “stunts” in the gymnasium; Dale Blackmore, of football fame; Hogan, whose Irish wit was delightful to listen to; Stuffer Singleton, who much preferred eating to studying, and Joe Nelson, the best scholar the Hall possessed.

But if Jack and Pepper made many friends, they also made many rivals and not a few enemies. Baxter was gone, but Reff Ritter remained, and what sort of a fellow he was we have already seen. As Andy Snow said, Ritter frequently imagined that he “was the whole show.” His particular cronies were Gus Coulter and Nick Paxton, while he had something of an admirer in a small lad named Fenwick, usually known as “Mumps,” who was a contemptible sneak, as had been proved on more than one occasion.

The organizing of the school had been followed by hard studying, yet not a few adventures had fallen to the lot of Major Jack and Pepper, and some of their chums. In the middle of one of the terms George Strong, the second assistant teacher, disappeared. He was found a prisoner in a hut, being kept there by two insane relatives, and to rescue him proved no easy task.

The assistant teacher’s ancestry dated back to Revolutionary times, and he told the boys of a treasure buried in that vicinity by some relatives. How the treasure was unearthed had been told in detail in “The Putnam Hall Rivals.”

With the coming of summer, the attention of the cadets was given largely to sports in the field and on the water. Jack’s uncle presented him with a fine sloop, the *Alice*, and in this the young major sailed several races, as related in the third volume of this series, entitled “The Putnam Hall Champions.” The cadets also held a great bicycle race and a hill climbing contest, and they likewise had a bowling match with the team of a rival school, Pornell Academy. At that time Fred Century was a student at Pornell, but he became disgusted at the way his fellow students acted, and at the treatment he received from Doctor Pornell, and left that institution of learning and came to Putnam Hall.

As the time went on Reff Ritter became more and more jealous of Major Jack’s popularity. A contest in the gymnasium was arranged between the two, and then Ritter, with a wickedness which he was wise enough to keep to himself, dosed the young major with some French headache powders,

putting the stuff in Jack's drinking water. As a consequence, Jack, while on the flying rings, became dizzy and then unconscious, and would have hurt himself seriously had he not been caught as he fell. He was put to bed and was sick for some time. It was discovered that he had been dosed, but, so far, the perpetrator of the vile deed had managed to keep his identity a secret. Jack and Pepper suspected Ritter, but not being able to prove the rascal guilty, could do nothing.

CHAPTER II

PEPPER PLAYS A JOKE

As there were a great many students to take part, it had been arranged that the whole of the next day should be devoted to rifle practice. The cadets were to march to Rawling's pasture directly after breakfast, and each youth was to carry his lunch with him, as well as his rifle and some rounds of ammunition.

"Now, young gentlemen," said Captain Putnam, when the quartermaster of the battalion had distributed the cartridges. "Kindly remember that your cartridges have bullets in them. I want no loading or firing without permission. A rifle, thoughtlessly discharged, may do great harm, and there will be no need of loading your guns until you are called upon to fire at one of the targets."

"Have we – we all got to do the – the firing?" asked Fenwick, the school sneak, in a trembling voice.

"Certainly," answered Captain Putnam.

"I'll wager Mumps is afraid to shoot with bullets," whispered Pepper to Andy Snow. "He always handles his gun as if he was afraid it would go off."

"He's as much of a coward as he is a sneak," answered Andy. His face broke into a sudden grin. "I've got an idea," he whispered.

"Let me in on it quick," returned Pepper, scenting fun.

"I've got a pack of firecrackers, left over from last Fourth of July –"

"Andy, how could you keep them all this time?" cried The Imp, reproachfully. "Why, a pack of firecrackers means dead loads of fun. Let me have them, please."

"What, the whole pack? Not much! I want some fun myself, sometime. I'll let you have a dozen crackers, though."

"All right – I'll make them do."

"Want to play a trick on Mumps?"

"Yes, keep your eye peeled for fun."

This talk took place half an hour before the boys were to start away from the school. Having procured the firecrackers, Pepper sought out the school sneak and found him talking to Billy Sabine, a cadet who was at times a sneak and then again quite a good fellow. Mumps had his gun over his shoulder and Sabine had his firearms across his elbow. Without being observed, The Imp lit the long stems of two firecrackers and dropped one down the barrel of each weapon.

"Hullo, you fellows!" he cried, hurriedly. "Have you heard the news?"

"What's that?" asked both of the others, while a small crowd began to collect.

"Somebody has sticks of dynamite, and some of the stuff was put in some of the guns," went on Pepper innocently. "You want to look out, or your gun may explode and blow you to bits."

"Gracious me, is that possible!" ejaculated Mumps, and turned pale.

"I didn't know –" began Sabine, and then glanced at the muzzle of his weapon. "I declare, what makes that smoke? And look, your gun is smoking, too!" he added, to Mumps.

"It's the dynamite –" began Pepper, and backed away as if in terror.

"Oh, dear, do you really think so?" quaked Mumps. "If I thought – Oh!"

Bang! went one of the firecrackers, and both Mumps and Sabine let out yells of fear. Bang! went the second cracker, and now both cadets threw their guns from them and ran toward the school building.

"It's the dynamite! We'll be blown to pieces!" screamed Mumps.

"Somebody wants to kill us!" roared Sabine, and put his hands to his ears, as if to keep out the sounds of some awful explosion.

And then both boys disappeared around a corner of the Hall. As they did this The Imp rushed forward, cleaned the guns of the exploded firecrackers, and threw the burning bits of cracker paper in some bushes.

“What a joke!” cried Andy, who has witnessed the scene, and he and a number of others laughed heartily.

“They’ll be afraid to touch the guns after this,” was Emerald’s comment. “Sure, they’ll think the old Nick is after bein’ in ’em, so they will!”

“Here they come back!” called out Dave Kearney. “And look, they’ve got old Crabtree with them!”

“If Crabtree is coming I think I’ll dust out!” murmured Pepper, and lost no time in disappearing.

Josiah Crabtree was the first assistant teacher, and he was as cordially hated by the majority of the cadets as George Strong, the second assistant, was beloved. Crabtree was a fine scholar, but he was headstrong and sarcastic, and continually “picking” at those under him, no matter how hard they studied or how well they behaved.

“What is this I hear about dynamite?” he demanded, as he strode up and glared at the assembled boys.

“Dynamite?” asked Andy innocently. “Did you say dynamite, Mr. Crabtree?”

“I did. There was an explosion out here. These boys’ guns – ”

“Why, these guns are all right,” said Dale Blackmore, picking them up. “I guess Fenwick and Sabine got scared at nothing.”

“They certainly did,” added Andy, and then, getting behind the teacher, he doubled up his fist and shook it threateningly at Mumps and Billy.

Now, if there was one thing both the younger cadets feared it was a whipping, and this suggestive attitude of Andy made each of them quail. They both realized that if they told on Pepper they would be punished for it. Each took his gun rather sheepishly.

“Fenwick, what have you to say?” began Josiah Crabtree. Just then the welcome rattle of the drum was heard, calling the battalion to get ready for the march.

“I – I guess it was a – a mistake,” faltered the sneak. “Can I go and get in line, please sir?” he added.

“I – er – I suppose so – since this is no time to investigate,” answered Josiah Crabtree; and off ran Mumps and Sabine, and the others also departed.

“Well, what did Crabtree say?” asked Pepper of Andy, when he got the chance.

“Didn’t have time to say much – the drum call broke in on his investigation. I hope, for your sake, Pep, he doesn’t take it up when we get back,” added the acrobatic youth.

It was a beautiful day for the outing, and the cadets certainly presented an inspiring sight as they marched from the campus and turned into the country road leading to the pasture where the rifle practice was to be held. Captain Putnam was on horseback, along with George Strong and an old army officer named Pallott, who was to assist in showing the boys how to hold their rifles while shooting and how best to take aim. Behind this little cavalcade came Major Jack with his sword flashing brightly, and followed by Company A and Company B. To the front were the two drummers and two fifers, making the welkin ring with their martial music.

“Hi, you look fine, so you do!” sang out an old farmer, as he drew up by the roadside with his wagon to let them pass. “You’re a credit to this section. If I had the money I’d send my son Jock to train with you, yes, I would!” And he waved a grimy hand after them.

A little later the cadets heard the honk honk of an automobile horn and soon a big touring car came into sight. It contained Roy Bock, Bat Sedley and several other students from Pornell Academy. As soon as Bock saw the young soldiers he stopped his machine.

“Hello, look at the tin soldiers!” he sang out. “Going to hunt mosquitoes?”

“No, we are going to hunt somebody who knows how to bowl,” retorted Pepper, who was near.

“Huh! We can bowl right enough and don’t you forget it,” growled Bock.

“Yes, but you can’t beat Putnam Hall,” retorted Dale; and then the cadets passed on, leaving the bully of the rival school in anything but a happy frame of mind.

“Those tin soldiers make me sick,” said one of the students in the touring car.

“We ought to get square with them for taking our trophies away,” said another.

“They did that because we stole their cannon and flagstaff,” added another.

“I don’t see how Fred Century can train with them,” added a youth named Carey.

“We’ll square it up with them some day,” came from Roy Bock. “Just wait till I think of something good. I’ve got it in for Jack Ruddy, Pepper Ditmore and that crowd, and don’t you forget it!”

“I’ve got it!” cried another boy. “The whole crowd is away from the school to-day. Why can’t we visit the place on the sly and turn things topsy-turvy?”

“Somebody must be left behind,” answered Will Carey, who was far from brave, as my old readers know.

“That doesn’t matter – we can keep out of the servants’ way – or get them out of ours,” answered Roy Bock. His crafty face became fixed for a moment. “That’s a good idea. Let us visit Putnam Hall by all means and fix things up! When those tin soldiers get back they won’t know what to make of it!”

“Well, we don’t want to get caught at this,” said Carey.

“Are you afraid?” demanded Bock.

“No, but – ”

“No ‘buts’ about it,” said a youth named Grimes, who hated Major Jack and his chums greatly. “I’m for visiting Putnam Hall to-day. We couldn’t have a better chance, with the captain and his cadets away.”

The touring car journeyed along slowly and the students from Pornell Academy talked the matter over carefully. Just as they came in sight of the Hall they saw a buggy drive away from the entrance and turn in the direction of Cedarville, the nearest village.

“There goes the head teacher, a fellow named Crabtree,” said Bock. “The fellow driving him is Peleg Snuggers, the general helper. Boys, outside of some help that doesn’t count, the coast is clear!”

“I’ve got a scheme,” said Grimes. “Let us hide the auto in the woods, and then disguise ourselves as tramps by rubbing dust on our faces and putting on the old auto dusters. Then we can sneak up to the school building and the gym., and learn how the land lays.”

“Yes, – and turn things inside out,” answered Roy Bock, with a gloating look. “Oh, won’t they be surprised when they get back to-night!”

The suggestion to hide the touring car and disguise themselves was quickly put into execution, and then, with great caution, the six students from Pornell Academy leaped a side hedge and made for the gymnasium. Here they spent nearly half an hour in “fixing things up” to their satisfaction. Then they entered the school building by a side door, and while three went to the library and classrooms the others ascended to the dormitories. They took care to keep out of the way of all the hired help, although to do so taxed their ingenuity to the utmost.

“Now, I reckon we have done something toward squaring accounts,” remarked Roy Bock, as he led the way back to the touring car. “Even the servants won’t be able to straighten things out. When those folks get back they won’t know their own school!”

CHAPTER III

AT TARGET PRACTICE

“Here we are! Now to make nothing but bull’s-eyes!”

It was Pepper who spoke, as the Hall cadets came to a halt in Rawling’s pasture, – a lot containing nearly a hundred acres which were almost as smooth as a barn floor. It had taken the battalion almost an hour to march there, and the students were allowed half an hour in which to rest up previous to beginning the contest on the three ranges which had been established in the pasture. The ranges were of one hundred yards, two hundred yards, and three hundred yards, the last named distance being deemed sufficiently great for the light rifles the cadets used. Had they had arms of greater caliber, Captain Putnam would have made the long range five hundred yards.

“I don’t expect to make very much of a score,” said Andy Snow. “I am not much of a shooter. Now if it was a contest in the gym. – ”

“Andy would win all the medals,” finished Jack, with a laugh.

“I’d rather have a fishing contest,” put in Stuffer, who loved to go out with his rod.

“Sure, and what’s the matter wid an eating contest, Stuffer?” inquired Hogan, with a broad grin. “I’m after thinking you’d take the head prize there – and all the others, too!”

“Huh, you needn’t talk,” grumbled Stuffer. “I notice you can do your share when we sit down in the mess hall.”

“That’s one thing I like about Putnam Hall,” declared Fred Century. “A fellow always gets enough to eat – at least I do. Now at Pornell Academy the meals were very uneven. The dinners were usually good, but some of the suppers were woefully slim.”

“If the meals were slim here I’d rebel,” answered Pepper.

“So would I!” cried Stuffer. “I’d raise the biggest kick you ever heard of.” How true their words were to become we shall see later.

The shooting soon began – at a distance of one hundred yards, and for two hours there was a steady crack! crack! of the rifles.

Each cadet had three shots at each target. A bull’s-eye counted five, so a perfect score would total up to forty-five.

On the short range, Jack managed to make three bull’s-eyes, thus scoring 15. Pepper got 13 and Andy 11. Much to his own delight Reff Ritter got 15, although one of his shots barely touched the bull’s-eye. Coulter received but 9, much to his disgust. The other cadets ranged from 10 to 5, – the five being made by Mumps, who was almost afraid to discharge his weapon.

“Wouldn’t Mumps make a fine soldier!” whispered Pepper to Jack. “If he saw the enemy approaching he’d run for all he was worth.”

“If he didn’t get too frightened to move,” added the young major.

“He certainly is both a coward and a sneak.”

At the two-hundred yard range Jack made 14, while Pepper finished with 13, the same as before. The long-range shooting was not to take place until after lunch.

“I don’t know whether to call it my unlucky thirteen or not,” said The Imp. “It’s not so good as your score, but it’s better than some others.”

“It is certainly lucky,” answered Andy, who had made but 9 on the middle range. “If you do so well on the long range you’ll be one of the leaders.”

“Reff Ritter made 14,” put in Joe Nelson. “He and Jack and Bart Connors are tied for first place so far.”

“Coulter had dropped behind, and Paxton’s score isn’t much better than Mump’s,” came from Dale Blackmore.

“I’ve got two elevens,” said Fred Century. “I don’t think that’s so bad for a fellow who hasn’t used a rifle for some years.”

Lunch was had in the shade of a number of trees growing at the edge of the pasture. While the cadets were eating many of them stacked their rifles and hung their belts and cartridge boxes on the weapons. Jack put aside his sword and also the gun and cartridge holder he had been using. There was a small brook nearby, fed by springs, and in this many of the boys washed their hands and faces before eating.

While the meal was still in progress Gus Coulter motioned to Reff Ritter and Nick Paxton, and the three drew away from the crowd and into some bushes behind the trees.

“I’ve got an idea,” said Coulter, in a low voice. “I don’t know if we can work it or not, but if we can – well, somebody will be surprised, that’s all.”

“What’s your idea?” demanded Ritter.

“I was hanging around when Bob Greenwood, the quartermaster, was giving out the ammunition for the shooting after lunch, on the three-hundred yard range. I heard him say that he had brought along a case of blanks by mistake. He said they looked a good deal like the cartridges that had bullets in. Now if we could get hold of that case of blanks – ”

“We can do that easily enough,” interrupted Nick Paxton. “The case is right over yonder, on a rock.” And he pointed with his hand.

“I reckon I know what you mean,” said Reff Ritter, a wise look coming into his face. “You mean for us to get the blanks and substitute them for the regular cartridges some of the fellows intend to use.”

“Exactly. Can we do it?”

“I don’t know. But it’s a great scheme. I’d like to put it up Ruddy’s back – and up Ditmore’s back, too.” Ritter bit his lip in thought for a moment. “Let’s see if we can get hold of that case of cartridges anyway.”

With great care the plotters stole through the bushes and up to the rock upon which rested the case containing the blank cartridges. All of the other cadets were busy lunching and nobody noticed them as they hauled the box out of sight.

“The cover is loose, anyway,” reported Ritter. “Guess I’ll take a few out, just for luck,” and he appropriated about a dozen blanks.

“Take out the top layer,” suggested Coulter. “Then Greenwood won’t be so apt to notice that the box has been trifled with.” And he and Paxton did so. Then the cover was slid into place once more and the case was restored to its original position. The blanks certainly looked like full cartridges, being tipped with silvery paper.

“Now to do some substituting,” said Reff Ritter. “That’s the hardest part of the job. Some of the fellows are hanging around those cartridge belts and boxes.”

“Maybe we can get them to walk away,” suggested Coulter. “Get them interested in something, you know.”

“I have it!” cried Ritter. “Nick, you walk down in the woods on the other side of the brook and yell like mad. Say you saw a big snake, or something. That will draw the crowd, and then Gus and I can get in our work with the blank cartridges.”

“I’ll do it,” answered Nick Paxton, and hurried around through the bushes and across the brook. He had been gone about five minutes when the cadets at lunch, as well as Captain Putnam and the others, heard a great yelling.

“Help! help! A snake! A snake!”

“What’s that?” exclaimed half a dozen, and then, as the yelling was continued, a rush was made in the direction of the brook.

“Now is our chance,” said Ritter to Coulter, and then the pair stole out of the bushes and in the direction of the stacked arms and the cartridge belts and boxes.

“What’s the matter, Paxton?” demanded Captain Putnam, who was the first to arrive at the spot from whence the cries for help emanated.

“A snake, sir!” answered the cadet glibly. “Ugh! He ran right between my legs!” And Paxton pretended to shiver.

“A snake!” cried several.

“Where is it?”

“Why didn’t you kill it?”

“Yes, a snake, and – and I guess it was a rattler, too. It was about that long,” and Nick Paxton held his hands as far apart as possible. “I couldn’t kill it for I didn’t have a thing in my hand. I – er – I looked for a rock, but the snake was too quick for me.”

The news that a snake was around – and that it might be a rattlesnake at that – alarmed many of the cadets, and some of them recrossed the brook to the open pasture. But others, and Captain Putnam, began a hunt for the reptile, but, of course, without success.

“We may as well give up the search,” said the master of the Hall, after a hunt of ten minutes. “If it was a rattlesnake it has managed to get away.”

“What was you doing here, Paxton?” asked Andy.

“Why I – er – I came over to look for – er – for ferns,” stammered the youth who had played the trick.

“Ferns? Didn’t know you were interested in ferns,” observed Joe Nelson, who was something of a collector of plants himself.

“Oh, I do a little collecting now and then,” answered Paxton, and then walked off, to escape being questioned further.

Half an hour later the noonday rest came to an end and the target practice was again taken up. In the presence of his pupils Captain Putnam took several shots at the long distance target, making a bull’s-eye each time. Then he and the old army officer who had been hired showed the boys how to fire to the best advantage.

Reff Ritter was one of the first to shoot at the three hundred yard target, and much to his chagrin got only three fours – a total of 12. Coulter got but 9, and Paxton 7.

When Jack stepped to the front with the rifle and cartridge box he had been using Reff Ritter winked suggestively at Coulter and Paxton.

“Now we’ll see something rich!” whispered Coulter.

“Hush! you want to keep this to yourself,” warned the bully of the Hall.

“Now, Jack, a bull’s-eye!” said Pepper to his chum.

“Right in the middle of the eye, too,” added Andy.

“I’ll do what I can,” answered the young major, modestly.

With great care he took aim at the target and pulled the trigger. There was a crack and a flash and then a moment of breathless waiting.

“Missed!”

“He didn’t hit the target even!”

The announcement was true, and the young major turned a trifle pale in spite of his efforts to control himself.

“Don’t fire hastily, Major Ruddy,” said Captain Putnam kindly. “Draw a bead directly on the center of the target.”

“I – I – thought I did,” stammered Jack.

Again the rifle was raised. Jack was now a bit nervous, yet he managed to steady himself ere he took another shot. His aim was directly for the center of the target.

“Another miss!”

“Why, Jack, what’s got over you?” cried Pepper, real distress showing in his voice.

“I – I don’t know,” faltered the youthful major.

“Don’t you feel well?” asked Stuffer. “Or is it your eyesight?”

“Yes, I feel well enough – and my eyesight is all right.”

“Maybe you had a blank cartridge,” cried Dale, suddenly.

This remark caused Jack to look at the remaining cartridges he possessed. Captain Putnam insisted upon examining them also, for he, too, was unwilling to believe that the young officer has made a total miss of the two shots.

“These are certainly ball cartridges,” he said, as he looked them over. “Nothing wrong there. You must have been careless in your aim, Major Ruddy.”

“Captain Putnam, I did the very best I could,” pleaded Jack.

“Well, you have one more shot,” answered the master of the school.

As pale as a sheet the young major of the battalion walked to the front once more and raised his rifle. For several seconds there was a deathlike silence. Then came another crack and flash and a moment of suspense.

“Hurrah! A bull’s-eye!”

“That’s the time you did it, Jack!”

“Why didn’t you do that before?”

With a long breath, Jack lowered his rifle and, turning faced the master of the school:

“Captain Putnam,” he said in a low but firm tone. “I made a bull’s-eye that time because there was a bullet in the cartridge. I am satisfied now that my other two shots were blanks.”

CHAPTER IV

THE BLANK CARTRIDGES

For the moment after Jack spoke so positively there was a silence. Captain Putnam looked at the young officer thoughtfully.

“Huh! that’s all tommy-rot!” observed Reff Ritter. “He missed and that is all there is to it.”

“Of course he missed,” chimed in Coulter. “He isn’t a crack shot by any means.”

“What makes you so certain that the first two shots were blanks, Major Ruddy?” asked the master of the school, somewhat sternly.

“Well, sir, I think my record helps to prove it,” answered Jack. “At the hundred-yard target I made three bull’s-eyes; at the two-hundred-yard target I made two bull’s-eyes and a four; now I have made a bull’s-eye and two blanks. Doesn’t it stand to reason, sir, that if those cartridges had not been blanks I would at least have made a two or a one?”

“It is probable, yes,” answered the captain, thoughtfully. “But I did not know any blanks had been brought along, much less dealt out.”

“I brought a case along by mistake,” put in Bob Greenwood. “But as soon as I discovered my mistake I put the case to one side. There it is, sir, on yonder rock.”

“I see. You are sure you didn’t hand any blanks around? That particular box looks like the real thing.”

“Yes, sir – I was very careful.”

Captain Putnam strode over to the rock and shoved back the lid of the case.

“Why, the top layer of cartridges is gone!” he cried. “Was the box full when you opened it?”

“Why – er – yes, sir – I think so, sir,” stammered the quartermaster of the school battalion. “It looked full to me.”

“Young gentlemen,” went on Captain Putnam, raising his voice. “Please to look over the cartridges you have left.”

There was a hasty examination by over a score of cadets.

“Mine are O. K., sir.”

“So are mine.”

“Here, I’ve got a blank!” cried Andy Snow, rushing forward and holding it up. “It’s one of the kind we used to have – those that looked so much like the ball cartridges.”

“Hum! So it is – one of the kind made to represent ball cartridges,” mused Captain Putnam.

“I’ve got two of them!” exclaimed Pepper, and held them up. “My other one is all right,” he added.

“Two blanks and one good one,” said Jack. “That must have been just what I had!”

“Quartermaster Greenwood, can you explain this?” demanded Captain Putnam, sternly.

“N – no, sir. I – I am sure I didn’t deal out any of the blanks. I was very careful, sir.”

“Then how do you account for the blanks being in use?”

“I – I don’t account for it, sir. I am sure, though, I didn’t give them out.”

“You gave out all the ammunition, didn’t you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then you must have given out the blanks. It was very careless on your part.”

“No wonder I missed!” growled one of the cadets.

“I think we ought to shoot over again,” added another.

“It was a mean trick!” cried a third.

“Quartermaster Greenwood, you have been grossly careless, and your carelessness has caused a great deal of trouble,” said Captain Putnam, sternly.

“I wasn’t careless, I tell you, I – ”

“Silence. I say you were careless, and I now ask you to resign your position as quartermaster of the school battalion.”

“Resign!” gasped Bob Greenwood.

“That is what I said. The battalion must have a quartermaster who can be relied upon at all times. Supposing we were going to have a sham battle and you dealt out ball cartridges instead of blanks, what would happen? Why some of the cadets might be killed! Do you resign or not?”

“Captain Putnam, I – I – ”

“If you refuse to resign I shall have to take the office away from you.”

“All right, I’ll resign,” cried Bob Greenwood, bitterly. “All the same, I say you are treating me unjustly.” And with a red face and bowed head he stepped back into the crowd.

“I don’t believe Bob did it,” whispered Stuffer to Hogan.

“Sure, and I thought he was more careful meself,” answered the Irish-American cadet. “It’s a bad mess, so it is!” added.

Captain Putnam now held a consultation with several of the others and then announced that for every shot fired which had not hit a target the cadet should have another try. In the meantime the blanks were collected and ball cartridges dealt out instead.

“Now, Jack, show ’em what you can do!” cried Pepper, as his chum walked to the front once more.

“Confound it, I guess our plan is busted,” whispered Paxton to Ritter.

“Hush! Not a word of it!” whispered the bully, warningly. “If Captain Putnam ever finds it out, – well, he’ll make it mighty warm for us, that’s all!”

With great care Jack took aim once more. Everybody watched him with interest, and a wild shout went up when the result was announced.

“A bull’s-eye!”

“There, what did I tell you?” cried Pepper. “I knew he could do it!”

“Now another, Jack!” said Andy, enthusiastically.

And the youthful major did make another bull’s-eye, amid the applause of his many friends.

“That’s the highest score yet!”

“Major Ruddy, I must congratulate you,” said Captain Putnam, holding out his hand. “I am now as convinced as you are that those other shots were blanks.”

“Jack, that’s the highest score yet,” said Dale. “I rather think you take the prize.”

“Didn’t know there was a prize, Dale.”

“Well, metaphorically speaking.”

“You’ve bested Reff Ritter and that’s a good deal,” said Andy.

When Pepper came to shoot he made one bull’s-eye and two fours. This gave him quite a high score and made him content. Andy and Dale also did well, while Bart Connors tied Ritter. Mumps and Paxton each made two misses on the long distance target.

“More blanks, I suppose,” grumbled Paxton, although he knew better.

“No,” said Captain Putnam. “That was only your carelessness did that. You shot too quickly.”

“I – I’m not feeling well to-day,” said the school sneak lamely. “I ought to have stayed at the Hall.”

After the target practice was at an end the cadets were allowed an hour to themselves.

“Let us take a walk through the woods,” said Pepper. And he and Jack and half a dozen went off in one direction while Reff Ritter and his cronies went off in another. Bob Greenwood felt so bad that he strolled off by himself.

“I must say, I feel sorry for Bob,” said Jack. “Even if he did deal out the blanks, I don’t think he meant to do it.”

“He feels all cut up to lose the quartermastership,” said Dale. “After the captain made him resign I saw the tears standing in his eyes.”

“What do you say if we go to Captain Putnam and ask him to reinstate Greenwood?” questioned Pepper, who was always ready to help anybody in distress.

“I’ll do that willingly,” came from several of the others.

“I don’t think we ought to go right away,” said Bart Connors. “Wait a few days – until his temper has a chance to cool. Finding the blanks riled him all up.”

“By the way, fellows, have you heard the news?” asked Joe Nelson.

“What news?”

“A new teacher is coming.”

“Who told you that?” asked Pepper.

“Nobody. I heard Captain Putnam and Mr. Strong talking about it. It seems Mr. Strong has got to go away on business, and the new man is coming during his absence.”

“Who is he, did you hear, Joe?” asked several, for they were always anxious concerning their instructors.

“Hope he isn’t like old Crabtree,” was Pepper’s comment. “If he is I’ll feel like jumping into the lake!”

“I don’t know anything about him, excepting that his name is Pluxton Cuddle.”

“Pluxton Cuddle!” cried The Imp. “Wonder if he’ll try to cuddle up to us?”

“I did hear that he was quite a scientist,” went on Joe Nelson. “One of the kind who does everything by rule.”

“Oh, dear! I can see my finish!” sighed Pepper. “It will be ten minutes for this, ten minutes for that, and so on, all day long. And find out the whyforness of the thus of everything in the bargain!”

“Oh, don’t worry beforehand,” answered Jack. “He may be another Mr. Strong.”

“Not much, Jack! Mr. Strong is one teacher out of a hundred, heaven bless him!”

“If all teachers were like Mr. Strong, going to boarding school would be a cinch,” added Andy, slangily. “He’s the dearest man who ever tried to teach a fellow the value of x and y , and don’t you forget it!”

“And I firmly believe we learn twice as much under a man like Mr. Strong as we do under old Josiah Crabtree, – although Crabtree may be the greater scholar,” came from Stuffer.

The cadets spent a pleasant time in the woods, and at the roll of the drum hastened back to the pasture. When the two companies were formed it was found Bob Greenwood was missing.

“He got disgusted and said he was going to walk back to the Hall alone,” said one of the students. “I can’t say that I blame him much. It was a terrible thing to be made to resign.”

In a few minutes more the line of march back to Putnam Hall was taken up. To give the cadets a variety of scene, Captain Putnam took to another road than that pursued in the morning. This was nearly a mile longer, and, consequently, it was after the supper hour when the cadets came in sight of the school buildings.

As the cadets marched up to the campus a man came rushing out of the school holding up his hands in horror. It was Josiah Crabtree.

“Captain Putnam! Captain Putnam!” he gasped. “Come quickly! Something dreadful has happened!”

CHAPTER V

A “ROUGH HOUSE” AT PUTNAM HALL

“What is the matter, Mr. Crabtree?” demanded the master of the school, as he dismounted from his horse and strode forward.

“The schoolrooms, sir – and the sitting room and library! All turned topsy-turvy!”

“What!”

“Yes, sir! I just came in from the village – I went on a little business, as you know. When I got back I went to the library for a book – ‘The History of Turkey’ – and when I got there!” Josiah Crabtree held up his hands mutely. “It is a shame, an outrage, sir! And the classrooms are about as bad!”

“I’ll see about this,” said Captain Putnam, and strode into the school.

“Something is wrong,” said Pepper, after the cadets had broken ranks. “Let’s see what it is!” And he ran off to place his weapon in the gun rack.

Something was indeed wrong, as a hasty glance around the lower floor of the school building revealed. Every book in the library had been thrown on the floor, and to the general heap were added several pictures and maps taken from the walls. Two inkstands from a writing desk had been overturned, one on a table and over a beautiful statue of Justice standing on a pedestal in a corner. The floor rug had been folded up and thrown over a chandelier.

“Who did this?” demanded the master of the school sternly. “Who did this, I say?”

Nobody answered for the reason that nobody knew.

“And the schoolrooms are as bad,” cried Josiah Crabtree. “Never have *I* seen the equal, sir!”

Without loss of time Captain Putnam walked from one classroom to another and the cadets and teachers followed him, and so did some of the frightened servants. In every room books and papers were scattered in all directions. On a big school globe rested an old silk hat, and an old linen duster that Josiah Crabtree occasionally used in warm weather.

“Look at that! The rascals!” spluttered the irate teacher. “My coat, sir! It makes the globe look like a – a – scarecrow, sir!”

“It certainly does,” answered Captain Putnam, and for an instant he felt inclined to laugh. At the same time Pepper burst into a roar and Andy and some others did the same.

“This is a rough house and no mistake,” murmured Jack. “Who did it, I wonder?”

“Somebody has been here during our absence,” said Dale.

“Boys, stop your laughing!” exclaimed Josiah Crabtree, turning suddenly upon Pepper and his chums. “If you do not stop this minute, I’ll punish you severely! This is no laughing matter!”

“I won’t laugh any more,” answered Pepper, and, behind the fussy teacher’s back drew such a doleful face that Andy and Dale were almost convulsed.

“Here’s a go!” cried one of the cadets presently. “My Latin grammar is gone!”

“So is my history!” came from another.

“So is mine!”

“And mine!”

A hasty hunt was made and soon it was discovered that every history and every Latin grammar was missing. All the other books were there, although mixed up and mussed.

“Well, I don’t mind the loss of the grammar and history so much,” observed Pepper. “I’d like to get rid of them forever!”

“So say we all of us!” sang out Andy softly.

“Boys!” cried Captain Putnam loudly, and at the call everybody became silent. “If any one of you know anything about this, I want that pupil to step forward and say so.”

There was a pause. Nobody budged.

“Was anybody left behind when we went for the target practice?”

Again there was a pause. Nobody spoke.

“This is, as Mr. Crabtree says, an outrage, and I intend to get at the bottom of it.”

“I know somebody who came back before we did,” said Mumps, stepping to the front.

“Who was that, Fenwick?”

“Bob Greenwood.”

“Oh, what a little sneak!” murmured Pepper.

“He ought to have his neck wrung!” added Andy.

“Humph! So he did,” said Captain Putnam. “Does anybody know where Greenwood is now?”

He looked from one to another of the assembled scholars, but all shook their heads.

“Mr. Crabtree, have Peleg Snuggers hunt Greenwood up, and at once.”

“I will, sir,” answered the teacher and hurried off to find the general utility man of the Hall. Then both went in search of Bob Greenwood, but failed to find the ex-quartermaster.

“Perhaps he didn’t come back after he left us,” said Jack. “Maybe he felt too down-hearted to return. I must say, I feel mighty sorry for Bob.”

There was nothing to do but to straighten out the library, sitting room and classrooms, and then the cadets went to supper. After that some of the boys went out on the campus, some to the lake shore, and others to the gymnasium.

“Well, one thing is certain, some of our school-books are gone,” said Joe Nelson. “Too bad! I had an essay in my history. If it is not found I’ll have to write another paper I suppose.”

“I’d not do it!” cried Stuffer. “It’s not your fault that the paper is gone.”

Jack and his chums were entering the gymnasium when a student who had gone ahead uttered a cry.

“They have been here, too!”

“What did they do?”

“Do? Did everything they could to spoil this place,” was the answer.

When lit up the gymnasium certainly presented “a sight for to see,” as Andy expressed it. The wooden horses had been stacked in a corner, the rings and turning bars had been cut down, and the Indian clubs, pulling machines, and the floor covered with oil and grease. Jack did not notice the grease on the floor until he slipped and fell, and Pepper, who was at his side, came down on top of him.

“This is the worst yet!”

“Why, fellows, this place is almost ruined!”

“The fellows who did this ought to be tarred and feathered!” cried Jack, as he got up and rubbed a bruised elbow.

“I don’t believe any of our cadets would do such a trick as this,” observed Andy.

“Reff Ritter and his cronies are mean enough to do anything,” answered Pepper.

“But they were with us,” answered Bart Connors.

“Boys, I think I know who is guilty!” almost shouted Jack, as a sudden idea popped into his head.

“Who?”

“Roy Bock and his crowd – the fellows we met this morning in the big touring car – the chaps who called us tin soldiers.”

“My gracious, Jack, do you think that is true?” demanded Pepper.

“If it is we ought to march over to Pornell Academy and wipe them off the face of the earth,” said Fred Century. “This looks just like Roy Bock’s underhanded meanness,” he added.

Captain Putnam was notified of the new discovery made and came down to inspect the damage done. His face grew very stern.

“This is positive vandalism,” was his comment. “If any boy in this school is guilty I shall expel him.”

“If you will permit me, Captain Putnam, I’d like to say a word,” said Jack.

“What is it, Major Ruddy.”

“I do not think this was done by anybody in our school. If you will remember, we were all away to-day to target practice.”

“That is true, but one boy, Robert Greenwood, came back early.”

“I know that, sir, but – ”

“And I rather think he was in an ugly frame of mind upon his return,” pursued the master of the school grimly.

“That might be, too, sir. All the same, I don’t think he’d do this. Bob isn’t that kind of a fellow.”

“Well, what were you going to say?”

“I was thinking of that crowd of Pornell Academy students we met on the road this morning.”

“The ones in an automobile?”

“Yes, sir, – the fellows who jeered at us and called us tin soldiers.”

“Ahem! What of them?”

“I don’t want to say too much, sir. But you know they are down on us, – and you know how our flagstaff and our cannon disappeared,” went on the young major, referring to an incident which had been related in detail in “The Putnam Hall Champions.”

“Yes, yes. And I also know how Doctor Pornell complained of the disappearance of some choice trophies belonging to his students,” said Captain Putnam grimly.

“Well, they got those trophies back,” said a student in the rear of the crowd, and a snicker passed among the cadets at the remembrance of the incident.

“Those fellows are the worst boys at Pornell,” went on the young major. “I don’t think they’d stop at anything to do this school an injury.”

“Can you prove any of them guilty?”

“No, sir – at least, not yet.”

“Then I can do nothing, for Doctor Pornell and myself are no longer on speaking terms.”

“I think it is clear enough,” said Pepper. “Outsiders wouldn’t have any reason to come here and do this – unless they had a grudge against you.”

“Maybe that butcher, Pangborn, did it,” suggested Dale, mentioning a meat dealer who had had trouble with the captain over his meat bill, and who no longer supplied the school.

“It might be.” The master of the school drew a long breath. “Well, I shall watch out, and I want you young gentlemen to do the same. If you learn of anything, let me know.”

A little later Bob Greenwood came in. From the target grounds he had walked to Cedarville and had purchased his supper at the village. He tried to slip upstairs unobserved, but was caught by Josiah Crabtree.

“Ha! so we have you, you young villain!” cried the teacher, taking him by the collar.

“What’s the matter?” asked Bob, somewhat startled.

“You know well enough,” stormed Josiah Crabtree, and without further ado marched the ex-quartermaster to Captain Putnam’s private office. Here Greenwood was put through a great number of questions. When he learned the drift of things he was highly indignant.

“Captain Putnam, I am not guilty, and you ought to know it!” he cried. “It was bad enough to make me resign my position, this is even worse. I shall write to my folks and ask them to take me away from this school!”

“You may do as you please, Greenwood,” was the captain’s cold reply.

“Some day, perhaps, you’ll find out your mistake,” said the cadet, and then, with tears of anguish and indignation standing in his eyes he left the office and ran up the stairs to the dormitory occupied by himself and several others.

Left to himself, Captain Putnam leaned his elbow on his desk and rested his head in his hand.

“These boys! These boys!” he murmured to himself. “I hardly know whether to believe them or not – they are up to so many tricks! Greenwood looks honest enough, and yet – you never can tell!” And he heaved a deep sigh. He was beginning to learn that after all, running a boarding school was not such an easy thing as he had at first supposed. He wanted to do what was just, – but he hated to be imposed upon.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW TEACHER

The first person the ex-quartermaster encountered upstairs was Jack.

“Hello, Bob,” cried the young major. “Just the person I want to see.”

“I – I – some other time, Ruddy,” stammered the youth, whose eyes were full of tears.

“See here, Bob, what’s your hurry? Anything special on?” And now Jack caught the other boy affectionately by the shoulder.

“I – I am going to leave this school!” was the bitter response. “Captain Putnam hasn’t treated me fairly. I didn’t distribute those blanks, I am certain of it – and I didn’t have anything to do with rough-housing the Hall, either!”

“Who said you played rough-house here?”

“He did – or he said as much.”

“Where have you been?”

“To Cedarville. I walked there directly from the target grounds.”

“Meet anybody on the road?”

“Why – er – yes, a farmer named Laning. He was driving a team of oxen and wanted to know what the shooting meant.”

“Where did you go when first you got to Cedarville?”

“What do you want to know that for?”

“Never mind, just tell me?”

“I went to the steamboat dock. There I met the agent, and helped him tow a boat up to Chase Point. When we got back I went and got supper at Berry’s and then came to the school.”

“Did you tell the captain all that?”

“No – he didn’t give me the chance.”

“Well, you should have told him. It seems to me it would be easy for you to prove an *alibi*, so far as being here this afternoon is concerned.”

“I am not going to bother with it – I’m going to quit and go home,” answered Bob Greenwood recklessly.

“I wouldn’t do it. Stay, Bob, and face the music. If you go away it will make it look as if you were guilty.”

“But Captain Putnam – ”

“Is all upset on account of this awful mix-up. He’ll calm down by to-morrow – and so will you. And let me say another thing, Bob. None of us fellows thinks you distributed the blanks, – or, if you did, we are sure it was a pure and simple mistake.”

At this moment came a cry from one of the dormitories, followed a second later by a yell from another room.

“This is the worst yet!”

“Every bed sheet is gone!”

“So are all the night clothes!”

“Here is some of the stuff, in the closet, and, yes, it’s tied up in hard knots!”

“Talk about ‘chawin’ on the beef!’ It will take some ‘chawin’ to get these knots out!”

“Oh, if I only had the fellow who did this, wouldn’t I give him a piece of my mind!”

“I’d give him a piece av me fist!” roared Emerald. “Just be after looking at them beautiful pajamas of mine, toied in about twinty knots!” And he held up the articles of wearing apparel dolefully.

Jack ran into his dormitory, to find Pepper with a bundle in his hand. The bundle consisted of their night clothes and some bed sheets, all knotted together in a hopeless tangle. Several similar bundles were in the possession of other cadets.

The uproar was so great that soon all the teachers and the servants were on the scene. For once Captain Putnam was as furious as Josiah Crabtree had ever been.

“This is the vilest kind of an outrage!” cried the master of the Hall. “If I find out who is guilty I’ll have that person locked up!”

“I fancy more than one person did this,” said George Strong.

“You are right – it would take several at least. What a mess!” The captain glanced from room to room in perplexity. “I hardly know what to do.”

“Please, Captain Putnam, my nightgown is split from top to bottom,” wailed Mumps.

“One of the legs of my pajamas is torn off,” growled Reff Ritter.

“An arm of mine is gone,” added Coulter.

“Boys, you will have to straighten out things as best you can for the night,” said Captain Putnam at last. “To-morrow I’ll have a thorough investigation.”

The cadets went to work “chawin’ good and proper,” as Andy expressed it, and inside of half an hour the sheets and night clothing were straightened out, and then the lads went to bed, tired but highly excited. All voted that this was the most strenuous day that had ever come to them.

“Captain Putnam can think as he pleases,” said Pepper. “I am certain in my mind that the Pornell fellows did this, although how they managed it without being seen is a wonder to me.”

“It wasn’t so difficult, with all the cadets and all the teachers away,” answered Stuffer. “They must have gotten in on the sly and then posted a guard.”

“If we find out it was really the Pornell fellows we ought to pay ’em back,” spoke up Dale.

“We will,” answered Pepper promptly.

On the following morning both the cadets and the teachers had calmed down, and Captain Putnam acted like quite another person. A rigid investigation was held, but nothing came of it, although the missing school books were found in a hall closet. Acting on Jack’s advice Bob Greenwood went to the master of the school and told his story in detail, adding that he could prove by Mr. Laning, the farmer, and by the people in Cedarville how he had put in his time.

“Well, Greenwood, if you are innocent of this rough-house work I am glad to know it,” answered Captain Putnam finally. And so that matter was dropped. But he still believed poor Greenwood guilty of having distributed the blank cartridges and refused to reinstate the ex-quartermaster.

Two days later the new teacher arrived and was introduced to the cadets by Captain Putnam. Mr. Pluxton Cuddle proved to be a large man, fully six feet two inches in height and weighing at least two hundred pounds. He had a shock of heavy black hair, a heavy black moustache, and heavy black eyebrows. When he spoke his voice was almost a rumble, and he had a manner of shifting his eyes constantly and of rubbing his hands together as if soaping them well.

“I am sure we shall get along well together, young gentlemen,” he said in a voice that could be heard out on the campus. “Education is a great thing, a grand thing, and while you are at this institution you must make the most of your opportunities. My heart goes out to all boys who desire to elevate themselves mentally, and you who love to study will find me your best friend. In a few days I shall feel more at home here, and then we will see how much of precious study we can crowd into the all but too short hours of school life.” And having said this he bowed profoundly and sat down.

“Phew! but he’s a corker!” whispered Pepper to Jack. “I rather think he’ll make us sit up and take notice, eh?”

“Right you are, Pep,” answered the young major. “If I am any judge he’ll be even stricter than old Crabtree.”

“Looks like a chap who would carry out his ideas, once he had made up his mind,” came from Andy.

“Silence in the classroom!” called out Captain Putnam, and then, after a few words more, he left the new teacher and the students alone. Mr. Pluxton Cuddle got to work at once, and that day the boys studied more mathematics, astronomy and physics than ever before. They found that Mr. Cuddle was a regular “slave driver,” as Dale called him. Even Joe Nelson, studious as he was, shook his head.

“He’d want to keep a fellow at it every minute,” he observed. “I don’t mind boning away, but I want a breathing spell now and then.”

In the mess hall Pluxton Cuddle made himself even more disliked than in the classrooms. Hardly had the cadets at his table begun to eat when he commenced to find fault.

“The food is really cooked too much,” he said. “It is not healthy for the human stomach to eat food so well-done. And, boys, do not overload your stomachs. An overloaded stomach befogs the brain. To grow up clear-brained one must eat little and only that which is rare-done.”

“Gracious! does he want to starve us?” cried Pepper.

“He shan’t starve me!” returned Stuffer. He looked up to see the eyes of the new teacher fastened on him and his plateful of victuals.

“I say, you!” cried Pluxton Cuddle, pointing a long finger at poor Stuffer. “Do you mean to eat all that food?”

“Ye – yes, sir,” stammered Singleton.

“It is entirely too much, young man, entirely too much. Why, sir, do you know the capacity of the human stomach?”

“I know what mine can hold,” answered Stuffer, and at this answer a titter arose.

“Half of that food is sufficient for any boy,” went on Pluxton Cuddle, and glared around so sharply that the tittering stopped at once. “You cannot have a clear brain if you stuff yourself.”

“Captain Putnam lets me eat what I please,” grumbled Stuffer.

“Then the captain is making a sad mistake, and I feel it my duty to rectify it. Take a saucedish and put half of the food on it, and then eat what is left on your plate and no more.”

After that there was silence, but many of the cadets looked at each other meaningly. Here was a brand-new experience. When they got out on the campus they gathered to talk it over.

“Cut me off on food!” snorted Stuffer. “Say, if this thing keeps up I’ll go home. Why, I ain’t had half enough to eat!”

“Poor Stuffer!” cried Pepper. “Now see what you get for pampering your stomach!”

“I wanted some more rice pudding but I didn’t dare to ask for it,” said Dale.

“I wanted some more meat,” came from Bart Connors. “But he wouldn’t let the waiter bring me any. I think this is the limit!”

“What made me mad was the way Reff Ritter grinned at me from the next table,” continued Stuffer. “He had all he wanted to eat, for they had Mr. Strong there.”

“Too bad Mr. Strong is going away,” was Jack’s comment. “I hope he doesn’t stay long.”

“When does he go?” inquired another pupil.

“To-morrow.”

“The only thing this Cuddle knows is lessons,” said Dale. “There is no denying he is learned – more so even than old Crabtree. But I must say I like him even less than Crabtree – and that is saying a whole lot.”

“I don’t see how Captain Putnam came to pick him out,” said Henry Lee. “There are plenty of good teachers to be had.”

“He came well recommended,” answered Jack. “I heard Mr. Strong say so.”

“Humph! Wish he had stayed home,” growled Pepper. “If this sort of thing keeps on, I’ll rebel.”

“So will I!” cried Andy.

And several others said the same. Little did they dream then, however, of the rebellion so close at hand, and of the adventures which were to follow.

CHAPTER VII

AN ENCOUNTER ON THE LAKE

“I am going out for a sail,” said Jack, on Saturday afternoon. “Will you go along, Pep?”

“Certainly,” was the ready response. “Anybody else going?”

“Yes, Dale and Stuffer. Fred Century is going out in his boat too, and take several others of our crowd.”

“Going to race again?”

“I don’t think so,” answered the young major. “He hasn’t said anything. Of course I’ll race him if he wants to.”

As my old readers know, there had been in the past two races between the *Alice*, the sloop owned by Jack, and the *Ajax*, the craft belonging to Fred Century. These had taken place while Fred was a student at Pornell Academy. In the first race a sudden gust of wind capsized the *Ajax* and Jack and his chums had to go to the rescue of Fred and his friends. In the second race, which included another sloop belonging to a young man who lived near the two schools, the *Alice* came in ahead, with the *Ajax* second. On this race Roy Bock and his cronies lost considerable money by betting, and they circulated a story that Fred had “sold out” to the Putnam Hall boys. This caused a great rumpus, and a fight in which Bock and several other Pornell students got a good drubbing. Then Fred had a bitter interview with Doctor Pornell, and left the Academy and came to Putnam Hall.

The two sloops, looking very much alike, now that both flew the colors of the Hall, were soon standing up the lake in a breeze which was just sufficient to fill the sails. Each carried a party of four, and all the boys were in the best of spirits in spite of another “run in” with Pluxton Cuddle over the matter of eating.

“Jack, if you don’t mind, I’ll race you for a couple of miles!” sang out Fred, who was handling the tiller of the *Ajax*.

“Want to get beat again?” asked the young major, with a grin.

“No, I want to prove to you that the *Ajax* is just as good a sloop as the *Alice*.”

“All right, I’ll race if you want to. What’s the course?”

“From here to Borden’s Cove, if you don’t mind.”

“Want to capsize again?” questioned Pepper.

“No, I know enough to take in sail now,” answered Fred.

“All right!” sang out the owner of the *Alice*. “What’s the prize for winning?”

“A quart of baked ice-cream,” answered Fred merrily.

“Add a dozen stuffed pancakes fried in ice and I’ll go you!” called the young major. “Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Then go! And catch me if you can!”

“Catch me, you mean!” yelled Fred, and then both skippers settled down to handle their respective craft as best they knew how. Each had his topsail broken out, and each made his passengers sit so as to make his sloop ride on as even a keel as possible.

It was a beautiful day for a race, warm and clear, with scarcely a cloud in the sky.

“I know what I’d like,” said Pepper, as they bowled along over the course. “I’d like to take a swim. I know the water must be dandy.”

“I’ll be with you – after this race is over,” answered Dale.

Side by side the two sloops kept on the course until Cat Point was rounded. Then the *Ajax* began slowly to crawl ahead.

“There! What did I tell you!” cried Fred Century. “See how we are going ahead!”

“This race isn’t over yet,” answered Jack.

They had passed the spot where the mishap had occurred to the *Ajax* and were now heading directly for Borden’s Cove. Soon the *Alice* began to crawl up and presently passed the *Ajax*. Those on Jack’s craft gave a cheer.

“You can’t beat the *Alice*, Fred!”

“If you want a tow we’ll throw you a rope!”

“Wait, this race isn’t over yet!” called Fred, and swung his tiller over a little. At once his sloop began to move faster, and soon the two craft were side by side again. And this position they kept until the Cove was gained and the race had come to an end.

“We’ll have to call it a tie!” declared the young major.

“A tie it is,” answered the owner of the *Ajax*. “But some day I’ll beat you yet,” he added, with a determined shake of his head.

“Well, I’d rather be beat by you than anybody else on this lake, Fred,” said Jack.

“Thank you, that’s a nice thing to say.”

“I mean it.”

“I believe you, Jack, and I’d rather come in behind the *Alice* than behind any other sloop,” added Fred. “My opinion is that our boats are both crackerjacks.”

“Right you are,” came from Pepper.

“If you want to give them away, I’ll take either,” said Andy, with an innocent look, and this remark caused a general laugh.

The boys found a secluded spot, and tying up the two sloops, went ashore and began to get ready for a swim. Soon Pepper plunged into the clear water and Andy and the others followed. It felt a trifle cold at first, but they soon got used to it, and they dove, splashed, and swam around to their hearts’ content.

“Come on and race!” sang out Pepper, presently.

“Done!” called Dale, and side by side they struck out for a distant rock. The others joined in, and in a few minutes all were some distance away from where they had left the sloops and their clothing.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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