

Stratemeyer Edward

**Dave Porter in the Far North:
or, The Pluck of an American
Schoolboy**



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PREFACE

"Dave Porter in the Far North" is a complete story in itself, but forms the fourth volume in a line issued under the general title of "Dave Porter Series."

In the first volume, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," I introduced a typical American lad, full of life and vigor, and related the particulars of his doings at an American boarding school of to-day – a place which is a little world in itself. At this school Dave made both friends and enemies, proved that he was a natural leader, and was admired accordingly.

The great cloud over Dave's life was the question of his parentage. His enemies called him "that poorhouse nobody," which hurt him deeply. He made a discovery, and in the second volume of the series, entitled "Dave Porter in the South Seas," we followed him on a most unusual voyage, at the end of which he found an uncle, and learned something of his father and sister, who were at that time traveling in Europe.

Dave was anxious to meet his own family, but could not find out just where they were. While waiting for word from them, he went back to Oak Hall, and in the third volume of the series, called "Dave Porter's Return to School," we learned how he became innocently involved in a mysterious series of robberies, helped to win two great games of football, and brought the bully of the academy to a realization of his better self.

As time went by Dave longed more than ever to meet his father and his sister, and how he went in search of them I leave the pages which follow to relate. As before, Dave is bright, manly, and honest to the core, and in those qualities I trust my young readers will take him as their model throughout life.

Once more I thank the thousands who have taken an interest in what I have written for them. May the present story help them to despise those things which are mean and hold fast to those things which are good.

Edward Stratemeyer.

January 10, 1908.

CHAPTER I ON THE TRAIN

"Here we are at the station, Dave!"

"Yes, and there is Phil waiting for us," answered Dave Porter. He threw up the car window hastily. "Hi, there, Phil, this way!" he called out, lustily.

A youth who stood on the railroad platform, dress-suit case in hand, turned hastily, smiled broadly, and then ran for the steps of the railroad car. The two boys already on board arose in their seats to greet him.

"How are you, Dave? How are you, Ben?" he exclaimed cordially, and shook hands. "I see you've saved a seat for me. Thank you. My, but it's a cold morning, isn't it?"

"I was afraid you wouldn't come on account of the weather," answered Dave Porter. "How are you feeling?"

"As fine as ever," answered Phil Lawrence. "Oh, it will take more than one football game to kill me," he went on, with a light laugh.

"I trust you never get knocked out like that again, Phil," said Dave Porter, seriously.

"So do I," added Ben Basswood. "The game isn't worth it."

"Mother thought I ought to stay home until the weather moderated a bit, but I told her you would all be on this train and I wanted to be with the crowd. Had a fine Thanksgiving, I suppose."

"I did," returned Ben Basswood.

"Yes, we had a splendid time," added Dave Porter, "only I should have been better satisfied if I had received some word from my father and sister."

"No word yet, Dave?"

"Not a line, Phil," and Dave Porter's usually bright face took on a serious look. "I don't know what to make of it and neither does my Uncle Dunston."

"It certainly is queer. If they went to Europe your letters and cablegrams ought to catch them somewhere. I trust you get word soon."

"If I don't, I know what I am going to do."

"What?"

"Go on a hunt, just as I did when I found my uncle," was Dave Porter's reply.

While the three boys were talking the train had rolled out of the station. The car was but half filled, so the lads had plenty of room in which to make themselves comfortable. Phil Lawrence stowed away his suit case in a rack overhead and settled down facing the others. He gave a yawn of satisfaction.

"I can tell you, it will feel good to get back to Oak Hall again," he observed. "You can't imagine how much I've missed the boys and the good times, even if I was laid up in bed with a broken head."

"You'll get a royal reception, Phil," said Dave. "Don't forget that when you went down you won the football game for us."

"Maybe I did, Dave, but you had your hand in winning, too, and so did Ben."

"Well, if the fellows – Say, here comes Nat Poole." Dave lowered his voice. "I don't think he'll want to see me."

As Dave spoke, a tall, fastidiously dressed youth came down the car aisle. He was not bad-looking, but there was an air of dissipation about him that was not pleasant to contemplate. He wore a fur-trimmed overcoat and a cap to match, and heavy fur-lined gloves.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, on catching sight of Phil Lawrence. "Going back to the Hall, eh?"

"I am, and you are going back too, Nat, I suppose."

"Yes," drawled Nat Poole. He turned and caught sight of Dave and Ben. "Humph!" he muttered, and without saying more continued on his way down the aisle and through to the next car of the train.

"He's real sociable, he is," observed Ben Basswood, with a grin.

"I knew he wouldn't want to see me," said Dave.

"What's up – more trouble, Dave?" questioned Phil. "Remember, I've been away from Oak Hall so long I've rather lost track of things."

"This trouble didn't occur at the school," answered Dave. His face grew a trifle red as he spoke.

"It happened back at Crumville," broke in Ben, and winked one eye. "You see, Nat wanted to come to a Thanksgiving party the Wadsworths gave. But Dave told Jessie just what sort Nat was, and she left him out at the last moment. It made Nat furious, and I've heard that he is going to do his best to square up with Dave this winter."

"You're mistaken, Ben; I didn't have to tell Jessie anything," corrected Dave. "A fellow named Bangs wanted Nat invited, but Jessie didn't want him and neither did her folks. Bangs got mad over it, and said he wouldn't come either, and he and Nat went to a show instead."

"Well, I heard that Nat blamed it on you."

"He is apt to blame everything on me – if he can," said Dave, with a short, hard laugh. "It's his style. I suppose he'll even blame me for getting Gus Plum to reform."

"Well, you did get Gus to do that," declared Ben, heartily. "It's the best thing I ever heard of, too."

"If Plum cuts Poole, what's the dude to do?" asked Phil. "The two used to be great cronies."

To these words Dave did not reply. He was wiping the steam from the car window. Now he peered out as the train came to a stop.

"Hurrah! Here we are!" he cried, and leaped from his seat.

"Where are you going?" demanded Ben.

"After Roger. I know he'll be at the station, for I sent him a special message," and away went Dave after Roger Morr, one of his best and dearest schoolmates. The two met on the car platform, and as the train moved off again, both came in to join Ben and Phil.

To those who have read the former volumes in this "Dave Porter Series" the boys already mentioned need no special introduction. They were all pupils of Oak Hall, a first-class boarding school located in the heart of one of our New England States. At the academy Dave Porter seemed to be a natural leader, although that place had been at times disputed by Nat Poole, Gus Plum, and others. It was wonderful what a hold Dave had on his friends, considering his natural modesty. Physically he was well built and his muscles were those of a youth used to hard work and a life in the open air. Yet, though he loved to run, row, swim, and play games, Dave did not neglect his studies, and only a short time before this story opens had won the Oak Hall medal of honor, of which he was justly proud.

In times gone by Dave's enemies had called him "a poorhouse nobody" – something which had caused him a great deal of pain. When a child, he had been picked up alongside of the railroad tracks by strangers and taken to the Crumville poorhouse. At this institution he remained until he was nine years old, when a broken-down college professor named Caspar Potts, who had turned farmer, took him out and gave him a home. At that time Caspar Potts was in the grasp of a hard-hearted money lender, Aaron Poole, the father of Nat Poole, already mentioned, and the outlook soon became very dark for both man and boy.

Then came an unexpected turn of affairs, and from that moment Dave's future seemed assured. As related in my first volume, "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," the boy called upon Mr. Oliver Wadsworth, a rich manufacturer of that neighborhood. The gentleman had a daughter Jessie, a bright-eyed miss some years younger than Dave. She was waiting to take an automobile ride when the gasoline tank of the machine caught fire. It was plucky Dave who rushed in and, at the peril of his own life, saved the girl from being fatally burned.

The Wadsworths were more than grateful, and when Mr. Wadsworth discovered that Caspar Potts was one of his former college teachers, he insisted that both the old man and Dave come to live at his mansion. He took a great interest in Dave, more especially as he had had a son about Dave's age who had died.

"The lad must go to some boarding school," said Oliver Wadsworth, and at his own expense he sent Dave to Oak Hall. With Dave went Ben Basswood, a friend of several years' standing.

Dave made friends with great rapidity. First came Roger Morr, the son of a United States senator, then Phil Lawrence, whose father was a wealthy ship-owner, Sam Day, who was usually called "Lazy," because he was so big and fat, "Buster" Beggs, "Shadow" Hamilton, and a number of others, whom we shall meet as our story proceeds.

For a while all went well with Dave, but then came trouble with Nat Poole, who had come to the Hall, and with Gus Plum, the school bully, and Chip Macklin, his toady. The cry of "poorhouse nobody" was again raised, and Dave felt almost like leaving Oak Hall in disgust.

"I must find out who I really am," he told himself, and fortune presently favored him. By a curious turn of circumstances he fell in with an old sailor named Billy Dill. This tar declared he knew Dave or somebody who looked exactly like him. This unknown individual was on an island in the South Seas.

"My father's ships sail to the South Seas," Phil Lawrence told Dave, and the upshot of the matter was that Dave took passage on one of the vessels, in company with the ship-owner's son, Roger Morr, and Billy Dill.

As already related in the second volume of this series, "Dave Porter in the South Seas," the voyage of the *Stormy Petrel* proved to be anything but an uneventful one. Fearful storms arose, and Dave and some others were cast away on an uninhabited island. But in the end all went well, and, much to the lad's joy, he found an uncle named Dunston Porter.

"Your father is my twin brother," said Dunston Porter. "He is now traveling in Europe, and with him is your sister Laura, about one year younger than yourself. We must return to the United States at once and let them know of this. They mourn you as dead."

There was a good deal of money in the Porter family, a fair share of which would come to Dave when he became of age. The whole party returned to California and then to the East, and word was at once sent to Europe, to David Breslow Porter, as Dave's father was named. To the surprise of all, no answer came back, and then it was learned that Mr. Porter and his daughter Laura had started on some trip, leaving no address behind them.

"This is too bad," said Dave. "I wanted so much to see them."

"We'll get word soon, never fear," replied his uncle, and then advised Dave to finish out his term at Oak Hall, Mr. Porter in the meantime remaining a guest of the Wadsworth family.

How Dave went back to Oak Hall, and what happened to him there has already been related in detail in "Dave Porter's Return to School." His enemies could no longer twit him with being a "poorhouse nobody," yet they did all they could to dim his popularity and get him into trouble.

"He shan't cut a dash over me, even if he has money," said Nat Poole, and to this Gus Plum, the bully, eagerly agreed. There was likewise another pupil, Nick Jasniff, who also hated Dave, and one day this fellow, who was exceedingly hot-tempered, attempted to strike Dave down with a heavy Indian club. It was a most foul attack and justly condemned by nearly all who saw it, and thoroughly scared over what he had attempted to do, Nick Jasniff ran away from school and could not be found.

There had been a number of robberies around Oakdale, where the academy was located, and one day when Dave and his chums were out ice-boating they had come on the track of two of the robbers. Then to his surprise Dave learned that Nick Jasniff was also implicated in the thefts. He knew that Jasniff and Gus Plum were very intimate, and wondered if the bully of the school could be one of the criminals also. At length, one snowy day, he saw Plum leave the Hall and followed the fellow. Plum made for the railroad, where there was a deep cut, and into this cut he fell, just as a

train was approaching. At the peril of his life Dave scrambled to the bottom of the opening and drew the bully from the tracks just as the train rolled by.

If ever a boy was conquered, it was Gus Plum at that time. At first he could not realize that Dave had saved him. "To think you would do this for me – you!" he sobbed. "And I thought you hated me!" And then he broke down completely. He confessed how he had tried to injure Dave and his chums, but said he had had nothing to do with the robberies. Nick Jasniff had wanted him to go in with the robbers, but he had declined.

"I am going to cut Jasniff after this," said Gus Plum, "and I am going to cut Nat Poole, too. I want to make a man of myself – if I can."

But it was hard work. A short time after the railroad incident the two robbers were caught and sent to prison, to await trial, and Plum had to appear as a witness for the state and tell how he had been implicated. In the meantime Nick Jasniff ran away to Europe, taking several hundred dollars of the stolen funds with him. Dave thought he had seen the last of the young rascal, but in this he was mistaken, as the events which followed proved.

CHAPTER II

A ROW IN A RESTAURANT

The majority of the boys had been home only for the Thanksgiving holidays. The exception was poor Phil Lawrence, who had been laid up for a number of weeks as the result of a blow on the head while playing a game of football. Phil said he felt as well as ever, but he was somewhat pale and in no humor for anything in the way of roughness.

As the train stopped at one station and another along the line, it began to fill up with passengers, including a goodly number of Oak Hall students. At one place Sam Day and Shadow Hamilton came on board, followed by half a dozen snowballs, sent after them by boys who had come to see them off.

"Hi! stop that!" cried Sam Day, as he tried to dodge, and just then a snowball meant for his head took a somewhat stout man in the ear. The man uttered a cry of surprise, slipped on the platform of the car, and fell flat, crushing his valise under him. At this a shout of laughter rang out from the depot platform, and the lads standing there lost no time in disappearing.

"You – you villains!" roared the stout man when he could catch his breath. "I'll – I'll have you locked up!"

"It wasn't my fault," answered Sam Day, trying hard to suppress the grin on his face. "Shall I help you up?"

"No," grunted the man, and arose slowly. "Do you know I have a dozen fresh eggs in that valise?"

"Sorry, I'm sure."

"A dozen eggs!" cried Shadow Hamilton. "Well, I never! Say, that puts me in mind of a story. Once a man bought some eggs that weren't strictly fresh, and –"

"Pah! who wants to listen to your stories?" interrupted the stout man. "You had better pay for the eggs that are smashed," and he entered the car in anything but a pleasant humor.

Dave had come to the car door to greet Sam and Shadow and conduct them to a seat near his own. The stout man was so upset mentally that he bumped roughly into the youth.

"Get out of my way, will you?" grunted the irate passenger.

"Excuse me, I didn't know you owned the whole aisle," said Dave, coldly. He did not like the manner in which he had been addressed.

"See here, are you another one of them good-for-nothing schoolboys?" bellowed the stout individual. "If you are, I want you to understand you can't run this train – not as far as I am concerned, anyhow."

Dave looked at the man for a moment in silence. "You are very polite, I must say," he observed. "I haven't done anything to you, have I?"

"No, but you young bloods are all in together. I know you! Last spring I was on the train with a lot of college boys, and they tried to run things to suit themselves. But we fixed 'em, we did. And we'll fix you, too, if you try to run matters here," and with a savage shake of his head the stout man passed down the aisle and dropped heavily into the first vacant seat he reached.

"Isn't he a peach?" murmured Sam Day to Dave. "Meekest man I ever saw, and ought to have a monument for politeness."

"I hope all his eggs are smashed," said Shadow Hamilton. "He certainly deserves it."

"Shouldn't wonder if they are – he came down hard enough," answered Dave.

By good luck all the students had seats close to each other, and as the train rolled along they told of their various holiday experiences and discussed school matters.

"Just four weeks and then we'll close down for Christmas," said Roger.

"We ought to have lots of fun," said Ben. "We can go skating and ice-boating, and we can build a fort –"

"And snowball Pop Swingly and Horsehair," interrupted Sam, mentioning the janitor of Oak Hall and the driver for the institution. "Don't forget them or they'll feel slighted."

"What's the matter with snowballing Job Haskers?" asked Phil, mentioning a teacher who was anything but popular with the students.

"Oh, we'll attend to him, never fear," answered Roger Morr.

"Has anybody heard from Plum?" questioned Sam, during a lull in the conversation.

"I got a letter from him," answered Dave, seeing that nobody else replied. "He is afraid he is going to have a hard time of it to reform. I hope you fellows will treat him as well as you can."

"I shall," said the senator's son, and several nodded.

"I think I have always treated him better than he deserved," said Shadow Hamilton. He could not forget what serious trouble the former bully of Oak Hall had once caused him, when Doctor Clay's valuable collection of postage stamps had disappeared.

It had been snowing slightly since morning, and now the flakes began to come down thicker than ever. As a consequence the engineer of the train could not see the signals ahead and had to run slowly, so that when the Junction was gained, where the boys had to change for Oakdale, they were half an hour late.

"We've missed the connection and must remain here for just an hour and a quarter," declared Dave, after questioning the station master. "We can't get to Oak Hall until after dark."

"I move we have something to eat," said Roger. "A sandwich, a piece of mince-pie, and a cup of hot chocolate wouldn't go bad."

"Second the commotion!" cried Ben. "All in favor raise their left ear."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," said Shadow. "Two men went to a restaurant and ordered – "

"Fried snakes' livers on mushrooms," interrupted Dave. "You've told that story before."

"No, I didn't, and it wasn't fried – "

"I know what he means," said Phil. "It was robins' wings salted in sauerkraut."

"It wasn't. This was an order of – "

"Blue pumpkin rinds with mackerel sauce," interrupted Sam Day. "Very fine dish. I ate it once, when I was dining at the White House with the President."

"It wasn't pumpkin rinds, or anything like it. It was a plain order of – "

"Cherry roast, with minced sunflowers?" suggested Roger. "The girls at Vassar dine on 'em regularly, after playing football."

"This was a plain everyday order of pork and beans," shouted Shadow, desperately. "And after the men got 'em, what do you think they did? Oh, this is a good one;" and Shadow's eyes began to sparkle.

"Found fault, I suppose, because the beans weren't from Boston," said Dave.

"No."

"Don't keep us waiting, Shadow. Tell the story to a finish," said Phil.

"Well, they got the pork and beans – "

"Yes."

"And they sat down, facing each other – "

"All right – fire away," said Sam, as the story-teller paused.

"And they began to eat – "

"Glad to know they didn't begin to weep," was Roger's soft comment.

"And they ate the pork and beans all up," continued Shadow, soberly. And then he stopped short and looked around blankly.

"Eh?"

"Well, I never!"

"Is that all there is to the story?" demanded Sam.

"Certainly. You didn't expect they'd buy the beans and throw them away, did you?" asked Shadow, innocently.

"Sold that time!" cried Dave, good-naturedly. "Never mind; we'll let Shadow pay for the lunch we're going to have. Come on."

"Not on your tintype," murmured the story-teller. "Not unless you pass around the hat and make me treasurer."

They found a convenient restaurant and, pushing together two of the tables, sat down in a merry group. The proprietor knew some of them, and nodded pleasantly as he took their orders. Soon they were eating as only happy and healthy schoolboys can eat.

"My, but this mince-pie is good!" declared Roger. "I could eat about a yard of it!"

"A yard of pie is good," said Dave, with a smile.

"Talking about a yard of pie puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow, who was stowing away the last of a hot roast-beef sandwich.

"Hold on, we've had enough!" cried Sam.

"If you pile on another like that last one, we'll roll you out in the snow," was Phil's comment.

"This is a real story, really it is, and it's a good one, too."

"Vintage of 1864, or before Columbus landed?" inquired Ben.

"I've never told this before. Some Yale students went into a butcher shop and one of 'em, to be funny, asked the butcher if he'd sell him a yard of mutton. 'Certainly,' says the butcher. 'Fifty cents a yard.' 'All right,' says Mr. Student. 'I'll take two yards.' 'A dollar, please,' says the butcher. 'Here you are,' says the student, and holds up the money. Then the butcher takes the bill, puts it in his cash drawer, and hands out – six sheep feet."

"Very old and musty," was Dave's comment. "Washington told that to Cæsar when the two were planning to throw Socrates into Niagara." And then a laugh went up all around.

The boys were just finishing their lunch when the door opened and a stout man walked in. He was covered with snow, and looked anything but happy.

"Our friend of the smashed eggs," whispered Sam to Dave. "Wonder if he has cleaned out his valise yet."

The man sat down at a side table and ordered several things. Then he happened to glance around, noticed the students for the first time, and scowled.

"Humph! what you fellows doing here?" he growled.

"Haven't we a right to come here?" demanded Dave, for the man was looking straight at him.

"Shouldn't think the proprietor would want such gay larks as you here."

"I shouldn't think he'd want such a grunt as you here," retorted Sam Day.

"Hi! now, don't you talk to me that way!" roared the stout man. "I want you to understand I am a gentleman, I am."

"See here, we can't have any quarreling in here," said the restaurant proprietor, coming forward.

"Some of them fellows knocked me down on the train and smashed a valise full of eggs on me, Mr. Denman."

"We did nothing of the sort," answered Sam. "He fell on the icy platform of the car and right on top of his valise."

"And then he got up and bumped into me," added Dave. "He was very impolite, to say the least."

"Look here!" roared the stout man, "I want you to understand –"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Amos Denman, the restaurant keeper. "Isn't your name Isaac Pludding?"

"Yes."

"Then you are the man who caused the trouble at Mr. Brown's restaurant last week. I know you. Some time ago you were in here, and nothing suited you. I don't want to serve you, and you can go elsewhere for your meal."

"Don't want to sell me anything?" snarled Isaac Pludding.

"Not a mouthful. And, let me add, I consider these young men gentlemen, and I won't have them annoyed while they are in my place."

"Oh, all right, have your own way," snarled the stout man. "I'll take my money elsewhere, I will!" He glared at the students. "But I'll get square some day for this – don't forget that!" And shaking his head very savagely, he stormed out of the restaurant, banging the door after him.

CHAPTER III

OFF THE TRACK

"Well, if he isn't the worst yet," was the comment of the senator's son.

"I hope he isn't waiting for that train," said Shadow. "I don't want to see any more of him."

"Pooh! who's afraid?" asked Phil. "I guess we can make him keep his distance."

"I thought I knew him when he came in, but I wasn't sure," said the restaurant keeper. "The man who runs the hotel, Mr. Brown, had a lot of trouble with him because he wouldn't pay his bill – said it was too high. Then he came here once and said the meat wasn't fresh and the bread was stale and sour. I came close to pitching him out. Don't let him walk over you – if he does take your train."

"No danger," answered Dave. He had not yet forgotten the rude manner in which Isaac Pludding had shoved him.

It was soon time for the Oakdale train to arrive, and the students walked back to the depot. The snow was over a foot deep and still coming down steadily. The depot was crowded with folks, and among them they discovered Isaac Pludding, with his valise and a big bundle done up in brown paper.

"He certainly must be waiting for the train," said Dave; and he was right. When the cars came to a stop the stout man was the first person aboard. The students entered another car and secured seats in a bunch as before.

"By the way, where is Nat Poole?" asked Roger, suddenly. "I didn't see him get off the other train."

"He got off and walked towards the hotel," answered Phil. "I suppose he feels rather lonesome."

"That can't be helped," said Sam. "He makes himself so disagreeable that nobody wants him around."

Just as the train was about to start a boy leaped on the platform of the car our friends occupied, opened the door, and came in. It was Nat Poole, and he was all out of breath. He looked for a seat, but could find none.

"They ought to run more cars on this train," he muttered, to Roger. "It's a beastly shame to make a fellow stand up."

"Better write to the president of the railroad company about it, Nat," answered the senator's son, dryly.

"Maybe there is a seat in the next car," suggested Phil.

Nat Poole shuffled off, looking anything but pleased. Hardly had he gone when several came in from the car ahead, also looking for seats. Among them was Isaac Pludding. He had had a seat near a door, but had given it up to look for something better, and now he had nothing. He glanced bitterly at the students as he passed, then came back and leaned heavily against the seat Dave and Roger were occupying. In doing this he almost knocked Dave's hat from his head.

"I'll thank you to be a little more careful," said Dave, as he put his hat into place. He felt certain that Isaac Pludding had shoved against him on purpose.

"Talking to me?" growled the stout man.

"I am. I want you to stop shoving me."

"I've got to stand somewhere."

"Well, you quit shoving me, or you'll get the worst of it," answered Dave, decidedly.

At that moment the car lurched around a curve and Isaac Pludding bumped against Dave harder than ever. Thoroughly angry, the youth arose and faced the stout man.

"If you do that again, I'll have you put off the train," he said.

"That's right, Dave, don't let him walk over you," added Roger.

"If he doesn't know his place, teach it to him," was Phil's comment.

"Have me put off the train?" cried Isaac Pludding. "I'd like to see you do it! I want you to know I am a stockholder of this line."

"Then it's a shame you don't provide seats for all your passengers."

"That's true, too," remarked a gentleman who was standing close by.

"I don't believe he owns more than one share of stock," observed Sam. "And that he most likely inherited from his great-granduncle."

"I own five shares!" howled Isaac Pludding. "And I want you to know – "

What he wanted the boys to know they never found out, for at that moment the train gave another lurch. It came so suddenly that the stout man was taken completely from his feet and sent sprawling in the aisle on his back. A valise from a rack over a seat came tumbling down, and, not to get it on his head, Roger shoved it aside and it struck Isaac Pludding full on the stomach, causing him to gasp.

The boys uttered a shout of laughter, and many other passengers joined in. The floor of the car was wet from snow, and when Isaac Pludding scrambled up he was covered with dirt. Dave caught up the valise and turned it over to Sam, to whom it belonged.

"Who threw that valise on me?" demanded the stout man, eyeing the boys in rage.

To this there was no answer.

"I guess you threw it," went on Isaac Pludding, and caught Dave by the arm.

"Let go of me," said Dave, eyeing the man steadily. "I did not throw it. Let go."

Isaac Pludding wanted to argue the matter, but there was something in Dave's manner that he did not like. He dropped his hold and drew back a little.

"Don't you dare to shove me again – not once," continued the youth. "If you do you'll regret it. I have stood all from you that I am going to stand."

"Oh, you're no good," muttered the stout man, lamely, and passed on to the end of the car.

The train was coming to a halt at a place called Raytown. They were now but eight miles from Oakdale, and the students began to wonder if anybody would be at that station to meet them.

"If Horsehair comes down with the carryall, he'll have all he can do to get through the snow," said Dave.

"Perhaps he'll come down with four horses," suggested Roger.

"One thing is certain, Doctor Clay will see to it that we get to Oak Hall somehow," said Ben.

"What a rickety old railroad this side line is!" declared Phil, as the car gave several lurches. "It's a wonder they don't fix the track."

"Not enough traffic to make it pay, I fancy," answered Dave. "They carry more milk and cattle than they do passengers."

It was growing dark and still snowing briskly. The car was cold, and more than one passenger had to stamp his feet to keep them warm. On they plunged, through the snow, until of a sudden there came a lurch and a jerk and then a series of bumps that caused everybody to jump up in alarm. Then the train came to a stop.

"What's the matter now?"

"I think we must be off the track."

"It's a wonder the train didn't go over."

"It couldn't go over, for we are down in a cut."

As one end of the car was up and the other down, the boys knew something serious was the matter. Taking up their hand baggage, they followed some of the passengers outside and jumped down in the snow.

It did not take long to learn the truth of the situation. A turnout on the track had become clogged with ice, and the locomotive and two cars had jumped the track and bumped along the ties for a distance of two hundred feet. Nobody had been hurt, and even the train was not seriously damaged, although one pair of car-trucks would have to be repaired.

"I don't believe they can get the cars and the locomotive back on the track right away," said Dave. "They'll have to have the wrecking train and crew down here."

When appealed to, the conductor said he did not know how soon they would be able to move again. Probably not in three or four hours, and maybe not until the next morning.

"I'll have to walk back to Raytown and telegraph to headquarters," he explained.

"We are in a pickle, and no mistake," was Roger's comment. "I must say I don't feel like staying on the train all night – it's too cold and uncomfortable."

In the group of passengers was Isaac Pludding, storming angrily at everything and everybody.

"It's an outrage!" he declared, to a bystander. "I must get to Oakdale by seven o'clock. I've got a business deal for some cattle I must close. If I don't get there, somebody else may buy the cattle."

"I hope he gets left," said Phil, softly.

"So do I," returned Dave.

"If we could only hire a big sleigh and some horses, we might drive to Oakdale," suggested Ben.

"Hurrah, that's the talk!" cried Dave. "There must be some farmhouse near here."

"Say, if you can get a sleigh, I'll pay my share, if you'll take me along," put in Nat Poole, eagerly. He hated to think of being left behind.

"All right, Nat, I'm willing," said Dave, generously.

"We've got to find the sleigh first," added the senator's son.

"And see if we can get horses enough to pull it," said Ben. "Some farmers won't let their horses out in such a storm as this – and you can't blame 'em much, either."

"If we can't get a sleigh, perhaps we can stay at some farmhouse all night," suggested Sam.

All of the party climbed through the snow to the top of the railroad cut and then looked around for some buildings.

"I see a light!" cried Phil, and pointed it out, between some bare trees.

"It's a house; come on," replied Dave, and set off without delay, the others following. "Who knows but that somebody else may want to ride, and if so, we want to be first to get a sleigh."

It was rather a toilsome journey to the farmhouse. Between them and the place were a barn and a cow-shed, and just as they passed the former there arose a fierce barking, and three big black dogs came bounding toward the students.

"Look out! The dogs will chew us up!" yelled Nat Poole, in terror, and started to retreat.

"Down!" called out Dave, who was still in advance. "Down, I say! Charge!" But instead of obeying, the big dogs continued to approach until they were within a dozen feet of the students. Then they lined up, growled fiercely, and showed their teeth.

"Let us get into the barn," suggested Roger, and flung open a door that was handy. Into the building they went pell-mell, Dave being the last to enter. One dog made a dart at the youth's leg, but Dave gave him a kick that sent him back. Then the door was slammed shut and latched, and the students found themselves in utter darkness.

"Wonder if they can get in any other way?" asked Phil, after a second of silence, during which they heard the dogs barking outside.

"I doubt if any of the doors are open in this storm," answered Shadow.

"Let us get up in – in the loft!" suggested Nat Poole. He was as white as the snow outside and his teeth were chattering from something else besides the cold.

"That's a good idea," said Dave. "But we must have a light to learn where the loft is. Anybody got a match?"

Nobody had such an article, and a groan went up. Nat Poole was appealed to, for the others knew he had been smoking on the train.

"My matchbox is empty," said he. "I am going to hunt for the loft ladder in the dark."

"Be careful, or you may run into some troublesome horse," cautioned Dave.

The boys moved slowly around in the dark. They could hear the sounds of several horses feeding and the barking of the dogs. Then, quite unexpectedly, came the cracking of a board, a yell of alarm from Nat Poole, and a loud splash.

"Help! I am drowning! Save me!"

CHAPTER IV

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE BARN

"Nat has fallen into the water!"

"Where is he? I can't see a thing."

"He must have gone down in some cistern."

These and other cries rang out, and all of the boys of Oak Hall were filled with consternation. Dave had located the splash fairly well, and as quickly as he could he felt his way in that direction.

"Nat, where are you?" he called out.

"Here, down in a cistern! Help me out, or I'll be frozen to death."

Dave now reached the edge of the cistern. Two of the boards which had covered it had broken, letting Nat down quite unexpectedly. Fortunately there was only three feet of water in the cistern, so there was no fear of drowning. But the water was icy and far from agreeable.

As Dave leaned down to give Poole his hand, the door of the barn was flung open and a farmer strode in, a lantern in one hand and a stout stick in the other. The man held the light over his head and looked around suspiciously.

"Wot yeou fellers doin' here?" he demanded.

"Come here with the light – one of our party has fallen into the cistern!" cried Dave.

"Into the cistern, eh? Mebbe it serves him right. Ain't got no business in my barn," answered the farmer, as he came closer.

"We ran in because your dogs came after us," explained Roger.

"An' where did yeou come from? Ye don't belong around here, I know."

"We came from the train – it's off the track," said Dave. "But help us get this boy out first and then we'll explain."

"Train off the track? Well, I snum!" cried the farmer. Then he set down the lantern and aided in bringing Nat Poole to the flooring of the barn. "Putty cold, I'll bet a quart o' shellbarks," he added, grinning at the lad's wet and shivering figure.

"Can't we get him into the house by the fire?" asked Ben. "We'll pay you for your trouble."

Now if there was one thing Shadrach Mellick loved, it was money, and at the mention of pay he was all attention. He asked a few questions, and then led the way out of the barn and towards his house. The dogs wanted to follow, but he drove them back.

"Their bark is worse nor their bite," he explained. "They wouldn't hurt yeou very much." Then he asked about the train, and the students gave him the particulars of the mishap. In the meantime Mrs. Mellick bustled around and got Nat Poole some dry clothing and allowed him to change his garments in a side room that chanced to be warm.

The boys soon learned that Shadrach Mellick owned a sleigh large enough to accommodate the entire party, and also four good, strong horses. For ten dollars he agreed to take them to Oak Hall, stopping at Oakdale on the way, to see if the school sleigh was waiting for them.

"The sooner we start the better," said Dave. And then he added in a whisper to Roger and Phil: "If we don't, some other passengers from the train may come up here and offer him more money for his turnout."

"Let us pay him part and bind the bargain," suggested the senator's son.

"I'll do it," answered Dave, and gave Shadrach Mellick two dollars.

"Good enough – thet binds the bargain," said the close-fisted farmer.

Nat Poole was a sight to behold in a well-worn suit several sizes too big for him, and the boys could not help but laugh when he made his appearance.

"That's a real swagger suit, Nat!" cried Sam Day. "Won't you give me the address of your tailor?"

"Nat can't do that," added Ben. "He wants the artist all to himself."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," broke in Shadow Hamilton. "A countryman went into a clothing store to buy a suit and –"

"Wow!" came from several of the students in a chorus.

"That story is a hundred and fifty years old."

"It's full of moth-holes, Shadow."

"It isn't – I've only told it about –"

"Two hundred and eleven times," finished Dave. "Shadow, you really must get a new joke-book to read."

"Never mind my clothing," grumbled Nat Poole. "I couldn't help it that I fell in the cistern. The farmer had no right to cover it with rotten boards."

"Yeou had no right to be in the barn," answered Shadrach Mellick, with a grin. "Howsomever, we'll let it pass. I'm satisfied ef yeou air."

The sleigh was soon ready, and the students bundled in, making themselves as comfortable as possible. Nat Poole's wet clothing was placed in a sack and tied on behind. Then the farmer mounted to the front seat.

"All ready?" he queried.

"All ready – let her go!" sang out several of the lads.

At that moment the dogs began to set up another bark, and then came a call from the darkness.

"Hi, there, wait a minute!"

"Who is that?" questioned Dave. "Hullo, if it isn't the stout man!"

It was Isaac Pludding, true enough. He had been walking rapidly and was nearly out of wind.

"Whe – where are you going?" he panted, to the farmer.

"Goin' to take these chaps to Oakdale."

"That is where I want to go." Isaac Pludding glared at the students. "I don't like to ride with those boys, but I suppose I can stand it. Got room for another passenger? I suppose they told you how the train broke down."

"They did," answered Shadrach Mellick. "Reckon I can carry one more," he added. "But yeou'll have to pay me. These boys are paying me ten dollars for the trip."

"How much do you want?" demanded Isaac Pludding.

"About a dollar, I guess."

"It's enough, but I'll go you," answered the stout man, and prepared to climb into the big sleigh.

As soon as Isaac Pludding appeared, Dave held a whispered conversation with Roger and some of the others. Now he turned to Shadrach Mellick.

"Excuse me, Mr. Mellick, but we don't propose to take another passenger," he said, decidedly. "At least, not this man."

"No?"

"No, sir. We hired this sleigh for ourselves alone."

"And paid part of the money to bind the bargain," added Phil.

"What! do you mean to say I can't ride if I want to?" cried the stout man, as unreasonable as he had been on the train.

"You can't ride with us," said Roger.

"What do you say?" asked Isaac Pludding of the farmer.

Shadrach Mellick scratched his head.

"A bargain is a bargain, Mr. Mellick," said Dave, hastily. "We hired this sleigh, and that is all there is to it."

"That is true, but – er –"

"Wouldn't you rather earn ten dollars than one or two?" asked Ben. "If that man is to ride we won't."

"So say we all of us!" came from a number of the others.

"Then I can't take yeou," said the farmer to Isaac Pludding. "These young fellers come fust."

"It's an outrage!" cried the stout man. "I'll – I'll have the law on you for it."

"Guess yeou air a fool," muttered Shadrach Mellick, in disgust. "Git along there, ye lazy critters!" And with a crack of his whip he sent the double team on their way, leaving Isaac Pludding standing by the gateway, shaking his fist at the vanishing students.

"He is mad now, if he never was before," observed Phil.

"I wonder if we'll see any more of him," said Ben.

"I don't want to see him again," answered Dave.

The wagon-road to Oakdale did not run near the railroad, so they saw nothing of the train passengers as they moved along. Luckily the snowstorm was letting up, so the ride was not as disagreeable as they had anticipated. In spite of the delay the boys were in excellent spirits, the single exception being Nat Poole, who sat huddled in a seat corner, saying nothing. The boys sang songs, told funny stories, and "cut up" generally, and thus, almost before they knew it, they drew up alongside of the railroad station at Oakdale.

There was no turnout there to meet them, and from the station master they learned that Jackson Lamond, the Hall driver, had been down with the carryall, but had gone back when he had learned that the train had broken down and would not arrive until morning.

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Dave. "We've hired our driver to take us to the Hall, anyway."

"All hands off for a hot soda!" cried Phil, as they rounded the drug-store corner, and the sleigh was stopped and they rushed in to get the refreshment. They treated Shadrach Mellick to two glasses, which put the old farmer in fairly good humor.

"I don't blame ye for not wanting that man," said he, after he had heard their story about Isaac Pludding. "Guess he's about as mean as they make 'em."

"He said he had some cattle deal on in Oakdale," said Dave. "Perhaps you know something about that?"

"Oh, mebbe I do. There's a city consarn buying cattle up here, now – started last fall. They're tryin' to do old Joe Parker out o' his bus'ness. Mebbe this fat feller is the city company's agent. If he is, old Joe Parker won't want him up here."

"Where does Joe Parker live?" asked Dave, with interest.

"We'll pass his house in a minit. There it is – over yonder, by the willer trees."

"Let me off a minute at that place," went on Dave.

"That's the talk!" cried Roger, catching Dave's idea. "We'll put a spoke in Pludding's wheel – if he is the rival cattle dealer."

Arriving at the Parker cottage, Dave and Roger leaped down in the snow and knocked on the door. A heavy-set and rather pleasant-looking man answered their summons.

"Is this Mr. Joseph Parker?" asked Dave.

"That's my handle, lad. What can I do for you? Will you come in?"

"No, Mr. Parker – I haven't time. I wanted to ask you, do you know a Mr. Isaac Pludding?"

At this question the brow of Joe Parker darkened.

"I certainly do."

"He is working for some opposition in the cattle line, isn't he?"

"Yes, and trying his best to do me out of my little income," was the grumbled-out answer.

"Well, I thought I might do you a favor," went on Dave, and then told of his meeting with the cattle agent, and of how Pludding was trying to reach Oakdale without delay.

"Is that possible!" cried Joseph Parker. "If it is, I'll have to get a hustle on me, I'm thinking. I told Farrington I'd let him know about those cattle to-day or to-morrow. I'll go right over and close

the deal now – before Pludding gets here. It's Farrington's cattle he is after. I am very much obliged to you."

"You are welcome," said Dave.

"I only hope you get the better of the fat man," added the senator's son; and then he and Dave went back to the sleigh, and the journey to Oak Hall was resumed.

CHAPTER V

BACK TO OAK HALL

As my old readers know, Oak Hall was an up-to-date structure built of brick and stone. Its shape was that of a broad cross, with its front facing the south. On that side, and to the east and west, were the classrooms, while the dining-hall and kitchen and laundry were on the north. Around the school was a broad campus, running down to the Leming River in the rear. Great clumps of oaks were scattered around, giving to the institution its name.

"Hurrah! I see the school!" cried Sam Day, who sat in front with the sleigh driver.

"So do I!" cried Roger.

"Boys, let's give them a song when we drive up!" suggested Dave. "It will prove that we are not quite frozen to death."

"Right you are," responded Shadow Hamilton. "Now then, all together!" And he started up the school song, sung to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne":

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

This was sung with great gusto and immediately following came the well-known Hall rally:

"Baseball!
Football!
Oak Hall!
Has the call!
Biff! Boom! Bang! Whoop!"

"That's the way to do it!" sang out Dave, and then, as the sleigh drew up to the front door of the academy, he started some doggerel also sung to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne" and just then becoming popular:

"We're here because we're here because
We're here because we're here!
We're here because we're here because
We're here because we're here!
We're here because we're here because
We're here because we're here!
We're here because we're here because —
We're nowhere else just now!"

The boys sang as loudly as they could, and kept it up until the front door of the Hall opened and Job Haskers appeared, attired in a dressing-gown and wearing slippers.

"Here! here! stop that racket!" cried the teacher who could never see any fun in anything. "Do you want to awaken the entire Hall?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Haskers; we only thought we'd let you know that we had arrived," answered Dave, sweetly.

"Well, there's no need to act like a lot of hoodlums," growled Job Haskers. "I thought you were all storm-bound at Raytown," he went on. "Lamond brought in word that the train had broken down."

"It did break down, but we hired this sleigh to bring us over," answered Roger. "We said the man could put up here over-night and go back in the morning."

"Ahem! I don't know about that. We are not in the habit –" began the teacher, when somebody caught him by the arm and came to the front. It was Doctor Clay, also in a dressing-gown, and smiling broadly.

"How do you do, boys?" he said, cheerily. "Glad to see you! So you thought you couldn't stay away, even if the train did break down? I rather suspected some of you would try to get a sleigh over. Come right in. You must be rather cold – or did the singing keep you warm?"

"How do you do, Doctor Clay?" was the answering cry, and all of the boys bounced out of the turnout, ran up the steps, and shook hands. Job Haskers was "left in the cold," so to speak, and stood in the background in disgust. He thought it was "bad discipline" to treat the scholars too good-naturedly. "Hold them down with a rod of iron," was his motto, and the boys knew it only too well.

Matters were speedily explained to the master of the school, and he directed Job Haskers to call Lamond and have the horses and the sleigh taken care of, and then told Shadrach Mellick to come in and he would be given a room for the night and his breakfast in the morning. The farmer was paid off and was well pleased over the treatment received.

"You appear to be the only one who has suffered," said Doctor Clay to Nat Poole. "But a good night's sleep will probably fix you up, and the housekeeper can look after your clothing."

"I have plenty of other clothing in my trunk," answered Poole, and then went off to the dormitory he occupied with Gus Plum and a number of others.

Dave and his chums occupied Dormitories Nos. 11 and 12, and there they found several of the other students awaiting them, including Luke Watson, who was noted as a singer and banjo-player, Bertram Vane, always called "Polly," because his manner was so girlish, and little Chip Macklin, who had been the school sneak but who had now turned over a new leaf.

"It does my heart good to set eyes on you fellows again!" cried Luke Watson. "If it wasn't so late I'd get out my banjo and sing a song in your honor."

"Yes, and have old Haskers up here, giving us extra work for to-morrow," answered Ben. "No, thank you, Luke, not so early in the season, please."

"Delighted to see you all," lisped Polly Vane. "I trust you all had a real nice time."

"I certainly did," answered Dave. "How about you, Polly? Did they invite you to any molasses-pulls or pink teas?"

"Oh, I had a glorious time, Dave. My two cousins visited us – splendid girls – and they had some other girls come in, and we –"

"All played blindman's-buff and hunt-the-slipper," finished Sam. "Wasn't that too delicious for anything!" and he said this in such a feminine tone that everybody but Polly laughed. The girlish student looked a bit doubtful, but was not offended.

The cold ride had made the boys sleepy, and all were glad to undress and go to bed. Dave was tired out, having put in an extra-long day, and the moment his head touched the pillow he sailed off into the land of dreams and did not awaken until the morning bell was clanging in his ears.

The storm had passed away, and outside it was as clear as crystal. The sun shone brightly, and this helped to put all the boys in good humor, for a gray day at Oak Hall was not to their liking. All were soon dressed, and Dave, Roger, and Phil started to go below together.

In the upper corridor they came face to face with Gus Plum, the former bully. Plum looked rather pale and thin and his eyes were somewhat sunken. That the exposure of his wrongdoings had caused him much worry there could be no doubt.

"How do you do, Gus?" said Dave kindly, and stepping closer he shook a hand that was almost as cold as ice. Phil and Roger merely nodded.

"Oh, I'm pretty well," answered Gus Plum. "How are you?"

"First-rate – that is, I would be if I could only get some word from my father and sister."

"It's too bad that you don't get some kind of message." Plum lowered his voice. "I'd like to see you alone this noon or to-night. I – er – want to talk something over with you," he whispered.

"All right, Gus – I'll try to see you this noon," replied Dave, in a low tone; and then all the students passed down to the dining-hall.

"Plum has certainly got something on his mind," was Roger's comment.

"Well, that exposure was a terrible thing for him," returned Phil. "Of course what he did wasn't as bad as what was done by Nick Jasniff and those two robbers, but it was bad enough. I'd hate to have such a black mark against my name."

The Thanksgiving holidays had been rather short, and those pupils who lived a long distance from Oak Hall had remained at that institution; consequently the routine of studies was taken up that day without much trouble. Fortunately Dave was now placed under Andrew Dale, the first assistant, a teacher loved by all the scholars.

"I know I shall learn faster than ever," said Dave to Roger. "Mr. Dale knows just how to bring out all there is in a fellow."

"I wish the doctor would get rid of old Haskers," returned the senator's son. "I simply can't bear him."

"Haskers is under contract, so I've been told, Roger. Maybe he'll be dropped when the contract runs out."

Just before the bell rang for the morning session Shadrach Mellick drove off in his big sleigh. The schoolboys gave him a parting salute of snowballs which the farmer tried in vain to duck.

"Hi, yeou!" he roared. "Want to knock the top of my head off? Stop it!" And then, to escape his tormentors, he whipped up his horses and dashed out of the Hall grounds at top speed. It was the last the boys saw of him for a long time.

It was not until after the day's sessions were over that Dave got a chance to see Gus Plum alone. The two met in the upper hallway and walked to the dormitory the former bully occupied, and Plum locked the door.

"Sit down, Dave, I want to talk to you," said Plum, and motioned Dave to the easiest chair the dormitory contained. Then he sank on the edge of a bed close by.

"All right, Gus, fire away," answered Dave, and he wondered what was coming next.

"I – er – I don't know how to say it – how to begin," stammered the former bully, and his face showed a trace of red in it. "But I've made up my mind to speak to you, and ask your advice. You saved me from a terrible disgrace, Dave, and I know you'll tell me the best thing to do."

"What about?"

"Well – about everything. First of all, about staying here. At first I thought I could do it – that I could face the crowd and live it down. But now – the way some of the boys treat me – and look at me – and the remarks made behind my back! Oh, Dave, it's terrible, – you can't imagine how hard it is!" And there was a quiver in Gus Plum's voice that meant a great deal.

"I am sorry to hear of this, Gus. But you must live it down, there is nothing else to do."

"I can go away – my folks are ready to send me to another school."

"Don't do it – stay here and fight it out. I know how you feel – I felt that way when they called me 'a poorhouse nobody.'"

"Oh, Dave, I did that! I am so sorry now!"

"You are bound to win in the end – if you do what is fair and honest. So long as Doctor Clay is willing to keep you, you'd better stay by all means."

"Yes, yes, I know, but – but – there is something else." Plum dropped his hands in his face. "I don't know how I am going to tell you, but I want to tell somebody. It's been on my mind ever since it happened." And then, to Dave's amazement, Gus Plum threw himself across the bed and began to sob violently.

CHAPTER VI

GUS PLUM'S CONFESSION

That the former bully of Oak Hall was thoroughly broken-down there could be no doubt, and Dave pitied him from the bottom of his heart. He wondered what Gus Plum would have to say next, and resolved to aid the lad as much as lay in his power.

"Come, Gus, you had better tell me your whole story," he said, kindly, and sitting on the bed he took one of the lad's hands in his own.

"Well, you know how I promised Doctor Clay I'd turn over a new leaf, and all that," began Plum. "I haven't done it."

"Oh, Gus!"

"I wanted to – but the force of circumstances, and my own weakness, wouldn't let me. Do you remember how I told you about my financial affairs – losing money on that football game and all that? Well, I learned that I was deeper in debt than I thought I was. I paid what debts I could and then found out that I still owed two men in Oakdale forty dollars. I didn't dare to write home for money, for after that exposure my father said he would only allow me five dollars a month spending money and not a cent more, for the next year. I met one of the men in Oakdale the day before Thanksgiving – after you were away – and he – oh, how can I tell it! – he got me to go to that tavern with him and gamble again, in the hope of winning the money I needed."

"And you gambled, Gus? That was too bad."

"At first I played cards for small amounts, but then the men treated – they insisted upon my drinking – and then we made the stakes larger, and when I came away, instead of winning back the forty dollars, I found myself owing them eighty-five dollars. And now they say if I do not pay up at once they'll expose me to the doctor and my folks." Gus Plum heaved a deep sigh. "Oh, I wish I was dead!" he sobbed.

"Gus, I thought you were going to give up gambling and drinking?"

"I was, but those men persuaded me before I was aware. If I ever get out of this you'll never catch me doing it again – never, as long as I live!"

"You say you owe them eighty-five dollars?"

"Yes."

"Do you owe any more than that?"

"They say I owe the tavern keeper two dollars. But I don't think so. I didn't order anything."

"Have you any money at all?"

"Three dollars and a half."

"Come to my room."

"What for?"

"Never mind, come along – before any of the others come up."

Wondering what Dave had in mind to do, the former bully of Oak Hall followed Dave to Dormitory No. 12. Here Dave went straight to his trunk, brought out a long flat pocketbook, and began to open it.

"Why, Dave, you don't mean to – " began Gus Plum, his eyes opening widely.

"Gus, I am going to lend you the money, but only under one condition," said Dave.

"Do you mean to say you have that much on hand?" demanded Plum.

"Yes, I have exactly a hundred dollars in this pocketbook. It is a special sum that my uncle advised me to keep for emergencies. He says he may go away some time and I may need money before he can send it to me. It has nothing to do with my regular allowance. I will loan you the eighty-five dollars on one condition – no, on two conditions."

"What are they?"

"The first is, that you give me your word to cut out all drinking and all gambling from now on."

"I'll do that readily, Dave."

"And the second is, that you remain at Oak Hall and fight your way through in spite of what some of the fellows say. Show one and all that you want to make a man of yourself, and sooner or later they will respect you."

"It will be a terribly hard thing to do."

"Never mind, Gus, I will help you all I can, and I am sure some of the others will help you, too."

For a full minute Gus Plum was silent, looking out of the long window at the gathering darkness of the short winter day. Then he turned again to Dave.

"All right, I'll take you up and stay, and I'll do my level best to deserve your kindness, Dave," he said, in a husky voice.

"Good! Now here is the money, in five-dollar bills. If you don't mind, I'll go along when you pay those fellows. I want to see that you get a receipt in full from them. As you say you owe them the money, we'll let it go at that, although it's more than likely they cheated you."

"Maybe they did, but I can't prove it."

With added thanks, Gus Plum took the eighty-five dollars and placed it carefully away in an inner pocket.

"I'll write the men a note to meet me Saturday afternoon," said he. "Will that suit you?"

"Yes, but don't meet them at the tavern. The depot will be better."

"Very well, I'll make it the depot," answered the former bully. He was very humble, and once more Dave had great hopes of his keeping his promises.

Some of the other students were now coming up, and Dave brought out some books he had brought along from home, including a fine illustrated work on polar exploration which Jessie Wadsworth had presented to him. She had written his name and her own on the flyleaf, and of this inscription Dave thought a great deal.

"I've read a part of it already," he said to Gus Plum. "It's very interesting. Some day I'll let you read it, if you wish."

"Thanks, perhaps I will, Dave," said the former bully, and then with a meaning look at Dave he retired. He knew Dave had brought out the book merely in order that the other lads would not ask embarrassing questions.

"That is a great book," said Roger, looking it over. "Say, it must be fine to travel in the land of perpetual snow."

"Providing you can keep warm," added Phil.

"Talking about keeping warm, puts me in mind of a story," began Shadow Hamilton. "Now, if you'll listen I'll tell it, otherwise I won't."

"How much to listen?" asked Luke Watson, meekly.

"Nothing – this is free, gratis, for nothing."

"I mean, what are you going to pay us for listening, Shadow?"

"Oh, you go to Jericho!" growled the story-teller of the school. "Well, this is about two men who hired a room in a hotel. It was in the summer-time and the room was very hot. They opened the window on the court, but it didn't let in enough air. In the middle of the night one of the men got up in the dark. 'What you doing?' asked the other man. 'Looking for another window to open,' says the man who was up. Pretty soon he touched a glass and found what he thought was a window opening sideways. 'There, that's fine!' he said. 'It's pretty breezy – guess I'll pull up the cover a little,' said the other man, and then both slept well until morning. When they got up they found that the one fellow had opened the door to an old bookcase in a corner."

"Very breezy story," was Roger's comment.

"Quite a refined air about it," remarked Ben.

"How did opening the bookcase make the room cooler?" demanded Dave, innocently.

"Why, it didn't. The man thought – "

"But you said he was cooler. He even pulled up the cover on the bed!"

"Certainly. He got the impression – "

"Who?"

"The man. He thought – "

"How could he think if he was asleep, Shadow?"

"I didn't say he thought in his sleep. I said – "

"Well, he went to bed anyhow, didn't he?"

"Of course. But when he opened the bookcase door – "

"Oh, I see, it was a refrigerator in disguise. Why didn't you tell us that before, – how the block of ice fell out on the man's left front toe and injured his spine so he couldn't sing any more?" finished Dave, and then a laugh arose, in the midst of which Shadow made a playful pass as if to box Dave's ear.

"The next time I have a good story like that to tell I'll keep it to myself," he grumbled.

To change the subject, some of the boys asked Luke Watson to give them a song. Luke was willing, and getting out his banjo, tuned up, and soon started a ditty about "A Coon Who Lived in the Moon," or something of that sort. Then he began a breakdown, and, unable to resist, Sam Day got up and began to dance a step he had learned from his father's coachman at home.

"Good for you, Sam!" cried Dave. "That's fine!"

"Sam, you ought to join the minstrels," added Roger, and began to keep time with his hands, "patting juba" as it is termed down South.

Not to be outdone by Sam, Ben joined in the dance, and several lads began to "pat juba" as loudly as possible. Growing very enthusiastic, Ben leaped over a bed and back. Then Shadow Hamilton caught up a chair and began to gallop around, horseback fashion. The chair caught in a stand, and over it went, carrying a lot of books and poor Polly Vane with it.

"Gracious, this won't do," murmured Dave, as he set to work to pick up the books. "Hi, stop that racket, Shadow!" he called out. "Do you want to get us all into trouble?"

"Can't stop, I'm on the race-track!" yelled Shadow. "This is the last quarter. Bet I win!" and around the dormitory he spun again. This time he knocked over little Chip Macklin, sending him sprawling.

"Say, let up!" called out Roger, and catching up one of the books he took aim at Shadow. "If you don't stop I'll throw this at your head."

"Can't stop – let her go – if you dare!" called back Shadow.

Hardly had he spoken when the senator's son let the volume drive. As he did so the dormitory door opened and Job Haskers appeared. The book missed Shadow, who dodged, and struck the door, sending that barrier up against the teacher's nose so sharply that Job Haskers uttered a shrill cry of mingled pain and alarm.

CHAPTER VII

HOW JOB HASKERS WENT SLEIGH-RIDING

On the instant the noise in Dormitory No. 12 came to an end. Shadow Hamilton dropped the chair and sat upon it and Luke Watson swung his banjo out of sight under a bedspread. Dave remained on one knee, picking up the books that had been scattered.

"You – you young rascals!" spluttered Job Haskers, when he could speak. "How dare you throw books at me?"

He glared around at the students, then strode into the dormitory and caught Dave by the shoulder.

"I say how dare you throw books at me?" he went on.

"I haven't thrown any books, Mr. Haskers," answered Dave, calmly.

"What!"

"I threw that book, Mr. Haskers," said Roger, promptly. "But I didn't throw it at you."

"Ahem! So it was you, Master Morr! Nice proceedings, I must say. Instead of going to bed you all cut up like wild Indians. This must be stopped. Every student in this room will report to me tomorrow after school. I will take down your names." The teacher drew out a notebook and began to write rapidly. "Who knocked over that stand?"

"I did," answered Shadow. "It was an – er – an accident."

"Who was making that awful noise dancing?"

"I was dancing," answered Sam. "But I don't think I made much noise."

"It is outrageous, this noise up here, and it must be stopped once and for all. Now go to bed, all of you, and not another sound, remember!" And with this warning, Job Haskers withdrew from the room, closing the door sharply after him.

"Now we are in a mess!" muttered Roger.

"Isn't it – er – dreadful!" lisped Polly Vane, who had taken no part in the proceedings, but had been looking over Dave's book on polar explorations.

"He'll give us extra lessons for this," grumbled Roger. "Just wait and see."

The next day the weather remained fine, and a number of the students went out coasting on a hill running down to the river. Dave and his friends wished they could go along, as both Sam and Ben had big bobs capable of carrying six boys each. But after the school session they had to report to Job Haskers, and he kept them in until supper-time, doing examples in arithmetic.

"Say, Dave, we ought to square up for this," said Phil. "See what a lot of fun coasting we've missed."

"Just what I say," added the senator's son. "We must get even with old Haskers somehow."

"Remember the time we put the ram in his room?" said Sam, with a grin.

"Yes, and the time we put the bats in," added Phil. "My, but didn't that cause a racket!"

"Let us put something else in his room this time," said Ben.

"Oh, that's old," answered Dave. "We ought to hit on something new."

"If we could only play some joke on him outside of the academy," said the senator's son.

"He is going to Oakdale to-night; I heard him mention it to Mr. Dale."

"Did he say when he would be back?"

"Yes – not later than eleven o'clock."

"Maybe we can have some fun with him on his return," said Dave. "I'll try to think up something."

They watched and saw Job Haskers leave the Hall dressed in his best. He drove off in a cutter belonging to Doctor Clay. But he had hardly reached the gateway of the grounds when he turned around and came back again.

"Forgotten something, I suppose," said Dave, who had been watching.

Job Haskers ran up the steps of the Hall and disappeared.

"Come, Roger, quick!" cried Dave. "We'll unhook the horse!"

The senator's son understood, and in a trice he followed Dave outside. It was rather dark, so they were unobserved. With great rapidity they unhooked the traces and unbuckled the straps around the shafts. Fortunately the horse did not move.

"Wait, we'll fix up the seat for him," said Dave, and lifting the cushion he placed some snow and ice beneath. "That will make things warm for him."

"I'll put a cake of ice in the bottom, too, for his feet," said the senator's son, with a grin, and did so, covering it partly with the lap-robe. Then the lads hurried into the school.

Soon Job Haskers came from the Hall with a small packet in his hand. The boys watched from some side windows and saw him leap into the cutter. He took up the reins.

"Get ap!" he chirped to the horse, and gave a quick jerk on the lines.

The steed did as bidden and began to move out of the shafts of the cutter. At first Job Haskers could not believe the evidence of his eyesight.

"Hi! hold up!" he yelled. "What the mischief! Who did – " And then his remarks came to a sudden end. He tried to hold the horse back, but could not, and in a twinkling he was dragged over the dashboard and landed head first in the snow of the road. Then the horse, no doubt startled at the unusual proceedings, started off on a trot, dragging the teacher after him.

"Whoa, I say! Whoa there!" spluttered Job Haskers. "Whoa!" and he tried to regain his feet, only to plunge down once more, this time on his face. Then he let go the reins and the horse trotted off, coming to a halt near the campus gateway.

If ever there was an angry man that individual was Job Haskers. He had intended to make an evening call on some ladies, and had spent considerable time over his toilet. Now his beautiful expanse of white shirt front was wet and mussed up and he had a goodly quantity of snow down his back.

"Who did this? Who did this?" he cried, dancing around in his rage. "Oh, if I only catch the boy who did this, I will punish him well for it."

He looked around sharply, and at that moment a student chanced to come around the corner of the Hall, on the way to the gymnasium building. Job Haskers leaped towards him and caught him roughly by the shoulder.

"Ha! I have you, you young imp!" he cried. "How dare you do such a thing to me! How dare you!" And he shook the boy as a dog shakes a rat.

"St – top!" spluttered the pupil, in consternation and alarm. "Stop, I say! I – I – Oh, Mr. Haskers, let up, please! Don't shake me to pieces!"

"Well, I never!" whispered Dave to Phil and Roger.

"Who is it?"

"Nat Poole."

"Oh my! but he's catching it right enough," chuckled the senator's son.

"Will unharness my horse!" went on Job Haskers. "Will throw me on my head in the snow! Oh, you imp!" And he continued to shake poor Nat until the latter's teeth rattled.

"I – I won't stand this!" cried Nat at last, and struck out blindly, landing a blow on the teacher's ear.

"Ha! so you dare to strike me!" spluttered Job Haskers. "I – I – "

"Let go! I haven't done anything!" roared Nat. "Let go, or I'll kick!"

Now, the assistant teacher did not fancy being kicked, so he dropped his hold and Nat Poole speedily retreated to a safe distance.

"You unharnessed my horse – " began Job Haskers.

"I never touched your horse – I don't know anything about your horse," exploded Nat.

"Didn't I catch you?"

"I just came from the library. I left a pair of skates in the gym., and I was going to get them. I've been in the library for half an hour," went on the dude of the school. "It's an outrage the way you've treated me. I am going to report it to Doctor Clay." And he started for the front door of the school.

"Wait! Stop!" called Job Haskers, in sudden alarm. "Do you mean to say you know absolutely nothing about this?"

"No, I don't."

"Somebody came out here while I was in the Hall and unharnessed the horse."

"Well, it wasn't me, and you had no right to pounce on me as you did," grumbled Nat Poole. "I am going to report it to Doctor Clay."

"Stop! I – er – if I made a mistake, Poole, I am sorry for it," said the teacher, in a more subdued tone. "Have you any idea who could have played this trick on me?"

"No, and I don't care," snorted the dudish pupil. "I am going to report to the doctor and see if he will allow an innocent pupil to be handled like a tramp." And off marched Nat Poole, just as angry as Job Haskers.

"Good for Nat," whispered Phil. "I hope he does report old Haskers."

"We must look out that we are not caught," answered Dave. "How funny it did look when Haskers went over the dashboard!" And he laughed merrily.

The boys took themselves to a safe place in the lower hallway. They saw Nat Poole come in and march straight for Doctor Clay's office. The master of the Hall was in, and an animated discussion lasting several minutes took place. Then the doctor came out to interview Job Haskers, who in the meantime had caught the horse and was hooking him up once more.

"Mr. Haskers, what does this mean?" asked the doctor, in rather a cold tone. "Master Poole says you attacked him and shook him without provocation."

"Somebody has been playing a trick on me – I thought it was Poole," was the reply, and the teacher told what had happened. "Just look at that shirt, and my back is full of snow!"

The doctor looked and was inclined to smile. But he kept a straight face.

"Certainly nobody had a right to play such a trick," said he. "But you shouldn't punish Poole for what he didn't do. You are altogether too hasty at times, Mr. Haskers."

"Am I? Well, perhaps; but some of the boys here need a club, and need it badly, too!"

"I do not agree with you. They like a little fun, but that is only natural. Occasionally they go a little too far, but I do not look to a clubbing as a remedy."

"I wish I could find out who played this trick on me."

"Don't you think you owe Poole an apology?"

"An apology?" gasped Job Haskers. Such a thing had never occurred to him.

"Yes. You are certainly in the wrong."

"I'll apologize to nobody," snapped the teacher.

"Well, after this you be more careful as to how you attack my students," said Doctor Clay, severely. "Otherwise, I shall have to ask you to resign your position."

Some sharp words followed, and in the end Job Haskers drove off feeling decidedly humble. He could not afford to throw up his contract with the doctor, and he was afraid that the latter might demand his resignation. But he was very angry, and the discovery of the ice and snow in the cutter, later on, did not tend to make his temper any sweeter.

"I'll find out who did this!" he muttered to himself. "And when I do, I'll fix him, as sure as my name is Job Haskers." But he never did find out; and there the incident came to an end. The boys thought they had had fun enough for one night, and so did not watch for the teacher's return to Oak Hall.

CHAPTER VIII

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER

In the morning mail Gus Plum received a letter postmarked London which he read with much interest. Then he called on Dave.

"I've just received a letter I want you to read," he said. "It is from Nick Jasniff, and he mentions you." And he handed over the communication.

It was a long rambling epistle, upbraiding Plum roundly for "having gone back on him," as Jasniff put it. The writer said he was now "doing Europe" and having a good time generally. One portion of the letter read as follows:

"The authorities needn't look for me, for they will never find me. I struck a soft thing over here and am about seventy pounds to the good. Tell Dave Porter I could tell him something he would like to hear – about his folks – but I am not going to do it. I don't think he'll meet that father of his just yet, or that pretty sister of his either. She'd be all right if she didn't have such a lunkhead of a brother. Tell him that some day I'll square up with him and put him in a bigger hole than he got me into. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't have to stay away as I'm doing – not but what I'm having a good time – better than grinding away at Oak Hall."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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