

Stratemeyer Edward

**The Rover Boys in the
Land of Luck: or, Stirring
Adventures in the Oil Fields**



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INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: This book is a complete story in itself, but forms the fifth volume in a line issued under the general title, "The Second Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

As mentioned in some volumes of the first series, this line was started years ago with the publication of "The Rover Boys at School," "On the Ocean," and "In the Jungle," in which I introduced my readers to Dick, Tom, and Sam Rover and their relatives. The volumes of the first series related the doings of these three Rover boys while at Putnam Hall Military Academy, Brill College, and while on numerous outings.

Having acquired a good education, the three young men established themselves in business in New York and became married. Dick Rover was blessed with a son and a daughter, as was likewise his brother Sam, while Tom Rover became the proud father of twin boys. As the four lads were all of a decidedly lively disposition, it was thought best to send them to a boarding school, and in the first volume of the second series, entitled "The Rover Boys at Colby Hall," I related what happened to them while attending this institution.

From Colby Hall the scene was shifted to "Snowshoe Island," where the lads went for a mid-Winter outing. Then they came back to Colby Hall, and what happened to them at the annual encampment of the young cadets is related in the third volume, entitled "The Rover Boys Under Canvas."

When Winter was once more at hand the younger Rovers thought they would like to go on another outing with their chums, and in a volume entitled "The Rover Boys on a Hunt" I related how they came upon a mysterious house in the forest and uncovered a most unusual mystery.

In the present volume the scene is shifted from stirring doings at Colby Hall to still more stirring doings in the famous oil fields in the southern part of our country.

Once more I feel called upon to thank my numerous readers for the many nice things they have said about these "Rover Boys" books. I earnestly hope that the reading of the volumes will do them all good.

*Affectionately and sincerely yours,
Edward Stratemeyer.*

CHAPTER I

OUT IN THE STORM

"Jack, it looks as if we were in for another storm."

"Yes, and it's starting right now," declared Captain Jack Rover, as he glanced through the trees to the overcast sky. "Don't you hear it on the leaves?"

"It does beat everything!" declared Andy Rover, his usually bright face clouding a bit. "It has rained enough in the past two weeks to last a year."

"Do you know, I like these constant rains less than I liked being snowbound up at Cedar Lodge," put in Lieutenant Fred Rover.

"Oh, there was some fun in being snowbound," declared Randy Rover. "A fellow could go out in it and have the best time ever. But what can a chap do when the rain is coming down to beat the band?"

"Well, you can go out and get a shower-bath free of charge," commented his twin gaily.

"I'll take my showers in the gym," was the quick reply. "Gee! listen to that, will you?"

There was no need for any of the four Rover boys to listen, or to look, either. A blinding flash of lightning had swept the sky, followed almost immediately by a crash of thunder in the woods behind them. Then followed another crash, as of falling timber.

"It struck a tree, I'll bet a new cap!" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes, and it was a little bit too close for comfort, too," answered his cousin Fred.

The thunder and lightning were followed by a sudden rush of wind which caused the trees of the forest to sway violently. Then the downfall of rain increased until it was little short of a deluge.

"We've got to get to some sort of shelter!" cried Jack. "And the sooner we get there the better. If we stay under the trees we'll be soaked to the skin."

"It's all right enough to talk about shelter," returned Randy quickly; "but where are you going to find it? I don't know of even a log shack in this vicinity."

"We might leg it down to the river," suggested his brother. "We can't be very far from Rocky Bend."

"That's the talk!" burst out Fred Rover. "There is a cliff at the Bend, and I remember there is a hollow under it which the river washed out years ago."

"The trouble is you may find that hollow filled with water now, Fred," answered Jack. "Remember the heavy rains of the last few weeks have caused something of a freshet. Even down at our boathouse the water is unusually high."

Another streak of lightning followed by more thunder interrupted the conversation. Then the wind seemed to veer around, and the rain came swishing in under the tree where the four lads had been resting.

The Rover boys had left Colby Hall immediately after the day's lessons for a tramp through the woods that bordered the Rick Rack River. They had been kept indoors more or less for over two weeks, it raining nearly every day. But that morning the sun had come through the clouds, and they had thought to enjoy a much-desired outing.

All were clad in their cadet uniforms, and in addition wore their shoulder capes and also their rubbers. They had found the roads and paths running through the woods very wet, but did not mind this, being glad to breathe some "real air," as Randy had expressed it.

"I just hate to be boxed in all the time," had been his words. "Give me an outdoor life every time." And then in the exuberance of his spirits he had turned what is commonly termed among athletes a cart-wheel. But when his feet came down again he found the ground so slippery he promptly landed flat on his back, much to the amusement of the others.

The four Rovers had asked some of their chums to accompany them, but two of the other cadets had errands to do in town and the others wished to write letters to their folks at home, so the four had gone off by themselves. All were good walkers, and they had covered a distance of several miles before the sky became again overcast.

"If we weren't so far from the school we might make a dash for it," suggested Jack.

"We can't run that far!" returned Fred, who was the smallest of the boys. "We'd be all out of wind and simply get wet through and through. Let's try for the river. We're sure to find some sort of shelter under the rocks and bushes at the Bend."

"All right; here we go!" was Jack's quick reply. As the oldest of the boys and as a captain of the Colby Hall cadets, he was naturally looked upon as the leader.

He and Fred started side by side and Andy and Randy followed closely. Their course was along a winding path leading over some rough rocks and through some small overhanging bushes.

"Wow! What are you trying to do? Give me a shower-bath?" grumbled Randy presently. Jack had pushed some long and well-saturated brushwood to one side in passing. Now the bushes swung back into place, catching poor Randy over the face and breast and showering him with water.

"Excuse me, but I couldn't hold the bushes back," said Jack. "You had better not stick so close."

"Oh, well, a little more water doesn't count, Jack. We are getting pretty well soaked anyway."

The wind was blowing so furiously the cadets had all they could do to hold their capes tight around their shoulders as they progressed. More lightning lit up the sky, and then they heard the fall of another tree some distance away.

"It's going to be a humdinger of a storm," remarked Andy.

"Yes, and I'd give as much as two nickels to be safe back at the Hall," came from Fred. The constant thunder and lightning was beginning to get on the smallest youth's nerves.

Presently the four Rovers caught sight of the river through the trees. The stream, which at this point was nothing more than a mountain torrent, boiled and foamed as it dashed over the rocks.

"It certainly is getting high," said Jack, as all paused for a moment to catch their breath. "I can't remember having seen it like this before."

"Just look at the stuff coming down, will you?" remarked Fred. "There is a whole lot of good firewood going to waste."

"I guess some one will pick it up by the time it reaches the lake, Fred," said Randy. "There are a lot of poor people down at Haven Point who get all their Winter firewood from this river."

"Yes, but it's not all driftwood," broke in Jack. "A good deal of the timber is cut up in the woods and then floated down. That is quite an industry among some of the old settlers up there."

The four cadets did not pause very long to survey the scene. Their one idea was to find some sort of shelter from the storm; and with this in view they hurried on parallel to the watercourse until they came to the point of rocks commonly known as the Bend. Here the side of the river on which they were located arose to a height of from twenty to thirty feet. In one place there was a sheer rocky wall, but at other places the rocks were much broken up, and consequently, irregular.

"There is the shelter I had in mind," said Fred, pointing with his hand. "Come on; I think it will be just the place to get out of this storm."

"Any kind of a shelter will be better than standing out here," answered Randy, and he and Fred set off on a wild scramble over the slippery rocks with the others following.

"Be careful that you don't sprain an ankle or break a leg," warned Jack.

"Gee! a fellow would have to be a regular grasshopper to jump over these rocks," grumbled Randy, and he had scarcely uttered the words when he slipped down, landing with a thump on his chest.

"Hurt?" queried Jack quickly.

"N-no," spluttered his cousin. "B-but I kn-kn-knocked the wind out of m-me."

In a minute more the boys had reached the shelter of the rocks where they overhung the Rick Rack River. Here they found a shelter several feet above the madly rushing torrent. The place was twelve or fifteen feet in length, and several feet in depth. Above them was a shelving rock which, while it did not shelter them completely, did much to ward off the heavy downpour of rain.

"Not as comfortable as a Morris chair in the library at school," remarked Andy, as he swished the water from his cap, "but it's a good deal better than being in the open."

"Provided we do not have to stay here too long," returned his twin. "What time is it, Jack? I didn't bring my watch with me."

"Quarter to five," announced the young captain, after consulting his wrist-watch.

"We ought to be on our way to the Hall," said Fred. "I don't know what Captain Dale will say if we are late."

"Oh, he'll excuse us when he learns the truth," answered Jack. "Just the same, I'd give a good deal if we were back safe and sound at the school. We certainly can't stay here all night, and it looks as if this storm was going to be a lasting one."

"Maybe we are in for another couple of weeks of rain," growled Andy. "Gee! I wish the Weather Bureau would go out of existence. They have been predicting clearing weather for over a week, and it never came at all."

Crouching down in the shelter of the overhanging rocks, the four cadets made themselves as comfortable as possible. Over them and out on the river swished the wind and the rain. Just below them the mountain torrent boiled and foamed with increasing violence, showing that the heavy downpour was making matters steadily worse.

"I shouldn't want to have a cabin on the edge of this stream," remarked Fred presently.

"Not much!" exclaimed Andy. "You'd be in danger every minute of having it floated away."

"Look there, will you?" cried Randy a moment later, as he pointed out in the stream. "If that isn't a chicken-coop then I miss my guess!"

"You're right! And it's got one or two chickens in it!" burst out Jack.

"That shows that some of the farm lands up the river must be under water," remarked Andy.

"Maybe we'll see a house or a barn coming down next," cried Fred. "Gee, this certainly is some storm!" he added, as another flash of lightning lit up the sky. Then came the thunder, rolling and rumbling along the river and the mountains beyond.

A quarter of an hour passed, and while the wind blew as violently as ever, it seemed to the impatient cadets that the rain was slackening a little.

"Maybe it will let up in the next half-hour or so," remarked Jack hopefully. "Then, if we strike out for the turnpike, we'll be able to get down to the Hall in no time."

"Oh, sure! Only three miles through the mud; and of course that's nothing," remarked Andy airily.

All of the boys were sitting in silence, wondering what their next move would be, when Jack suddenly raised his hand as if to listen.

"What was it?" queried Randy quickly.

"I thought I heard a yell for help," was the reply. "Listen!"

All did so, and presently above the rushing of the wind heard a man's voice. Then came a shrill scream as if from a younger person.

"Somebody is in trouble!" cried Fred. "Listen! He is calling again!"

All strained their ears, and once more heard the yells of the man borne along by the rushing wind. Then came that other shrill cry, as if for assistance.

"They are in trouble, all right!"

"Where are they?"

"That cry came from up the river. Whoever they are, they must be right around the Bend."

"Come on! Let's see what it means."

With these and other exclamations the four Rover boys left the shelter of the overhanging rocks and crawled along a stony pathway leading up the watercourse. Soon they passed around the Bend, and then came within sight of a scene which almost appalled them. A mass of wreckage consisting of a small tree and a quantity of newly cut timber had come down the stream and become caught among the jagged rocks above the Bend, and in the midst of this wreckage, with the water rushing and foaming all around them, were a man and a boy, struggling wildly to save themselves from drowning!

CHAPTER II

WHO THE ROVER BOYS WERE

"Look there, will you!"

"That man and boy will surely be drowned!"

"Why don't they swim ashore?"

"Most likely the stream is running too swiftly for them."

"Help! Help!" came hoarsely from the man. Evidently his exertions were beginning to exhaust him.

"Save me! Save me!" screamed the boy, who seemed to be about Jack's age. "Save me! Don't let me drown!"

The two unfortunate victims had caught sight of the cadets, who had by this time come as close to them as the rocks on the bank permitted. The man waved his arm frantically toward them.

"Can't you swim?" yelled Jack, to make himself heard above the wind and the rushing of the water.

"I'm caught fast!" the man gasped out. "And my son is caught fast too."

"Both of my feet are fast!" screamed the boy. "Oh, please help us! Don't leave us here to be drowned!"

"It's a couple of logs of wood that are holding us," went on the man in a hoarser tone than ever. "They are jammed in between us and some rocks and a floating tree. If you can only start the tree, maybe we can get out of here."

Both the man and the boy were in the rushing water up to their armpits, and occasionally the dashing element would fly over them in a spray that hid them completely from view.

"Oh, boys, this is awful!" groaned Fred. "Can't we do something for them?"

"We've got to do something," answered Jack. "We can't leave them there to drown."

"But what are we going to do?" demanded Andy soberly.

"He said something about loosening the tree that has drifted up alongside them," came from Randy. "Do you think we can do it, Jack?"

"I don't know. But we can have a try at it, anyway. And if we can't push the tree, maybe we can get at the logs that are holding them down."

Jack was looking up the river as he spoke, and at a distance saw a series of rocks jutting out for a considerable distance into the stream.

"I am going out on those rocks and then trust to luck to get over to the other side," he said. "We can't get at that fallen tree from this side."

"All right, I'm with you, Jack," said Randy. And together they made their way out on the rocks mentioned and the others slowly and cautiously followed.

I know it will not be necessary to introduce the Rover boys to my old readers. But for the benefit of those who are now meeting them for the first time a few words of introduction will not come amiss.

In my first volume, entitled "The Rover Boys at School," I related how three brothers, Dick, Tom and Sam Rover, were sent to Putnam Hall Military Academy, where they made a great number of friends, including a cadet named Lawrence Colby.

After passing through Putnam Hall, the boys attended Brill College, and then joined their father in business in New York City, with offices on Wall Street. They organized The Rover Company, of which Dick was now president, Tom secretary and general manager, and Sam treasurer. The three youths were married and lived in three connecting houses on Riverside Drive, overlooking the Hudson River.

About a year after their marriage Dick and his wife became the parents of a son, who was named John, after Mrs. Rover's uncle, Mr. John Laning. This son was followed by a daughter, named Martha, after her great-aunt Martha of Valley Brook Farm. The boy Jack, as he was commonly called, was a sturdy youth with many of the qualities which had made his father so successful.

It was around this time that Tom Rover and his wife Nellie came to the front with a great surprise. This was in the nature of a pair of lively twins, one of whom was named Anderson, after his grandfather, and the other Randolph, after his great-uncle Randolph of Valley Brook Farm. Andy and Randy, as they were always called, were exceedingly active lads, in that particular being a second edition of their father, Tom.

About the time Tom's twins were born Sam Rover and his wife Grace became the parents of a little girl, whom they called Mary, after Mrs. Laning. Then, a year later, the girl was followed by a boy, who was christened Fred after Sam Rover's old school chum, Fred Garrison.

Residing so close together, the younger generation of Rover boys, as well as the sisters, were brought up very much as one family. When they were old enough all were at first sent to private schools in the Metropolis. But soon the boys, led by Andy and Randy, showed such a propensity for "cutting loose" that their parents were compelled to hold a consultation.

"We'll have to send them to some strict boarding school – some military academy," said Dick Rover.

At that time Lawrence Colby, the Putnam Hall chum of the older Rovers, was at the head of a military academy called Colby Hall. To this institution Jack, Fred and the twins were sent, as related in detail in the first volume of my second series, entitled "The Rover Boys at Colby Hall." This military school was located about half a mile from the town of Haven Point, on Clearwater Lake. At the head of the lake was the Rick Rack River, running down from the mountains and woods beyond.

The school consisted of a large stone building facing the river at a point not far from where the stream emptied into the lake. Close by was a smaller building occupied by Colonel Colby and his family and some of the professors, and at a short distance were a gymnasium and a boathouse, and likewise bathing pavilions.

On arriving at Colby Hall the younger Rovers found several of their friends awaiting them, including Dick Powell and Gifford Garrison. They also ran into Nappy Martell, who had been far from friendly with them while in New York, and likewise had trouble with an overgrown bully named Slugger Brown, who was Nappy's crony.

As mentioned, Colby Hall was located about half a mile beyond Haven Point. On the opposite side of the town was Clearwater Hall, a boarding school for girls. During a panic at a fire in a motion picture house the Rover boys became acquainted with several girls from Clearwater Hall, including Ruth Stevenson, May Powell, Alice Strobell and Annie Larkins. They discovered that May was Dick Powell's cousin, and the whole crowd of young people soon became friends. Later on Mary and Martha Rover became pupils at the girls' school.

Ruth Stevenson had an old Uncle Barney. The Rover boys, while out hunting one day, did the old man a great service, and for this he was so grateful that he invited them to spend their Winter holidays with him; which they did, as related in "The Rover Boys on Snowshoe Island."

On this island the lads met their former enemies, Nappy Martell and Slugger Brown, as well as Asa Lemm, a discharged teacher of Colby Hall. The boys exposed a plot against old Uncle Barney, and in the end caused the old hunter's enemies to leave Snowshoe Island in disgust.

"I guess we haven't seen the last of Nappy and Slugger," said Jack; and he was right. Those two unworthies turned up once again, as related in the volume entitled "The Rover Boys Under Canvas." In that book I told how the cadets went into their annual encampment and how after a Spring election for officers Jack was made captain of Company C and Fred made first lieutenant of the same command.

Among the cadets who wished to become a captain was one named Gabe Werner, a great chum at that time of a lad named Bill Glutts. Having failed of election, Werner did all he could to make

things uncomfortable for the Rovers, and in his actions he was aided by Glutts. But these two young rascals were discovered in some of their nefarious doings, and, becoming alarmed, Gabe Werner left the school camp and did not return. Glutts was brought before Captain Dale, the teacher in charge of the camp, and received a stern lecture and was deprived of many liberties.

While the Rover boys were at Colby Hall the great war in Europe opened and our country was overrun with German spies and sympathizers. During their time under canvas the boys made several surprising discoveries, and in the end helped the secret service men to capture a hidden German submarine. They likewise helped to round up the fathers of Nappy Martell and Slugger Brown. Mr. Martell and Mr. Brown were sent to prison on the charge of aiding the enemy, while Nappy and Slugger were marched off to a detention camp in the South. When being taken away Nappy and Slugger were very bitter against the Rovers, and vowed they would square accounts the first chance they got.

"And they will do it, too. You'll see," was Fred's comment. "They are as mad as hornets, and they will do everything they can think of to make trouble for us."

When the call for army volunteers came Dick Rover and his brother Sam had lost no time in enlisting. At first Tom Rover had been unable to get away. But soon the business in New York City had been left in reliable hands, and the three fathers of the boys had gone to the trenches in Europe to do their bit for Uncle Sam. They had been in several engagements, and Tom and Sam had received shell wounds, while Dick Rover had suffered somewhat from a gas attack.

"Well, we can be thankful that it is no worse," had been Jack's comment on receiving this news from abroad. "Just the same, I wish this awful war was at an end."

During the Winter Gif Garrison had received a letter from his uncle stating that he and his chums might use a bungalow up in the woods known as Cedar Lodge. Gif at once invited Dick Powell, often called "Spouter" because of his fondness for long speeches, and the Rover boys to become his guests on an outing to the lodge. And how all of the lads went to that place has been related in detail in the volume previous to this, entitled "The Rover Boys on a Hunt." In that book they came upon a house in the forest, and there uncovered a most unusual mystery. They found that some Germans were getting ready to establish a wireless telegraph station, and aided in the round-up of these men by the United States authorities.

Mixed up with the German sympathizers were Gabe Werner and Bill Glutts, and these badly scared youths had all they could do to convince the authorities that they were really patriotic. Glutts and Werner considered that they had been brought into ill repute by the connivance of the Rovers and their chums, and they were exceedingly bitter against the cadets.

"We are certainly making some real enemies," was the way Jack expressed himself. "First Nappy and Slugger, and now Glutts and Werner. Every one of those fellows will do all he can to injure us."

"Well, all we can do is to keep our eyes open for them," was Randy's reply. "Personally, I'm not afraid of any of them."

"They are all sneaks, and sneaks are always cowards," added Fred.

Having finished their outing at Cedar Lodge, the four Rovers and their two chums had returned to Colby Hall, there to plunge once more into their studies and their other duties as cadets. It was now early Spring, and talk of baseball filled the air, but with so much rain outdoor practice was practically impossible.

Then had come a ray of sunshine, and the four Rovers had ventured forth that afternoon thinking to have a pleasant little outing. But the sunshine had quickly passed, and now they found themselves out in a furious storm and face to face with a situation that was as appalling as it was dangerous.

CHAPTER III TO THE RESCUE

"Don't leave us! Don't leave us!" shouted the man in the middle of the river, as he saw Jack and the others crawling over the rocky shore up the stream.

"We're not going to leave you," answered the young captain of the Colby Hall cadets. "We are going to try to get to that tree and move it. Keep up your courage."

"Oh, please hurry!" screamed the boy in the stream. "The water is getting higher every minute, and it's flying right into our faces!"

"We'll do what we can," shouted back Randy, and the others added similar words of encouragement.

It was no easy task for the Rovers to make their way over the wet rocks, covered here and there with slippery grass and weeds. More than once one or another went down, and Fred gave his left elbow a bump, while his cousin Andy received a scraping of the shins.

Fortunately, the downpour of rain was abating, so that they had a chance to dash the water from their caps and faces and see better what they were trying to do. They soon reached the last of the rocks jutting out from the shore, and here the four came again to a halt to view the situation.

"There is no help for it – we've got to jump right in and trust to luck to reach the other side," said Jack.

"Let us take hold of hands. Maybe we can brace ourselves better," suggested Randy.

This plan was carried out, and a moment later found the four cadets in water up to their knees. So swift was the current they had all they could do to keep their feet, and Andy would have gone down had not his brother and Fred held him up.

It was lucky for the lads that they had chosen a spot where the stream was rather broad and shallow, widening out on the side opposite to the rocky bluff. Nevertheless, at one point they found themselves in water up to their waists, and here they had to struggle with might and main to keep from being swept down to where the man and the boy were held prisoners.

"Say, this is awful!" gasped Fred, when he at last found himself on a safer footing.

"This river is running like a mill-race," was Randy's comment.

When they had reached a spot where the water was less than a foot deep they stopped once more to regain their breath, and then, led by Jack, moved cautiously down the river to the point where was located the drifting tree the man had mentioned.

"Just see if you can't pull it toward the shore," directed the man. "But be careful that you don't get hit when it swings around."

It was now that the young cadets' lessons in bridge building while in camp came into good play. Jack gave orders as to just how the swinging around of the tree might be managed. Then all took hold and pulled with might and main.

"I don't see that it has budged any," gasped Fred, after half a minute of the hardest kind of effort.

"Try it again, boys!" shouted Jack encouragingly. "Now then – all together! One – two – three!"

Again the four sturdy boys exerted all their strength on the tree, and this time they felt the lower end, which had been wedged in between some logs and rocks, give way. Then, as they hauled the tree still farther from the center of the river, it suddenly swung around and, caught by the current, went dashing along on its course.

"Hurrah! There she goes!" shouted Randy, as the tree disappeared in a veil of foam and spray.

"How about it?" shouted Jack to the man and boy. "Can you get loose now?"

Both of the prisoners were exerting their utmost to release themselves and did not answer. But their efforts were in vain, and soon they ceased to struggle.

"It's no use! One of the logs is holding our feet right against the rocks!" gasped out the man. "We don't seem to be able to budge it."

"I'm afraid it is going to break my leg!" screamed the boy. "I can't stand the pressure much longer."

"I'm going out there and see what I can do," said Jack.

"If you go, so will I," returned Randy promptly.

"You can count me in, too," announced Andy and Fred simultaneously.

"Look out that you don't get drowned," went on Jack quickly.

"We'll be as safe as you'll be," returned Fred.

All went up the river a short distance so that they might not be carried past the spot where the man and the boy were located. Then they struck out bravely for the place where the logs were jammed in a heap. Some of the sticks seemed to have been cut for railroad ties, while others looked like fence rails, and there were not less than two dozen of them in a jumble among the jagged rocks.

In a few seconds the cadets found themselves in this jam with the furious current of the river trying to sweep them to one side or the other. But they held fast, and as rapidly as possible loosened one log or rail after another.

"Look out there!" yelled Andy presently, and all heeded his warning. Then several of the logs bobbed up and went flying down the river.

This released the log holding the man and the boy, and the pair came up spluttering.

"Do you think you can swim ashore?" questioned Jack.

"I guess I can make it," answered the man somewhat weakly. "Look after my kid, will you?"

"We sure will!" answered Jack.

With Fred and Andy beside him, the man struck out for the shore, and all were soon carried down the stream and under the rocky bluff. In the meanwhile, Jack and Randy did what they could to aid the boy, and then followed the others.

The swiftly flowing current of the Rick Rack carried the entire party well past the overhanging rocks and then onward to a point where the river widened considerably. Here they managed to get a footing.

"Thank fortune we are out of that!" exclaimed Fred, as he and the others made their way over the sand and rocks and through the bushes to where there was a grassy slope backed up by a number of trees.

"It was a mighty close shave for me and my kid," returned the man. "I thought sure at one time we would be drowned."

"And we would have been if it hadn't been for these fellows coming to save us," added the boy gratefully, and he shot an admiring glance at the four dripping cadets.

"Are you soldier boys?" questioned the man, as the whole party gathered under the shelter of a tree. By this time the rain was nothing more than a fine drizzle.

"Not exactly," answered Jack. "We are cadets attending Colby Hall Military Academy."

"Oh, yes, I've heard about that school," said the man. "They tell me it's a very fine place. Well, all I've got to say is, if all the boys there are as brave as you lads you certainly must have a bang-up crowd," and he smiled broadly. Then he clapped Jack on his shoulder. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you did for us. It was a nery thing to do – to risk your lives in that river. I shall never forget it. If I were a rich man I'd want to reward you, but I must admit I'm just about as poor as they make 'em."

"We don't want any reward," answered Jack. "I'm glad to be of service to you."

"I guess we're all glad," added Randy, and the others nodded.

Then the young cadets introduced themselves and the man and the boy did the same. The man said his name was John Franklin.

"This is my son Phil," he added. "We don't belong around here – that is, not exactly. You see, I used to own a farm which was mostly in Texas and partly in Oklahoma, a pretty big farm, though it wasn't very productive. Some oil sharpers came along and made a sort of three-cornered deal, the particulars of which I need not give you, but as a consequence almost before I knew it I was done out of my farm and had next to no money in my pocket. Then I came up here expecting to see some friends who might help me in fighting those rascals, but the friends had moved away, and nobody knew where to, so I was almost stranded. Then Phil and I got work up in the woods, cutting timber and doing other odd jobs, and we had steady employment until this rainy season set in."

"So you came all the way from Texas, did you?" said Randy to Phil Franklin, with a smile. "It's a pretty long distance."

"Oh, we got sick of it down there after dad was done out of his farm by those oil sharpers," answered Phil Franklin.

"Did they find oil on your farm?" questioned Fred.

"No. That is, they hadn't up to the time we left. You know it takes a lot of time and money to sink an oil well. But they did us out of our farm, and that's bad enough."

"Some day, if I ever get on my feet again, I'm going back to Texas and have it out with those rascals," announced John Franklin. "They claimed that their dealings with me were perfectly legal, but I don't look at it that way. However, boys, that affair has nothing to do with you. As I said before, I wish I could reward you, but all I can do is to give you my very best thanks."

"And you can bet I'm thankful, too!" added Phil Franklin earnestly.

"Isn't it rather strange that you should be up here in such a storm as this?" questioned the man from Texas.

"We got tired of staying indoors on account of the rain," answered Jack; "so when it seemed to break away we thought we saw a chance to take a hike just for the fun of it."

"And now we're glad we did take a hike," put in Randy.

"We were trying to cross the stream by the aid of a rope," explained John Franklin. "The rope broke, and Phil was swept down the stream and I went after him to make sure that he didn't get drowned. Then we got mixed up in the logs and the tree, and you know the rest."

"You say you belong up the river?" questioned Andy.

"Yes. We've been stopping at Bossard's camp. I suppose we ought to be getting back there now, or he'll be wondering what has become of us. Besides that, we'll want some dry clothing. And you fellows will want some dry clothing, too. Otherwise you might catch cold."

"Yes, we'll hike back to the school as fast as possible," answered Jack. He held out his hand. "Good-bye to you, and good luck."

"You won't mind if I come down to see you some time, will you?" questioned the man. "I want your teachers to know how brave you have been."

"Come down, by all means," answered Jack. "But don't pile on the bravery stuff, please. We did only what any healthy young fellows would do."

"I don't know about that. I guess I know real heroes when I see 'em," answered John Franklin, with a grin.

"I'd like to see you fellows drill. It must be great," put in his son Phil.

"Come down any time and ask for us," answered Fred. He was rather taken by Phil Franklin's open manner.

A few words more passed, and then the Franklins hurried up the river in the direction of the lumber camp from which they had come. Then the Rovers turned in the direction of Colby Hall.

"I'm glad we went to the rescue," remarked Andy, when on the way. "They seem a pretty decent sort."

"All the way from Texas," mused his twin. "That's certainly some distance."

As the Rovers hurried to the Hall they talked the matter of the rescue over in all of its details.

"It was certainly a queer meeting," was Fred's comment. But little did he or his cousins dream of the still queerer meeting with the Franklins that was to come in the future.

CHAPTER IV IN THE GYMNASIUM

"Company attention! Carry arms! Present arms! Shoulder arms! Forward march!"

Captain Jack Rover, assisted by Lieutenant Fred Rover and his other officers, was drilling Company C in a corner of the gymnasium of Colby Hall. It was two days after the adventure on the Rick Rack River, and it was still raining, so that drilling in the open was almost out of the question.

The four cadets who had taken part in the rescue of John Franklin and his son Phil had explained the situation to Captain Dale on their return to the school and had been warmly praised by that old West Point military man for their bravery.

It may be mentioned here that Captain Dale had been in charge of the school since Colonel Colby had volunteered for the war and gone to France to fight.

Many of the cadets hated the rain and hoped it would soon clear. They loved drilling in the open far more than when held indoors, and they also wished to get at baseball and other Spring sports.

"It's a shame it doesn't let up," remarked Gif Garrison, after the drilling had come to an end and the rifles had been put away in their cases along the wall. Gif was a big youth, and the recognized head of many of the athletic sports.

"Well, we have to take such matters as they come," returned Spouter Powell, running his hand through his heavy brush of hair. "Were it not for the gentle rains, and the dews later on, the fields and slopes of the hills would not be clothed in the verdant green which all true lovers of nature so much admire. Instead we might have a bleak barrenness, a dissolution which would appall – "

"Gee, Spouter is at it again!" broke in Will Hendry, usually called Fatty by his chums because of his rotundity. Fatty was extremely good-natured, and as a consequence nearly every one admired him.

"Nothing gentle about this rain!" exclaimed Dan Soppinger, another cadet. "It's coming down in bucketfuls. Say, that puts me in mind – I've got an essay to write on moisture. Can any of you tell me why condensation takes place when – "

"Hurrah! the human question-box is once more with us," broke in Andy Rover. "Dan, I think you'd die if you couldn't ask questions."

"Humph! how is a fellow going to learn anything if he doesn't ask questions?" retorted Dan.

"You might walk around with a set of encyclopedias in your pocket," proposed Randy.

"That's it, Dan. Get a regular thirty-volume set while you are at it. You've got about thirty pockets in your suit, haven't you? You could put one in each pocket."

"I wish it would clear off to-morrow, at least enough to go to Haven Point," said Fred. "They have a dandy moving picture at Mr. Falstein's place."

"Oh, I know the piece you mean, Fred," cried Andy slyly. "It's entitled 'Meeting the Girls; or, The Great Conspiracy.'"

"Did the girls say they were going to see the pictures, Fred?" questioned Jack quickly.

"Mary telephoned that they might go," answered Fred. "That is, she said she and Martha might, and if they go probably some of the others will go too."

"Then we must get down to see the pictures by all means," answered Jack. "That is, if the storm lets up. If it keeps on raining I don't think any of them will show up."

"Let's go in for a little gymnastic work," cried Randy, and had soon shed his cap and his coat. He leaped up to one of the turning-bars, and was soon busily going through various gymnastic evolutions. His twin joined him, and then they did a little team work, much to the admiration of some of the others present.

"How about a swing from one bar to the next?" called out Ned Lowe. Ned was known as the chief singer of the school and was very handy with a mandolin.

"All right, Ned; I'll swing against you," called Andy quickly.

"Not much!" was Ned's ready reply. "I know you can beat me. See what you can do against Walt Baxter."

Walt Baxter was a clean-cut athletic youth who had made good in various contests in the gymnasium and on the baseball and football field. He was the son of Dan Baxter, who at one time had been a bitter enemy of the older Rovers. But the senior Baxter had reformed, and his son was well liked by the younger Rovers.

"All right, Walt," called out Andy. "Do you want to swing against me or against my brother Randy?"

"I'll swing against both of you," answered Walt pleasantly.

The details of the little contest were quickly arranged, and it was decided that Randy should make the first swing, Walt the second, and Andy should come last. The swing was to consist of a flying leap from one bar to the next, and then to a large pad spread beyond the second bar.

"One try only now, remember!" cried Dan Soppinger. "Do your best, everybody."

It did not take Randy long to get into position, and then he made a swing and a leap which were gracefulness itself. He landed on the pad lightly, but quite close to the second bar.

"I'm sure I can do better than that!" cried Walt Baxter; and in less than a minute he too had made the swing, landing half a foot beyond the mark set by Randy.

Andy eyed the distance carefully, and then prepared to make the swing.

"Here's where I do the flying-fish act!" he cried merrily.

"What's going on here? A contest? Let me see it!" came a voice from behind the crowd that had assembled to see the performance. Then Henry Stowell, a small cadet who was a good deal of a sneak, pushed his way to the front of the gathering.

"Hi, Codfish, what are you trying to do?" exclaimed Ned Lowe, who had been elbowed rather rudely by the small cadet.

"I want to see what's going on," cried Stowell.

"All right, Codfish, take it in for all you're worth," called out Fatty Hendry, and then put out his foot and pushed the sneak of the school forward.

It was a vigorous shove, and in order to keep himself from pitching headlong Henry Stowell took half a dozen quick steps forward. Andy was just in the act of launching himself from one bar to the next when Stowell's forward movement carried him to a point directly between the two bars. As a consequence Andy's feet struck the smaller cadet in the shoulder, and both went down in a heap on the floor.

"Stop! Stop! What are you trying to do – kill me?" yelled Stowell, as Andy came down on top of him in anything but a gentle fashion.

"I'd like to know what you are trying to do, Codfish?" demanded Andy, using a nickname for Stowell which the latter abhorred.

"I didn't do a thing! Fatty Hendry tried to trip me up."

"And you shoved your way in where you had no business to be," retorted Fatty. "Just the same, I'm sorry he got in your way, Andy," he added.

"Are either of you hurt?" questioned Jack quickly.

"He spoiled my jump," answered his cousin.

"And he kicked me in the shoulder and knocked me down," whined Stowell. "I've a good mind to report him."

"What! After all we did for you in the woods last Winter?" demanded Fred. They had found Stowell with Werner and Glutts and had rescued the little cadet from the bullies and seen him safe on his way home.

"I don't care! My shoulder hurts terribly," whined Stowell.

"Never mind, Codfish, we'll give you a mustard plaster to put on it," cried Ned Lowe. And then in some confusion the sneak of Colby Hall withdrew from the crowd.

"I don't suppose you feel like trying the swing now," remarked Walt Baxter to Andy. "If you want to call it off, all right."

"Not much!" was the quick reply. "I got pretty well shaken up by hitting Codfish, but just the same, I'm going to make the swing." And a moment later Andy did so.

"And he wins!" declared Dan Soppinger, after measurements were made. "He's a good six inches ahead of anybody!"

"Well, some time we'll try it again, and then maybe I'll be able to do better," remarked Walt Baxter good-naturedly.

"I'm afraid you've made Codfish sore on us once again," remarked Jack to Andy, after the little contest had come to an end and the cadets were breaking up into various groups.

"If he is going to get sore over that he can do it," retorted Andy.

"I supposed he would be real friendly after all we did for him up in the woods last Winter," remarked Fred.

"Well, that shows what's in a fellow is bound to come out sooner or later," answered Randy. "Codfish always was a poor stick, and I suppose he always will be. Just the same, I did hope he would turn over a new leaf."

When the cadets awoke on Saturday morning a pleasurable surprise awaited them. The storms of the weeks previous had completely passed, and the sun was shining over the hills most gloriously.

"Oh, but isn't this the best ever!" cried Randy, after glancing out of the window.

"It's simply scrumptious," retorted his twin; and then to show how good he felt, Andy turned a flip-flap over his bed. Then he caught up a pillow and threw it through an open doorway at Fred, who had just started to dress.

"Hi, you! what's this – a bombardment by the Huns?" yelled Fred, and promptly returning by sending a sneaker at his cousin. But the footwear struck Randy, who promptly returned the missile and followed it up with a book and a wadded-up towel.

"Hi, you fellows! stop the rough-housing!" shouted Jack. "Do you want to be reported?"

"Who's going to report us – you?" questioned Andy.

"No. But some monitor will, or some teacher. And then a fat chance you'll have of going to Haven Point this afternoon."

"Oh, that's so. We don't want to have our off-time cut off," put in Randy quickly. "The war's over, the armistice is signed, and everybody can go home and get washed up," he added, with a grin.

But while he was speaking Andy had advanced upon Fred, and now the two started to wrestle. Jack tried to stop them and in the confusion the three upset a small stand, sending a dozen or more books to the floor with a thump. Almost immediately came another thump on one of the doors leading to the corridor.

"Now we've done it," whispered Fred, in sudden alarm.

"Pick up those books! Quick!" answered Andy, and got down on his knees to do so while Jack righted the stand which had held the volumes. At the same time Randy leaped to pick up the pillows and otherwise straighten the connecting rooms which the Rovers occupied.

"Ho, you fellows! aren't you up yet?" came from the corridor in the voice of Gif Garrison. "Let me in. I've got some important news to tell you."

"Oh, it's only Gif!" murmured the twins in relief.

"He said he had important news," put in Jack. "I wonder what it can be."

CHAPTER V

THE RIVAL SCHOOL

One of the doors to the rooms occupied by the Rovers was quickly swung open and Gif Garrison strode in, followed by Dick Powell. Gif held a morning newspaper in his hand, one which had been delivered to the school only a short while before.

"You said you had important news, Gif," said Jack. "What is it?"

"There is an item here in the newspaper Gif wants to show you," put in Spouter. "I am sure it will interest every one of us."

"It's not much of an item so far as size goes," said Gif. "But it certainly is important – or at least it may be, especially to you Rovers – seeing that none of us has ever been particularly friendly with Nappy Martell and Slugger Brown."

"What! have you news of those two rascals?" demanded Randy.

"Did they run away from that detention camp in the South?" broke in Fred.

"They'd be fools to do that," returned Andy. "The military authorities would round them up in no time. It's no easy matter to keep out of the clutches of Uncle Sam if he wants you."

"No, they haven't run away. They have simply been given their freedom," answered Gif. "Here – you can read the news for yourselves."

The item he referred to was only twelve lines long and located at the bottom of a column on one of the inside pages of the newspaper. It was dated from a well-known detention camp in the South, and gave a list of six prisoners who had had another hearing and been given their freedom. Two of the names were Napoleon Martell and Slogwell Brown, Jr.

"Well, they're loose, all right enough," was Andy's comment, after they had perused the item. "I wonder what they'll do?"

"One thing is certain, being detained that way by the Government will certainly prove quite a stigma," said Jack. "I shouldn't like to have anything of that sort against me."

"I suppose they'll have it in for us," said Randy. "They always loved us a lot – I don't think!"

"Do you imagine they would dare show themselves around here?" questioned Fred quickly.

"Why not?" queried Spouter.

"I don't think they'll come here," answered Jack. "It's too slow for them around Haven Point. You know how sick they got of it the last time they were here. They'll probably head for some big city, where they can have a good time on whatever money they can get hold of."

Gif and Spouter passed on, to carry the news to other cadets who might be interested in it, and the Rovers hurried to get ready for roll-call and breakfast. While they were finishing their dressing they continued to discuss the news.

"I was hoping that we had seen and heard the last of Nappy and Slugger," said Fred; "just as I was hoping that we had seen the last of Werner and Glutts."

"They are like bad pennies – ready to turn up when you least expect it," said Andy. "Just the same, they had better keep out of my way if they don't want to get into trouble," he continued, his eyes flashing.

During the morning the boys had to attend a drill and then prepare a number of their lessons for the following week. But directly after lunch they had the time to themselves, and the four Rovers hurried off to town, and Gif and Spouter went with them.

As has been mentioned before, Haven Point possessed a first-class motion picture theater, run by a man named Felix Falstein, who on more than one occasion had shown his friendship for the cadets. Jack and Fred had communicated with their sisters, and Martha and Mary had agreed to meet them at a certain hour at the theater entrance.

"Not here yet," said Jack, when the crowd arrived.

"You can't expect girls to be on hand always," said Andy gaily. "You've got to give 'em a chance to get the hair-buns over their ears."

"And fourteen hooks hooked up on the shoulder where you can't reach 'em," added his twin, grinning.

"Here they come now!" interrupted Fred. "Do you want me to tell them about the hooks and the hair-buns?" he added slyly.

"You say a word, Fred, and you'll be killed in cold blood!" retorted Andy, while Randy shook a playful fist at his cousin.

In the crowd of girls coming around the corner of the street were not only the two Rovers and May Powell, the cousin of Spouter, but also Ruth Stevenson, Annie Larkins, and Alice Strobell.

"Have we been keeping you long?" questioned Martha Rover, as she came up to her brother.

"Only a couple of minutes, Martha," answered Jack.

"We haven't even had a chance to read the billboards," put in Andy.

"I was so glad to see it clear off," remarked Ruth Stevenson, as she quite naturally paired off with Jack, while May Powell turned to talk to Fred. And then she added, as she gazed admiringly at the young captain in his neat-fitting uniform: "I understand you and your cousins have been doing the hero act again."

"Who told you that?" questioned Jack quickly.

"Never mind who told me. We've heard all about how you rescued a man and his son from the Rick Rack River. Oh, Jack! it was a grand thing to do."

"But who told you, Ruth?"

"It was Mr. Franklin himself, if you want to know it."

"Where in the world did you meet Mr. Franklin?"

"Why, he works up at Bossard's lumber camp, and Bossard supplies our school with cordwood. Mr. Franklin and his son brought down a load of wood, and he told someone how the Rovers had come to their rescue. Then those folks pointed Martha and Mary out to them, and as we happened to be with your sister and your cousin at the time we heard the whole story. Mr. Franklin said it was a very brave thing to do, and he was awfully sorry that he couldn't offer you some reward – not but what I am sure, Jack, you wouldn't accept it," the girl continued quickly.

By this time all the boys and girls had paired off and soon the cadets had purchased tickets and all entered the showhouse. They found seats together, and sat down to enjoy themselves. A comic picture was being thrown on the screen, and at this the young folks laughed so heartily that it put all of them in the best of humor. Then came a slight intermission, and they had a chance to talk over their personal matters.

"I heard something a few days ago that interested me quite a good deal, Jack," said Ruth. "It was from that new school at Darryville, the Longley Academy."

The girl referred to a school which had been opened the Fall previous. It was supposed to be something of a physical culture academy where as much attention was paid to athletics as to mental studies. The school had been inaugurated too late to do anything in football, but had given out that they would be in the baseball field the following Spring.

"What did you hear about Longley, Ruth?"

"Why, there is a boy there I used to know quite well, Tommy Flanders. He says they have organized a first-class baseball club, and that they are going to put it all over Colby Hall – those are his exact words."

"Humph! that remains to be seen, Ruth."

"Have you received a challenge from them?"

"Not yet. But Gif Garrison is expecting one every day. We heard something of the talk. Do you know if this Tommy Flanders is much of a player?"

"He used to be considered quite a pitcher. In fact, he was so good as a boy pitcher that some of the local fans wanted him to sign up in one of the minor leagues. But of course they wouldn't let him do that because he was too young to leave school."

"That certainly sounds interesting, especially if this Flanders pitches for Longley."

"Tommy told me that they had not less than a dozen first-class baseball players at their academy. He boasted that they would wipe up the diamond with your school – I am now quoting his words."

"Evidently Tommy knows how to blow."

"Oh, but, Jack, he really is a first-class player. And you must remember that they have advertised Longley Academy as given over especially to athletics and gymnastics. Probably they'll pay more attention to baseball and football than they will to their studies."

"Well, if we get beaten we'll get beaten, Ruth, that's all. We'll do our best."

"And I certainly hope you win, Jack," said the girl, giving him a warm glance. "I would like to see you take some of the conceit out of Tommy Flanders."

After the performance was over the young folks adjourned to a nearby ice-cream parlor where they indulged in that dainty to their hearts' content. While eating their cream and munching the cake they had ordered with it, Jack mentioned what Ruth had told him regarding the boys at the new rival school.

"Yes, they said they were going to send a challenge soon," said Gif. "And I've been warned by others that they intend to put a first-class nine on the diamond to beat us."

"Then it will be up to you, Gif, to show them what Colby Hall can do," said Spouter. He himself was not much of a ball player, although he had been on the nine occasionally.

The young people had almost finished their ice cream and cake when they saw two girls and two boys come in. As they entered Ruth clutched Jack by the arm.

"There is Tommy Flanders now!" she whispered, pointing to the larger of the two youths.

Tommy Flanders showed that he was a good deal of a sport. He was dressed in a loud-looking suit, had pointed shoes, and he wore a cap set well back on his head. His face was rather red, and his forehead was overshadowed by a heavy mop of reddish-brown hair.

"Hello, Ruth! How are you?" he called out pleasantly, when still at a distance. "Glad to see you," and he smiled at all of the girls and bowed.

After this there was nothing to do but to introduce the newcomer, and he promptly introduced the two girls, who proved to be residents of Haven Point, and then introduced his friend, Pete Stevens.

"Pete is going to be my backstop on our nine," explained Tommy Flanders. "You know, I suppose, that I am the pitcher," he added in an off-hand manner.

"And he's one wonder pitcher, believe me!" piped in Pete Stevens. He was a stocky youth with small ferret-like eyes.

"I understand you're going to have quite a nine," remarked Jack politely.

"Say, it will be the finest baseball aggregation this part of the country has ever seen – that is, for a school nine," boasted Tommy Flanders. "You know, our school is long on athletics. We intend to put it over everything within traveling distance."

"That is, provided the other schools are not too scared to accept our challenges," added Pete Stevens.

"You won't find Colby Hall afraid to accept any reasonable challenge," retorted Gif, somewhat disgusted with the boasting manner of the newcomers.

"We've waxed a few schools around here, and maybe we can take a round out of Longley Academy," Fred could not help but add.

"You'll never take a round out of Longley, believe me," sneered Pete Stevens. "We'll put it all over you fellows just as sure as you're born."

"Well, we'll see," remarked Jack, and his face showed that he did not admire having this discussion before the girls.

"Say, I'll tell you what I'll do, Rover," said Tommy Flanders, advancing close to the young captain. "I'll bet you ten dollars that we win the first game of ball we play with you."

"You'll have to excuse me, Flanders, but I'm not betting," answered Jack.

"Afraid, are you?"

"I said I was not betting. And now if you'll excuse us, we'll finish our ice cream and cake," added the young captain coldly.

"Oh, well, if you're afraid to bet, we'll let it go at that," responded Tommy Flanders carelessly. Then he and his companion and the girls with them moved off to a table in the rear of the ice-cream parlor.

"Of all the conceited fools – " began Andy, when Jack caught him by the arm.

"Drop it, Andy," and Jack looked at his cousin and then at the girls, all of whom had been much disturbed over the possibility of a quarrel.

"Oh, sure, let's drop it," was Andy's quick answer. And then to change the subject he began a funny story and soon he had the girls shrieking with laughter. Then they finished their ice cream and cake and left the place.

"Oh, Jack, if you do play them I hope you beat them good," said Ruth, when the girls and the cadets were ready to separate.

"We'll do our best," was his reply.

"I hope when that match comes off we'll be able to see it," said Martha.

"Of course you'll all have to be on hand," answered her brother quickly. "We'll want you girls to encourage us."

"I want to see you beat Longley Academy," declared Mary.

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

CHAPTER VI

PLAYING HIXLEY HIGH

"Now for some real baseball practice, boys!"

"Right you are, Jack! I'm mighty glad it has cleared off at last."

"If we are going to have our annual game with Hixley High two weeks from to-day we had better get busy," put in Gif Garrison. "I had no idea they would ask for a match so early in the season."

"It's on account of the game they expect to have this year with Longley Academy," remarked Walt Baxter. "You see, they are to play the new school too."

"Yes, and I heard that those Longley fellows were boasting they were going to do up Hixley, just the same as they were going to do us up."

"Gee, but that Tommy Flanders makes me sick!" broke in Fred. "I really think he's the most conceited fellow I ever met."

"Just the same, I've heard he's a pretty good player," remarked Gif. "He is not only a good pitcher, but quite a good batsman. And they say that his crony is also quite a good all-around player."

The regular nine, minus two players who had left the school the term previous, were out on the diamond practicing. A little later, with two substitutes, they were to play a match of five innings against a scrub team picked from the most available of the ball players left.

Jack Rover was in the box and was putting some swift ones over the plate. As yet he did not have perfect control of the horsehide, and as a consequence it occasionally went over the catcher's head.

Three games of baseball had been arranged for Colby Hall, one with Hixley High, another with Columbus Academy, and a third with Longley. They were to take place in the order named and at intervals of one week.

The practice soon came to an end, and then the five-innings game with the scrubs started. This proved to be quite a contest, and Fred Rover distinguished himself by knocking a three-bagger, while Jack struck out six batsmen, much to his satisfaction. When the contest came to a close the regular nine had won by a score of 11 to 3.

"Well, that shows the old nine is still in the running," remarked Dan Soppinger, when the boys were rushing to the gymnasium to get under the showers.

"Right you are, Dan," answered Jack. "Just the same, that scrub team isn't Hixley High, or Columbus or Longley, either, please don't forget that."

"Oh, I know that just as well as you do, Jack. We've got to play much better than we did to-day if we expect any victories in the regular games."

"Don't forget that we'll be up against Dink Wilsey again," said Gif.

"I don't believe that any of us are likely to forget it," grinned Dan. All remembered Dink Wilsey very well. He was the pitcher for Hixley High and a fellow who was destined to become talked about in baseball circles. He had a puzzling delivery, and sometimes struck out even the best of the batsmen with ease.

From that day forth Jack and the other members of the ball team put in every spare moment at practice. Gradually the young pitcher obtained better control of the sphere, and then he did what he could to increase his speed and make his curves more puzzling.

The contest with Hixley High was to take place on the latter's grounds, and almost all the pupils at Colby Hall made the journey to see the game. Many girls were also present from Clearwater Hall and from the town.

"Oh, Jack, I hope you win!" said Ruth Stevenson, as he strode forward to greet her and the others who had arrived from the girls' school.

"We're going to do our best, Ruth," answered the young pitcher. And then, as he noticed something of a cloud on her face, he added jokingly: "You don't have to look so glum about it."

"I'm not glum over the game, Jack. I was thinking of something else," she answered soberly.

"Why, what's the matter, Ruth – has anything gone wrong?"

"Yes, Jack. But – but maybe I'd better not tell you anything about it," she faltered.

"Has anybody been annoying you?"

"I can't tell you now – I'll tell you after the game if I get a chance," whispered Ruth, as several of the other boys and girls came closer.

At that moment came a blare of tin horns and the noise of many rattles, and then the Hixley High boys let out a wild yelling:

"Hixley High! Hixley High! Hixley High forever!" and this was repeated over and over again.

"Wake up, fellows!" came suddenly in a bellow from Ned Lowe. "Everybody wake up for Colby Hall!" And then there boomed out this refrain:

"Who are we?
Can't you see?
Colby Hall!
Dum! Dum! Dum, dum, dum!
Here we come with fife and drum!
Colby! Colby! Colby Hall!"

"That's the stuff! Give it to 'em again!" yelled Fatty Hendry, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, and once more the school refrain boomed forth.

"Oh, isn't that grand!" remarked Mary Rover.

"The best ever!" answered her cousin Martha.

"It makes me feel just as if I was being raised off my feet," remarked May Powell.

The game began with Hixley High at the bat. There was a wild cheering for Rigby, the center-fielder, when he came up, stick in hand, and also yells of encouragement for Jack.

"Put him out in one-two-three order, Jack!"

"Don't let him get a smell at first!"

"Knock the cover off it, Rigby! Make a homer!"

After two strikes, one of them a foul, Rigby managed to get a safe hit to first. But then Jack tightened up and presently the side was retired without a run.

"That's the stuff! Hold 'em to goose eggs all the way through!"

"Now, then, Colby, go to it and make a couple!"

But alas for this hope! One player got as far as third, but there the inning ended.

Goose eggs also went up for both sides in the second, third and fourth innings. Then two players of Hixley High managed to make singles, and on a fumble by one of the new men playing for Colby one of these hits was turned into a run.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! That's the stuff! Score one for Hixley!"

"Hold 'em down! Hold 'em down! Don't let 'em score again!" came from the Colby Hall supporters. And the players from the military school did "hold 'em down" to the single tally which had been made.

With the score 1 to 0, the game ran along to the eighth inning. Then Dan Soppinger managed to knock out a two-bagger, and he was followed at the plate by Randy. Two men were already out, so it was a crucial moment in more ways than one.

Dink Wilsey was still in good form, although the strain was evidently telling upon him. He sent in two swift balls, which were called strikes, one being a foul. Then came two wide ones, which were put down as balls by the umpire.

"Hit it, Randy!" sang out Gif. "Paste it for all you know how!"

Randy was on the alert, and although the next ball pitched was a bit low, he swung for it, sending it down toward right field.

"Run, Dan! Run!"

"Leg it, Randy!"

And both players did run for all they were worth. Dan had started as Randy swung for the sphere, and consequently touched third a few seconds later. Then, as he saw the ball was still down in right field with the fielder chasing madly after it, he came in to the home plate. Randy had meanwhile reached first and was halfway to second, which he reached safely by sliding.

"Hurrah! One run for Colby Hall!"

"And Randy Rover made it a two-bagger!"

"Some playing, I'll say!"

The excitement was now intense as Colby Hall saw a chance to win. But this chance went glimmering a few seconds later when a pop-fly was gathered in with ease by the Hixley pitcher.

"Never mind, we've tied the score, and that's something," said Gif. "Now all we need do is to hold them down and make one more run."

In the ninth inning Hixley High fought desperately to score, and Colby Hall did the same. But neither side got further than first.

"A tie game! A tie game!" was the cry.

"Now, then, it takes only one run to win!"

The excitement was now at a fever heat, and this continued through the tenth and eleventh innings. By this time it was growing dark, so that the fielders had difficulty in seeing the ball.

"I think we had better call it a tie and let it go at that," said the Hixley captain to Gif. "What do you think about it?"

There was a brief consultation, and several of the regular school coaches were called in. In the meanwhile it grew darker rapidly, and presently the contest was called off.

"It's too bad we couldn't finish it," remarked Jack, as he shook hands with Dink Wilsey.

"We'll have to finish it next year," said the rival pitcher, with a grin.

There was a good deal of talk about the contest, but gradually the crowd dispersed, and many of the Colby boys started for the Hall. The Rovers and some of their chums rejoined the girls, and walked with them to the automobiles which were to take Martha and Mary and the others back to Clearwater Hall.

"I'm so sorry you fellows didn't win that game," pouted May Powell, on the way.

"Well, we did our best," answered Fred. "And believe me, it's something to hold down a school like Hixley with such a pitcher as Dink Wilsey."

"You don't mean to say he can pitch any better than Jack!" put in Ruth quickly.

"Oh, I'm not saying anything against Jack," answered Fred. "Just the same, Dink's a great pitcher, and Jack will say so himself."

"He certainly is," was the reply from the oldest Rover boy. "He'll be on one of the professional teams one of these days. If Longley Academy has any such pitcher in Tommy Flanders, we've got our work cut out for us."

Most of the boys and girls went on to where the automobiles were in waiting, but Jack kept to the rear until the whole crowd were out of hearing.

"Now, then, Ruth, tell me what is troubling you," he said in a low voice.

"Oh, Jack, I don't believe I ought to tell you! I should have torn it up and forgotten all about it," returned the girl.

"Torn it up? What do you mean? Was it a letter?"

"Yes, a letter that came yesterday. It is nothing but a scrawl, and it's unsigned. It was sent from New York."

"What did the letter say? Did somebody threaten you, Ruth?"

"No, Jack. Somebody threatened you. If it hadn't been for that, I wouldn't think of bothering you about it."

"Humph! this is interesting. Have you got the letter with you?"

"Yes. Here it is," and the girl brought forth the letter from her handbag. As she had said, it was postmarked New York City, and was addressed to her at the school. The envelope was a plain one, and inside was a single sheet of plain white paper. On this, evidently in a disguised hand, had been scrawled the following:

Ruth Stevenson: If you know when you are well off you won't have much to do with Jack Rover or his cousins. They are a bum lot and some day you will be ashamed of every one of them. Jack Rover never treated anybody square, and some day you can take it from me that I intend to pound his handsome face into a jelly. Better listen to my warning, or you will be very sorry you had anything to do with that crowd.

"A Friend."

CHAPTER VII

NEWS FROM ABROAD

"That's a fine letter, I must say!" remarked Jack, after perusing the scrawl a second time. "Evidently the writer loves me a whole lot."

"Of course it must have come from one of those fellows who used to go to school with you," said Ruth. "Perhaps that Martell boy or that Brown boy."

"I don't think Nappy Martell would dare send such a letter," answered the young captain of the cadets. "It would be more like Slugger Brown to do it. But you must remember that those fellows have just been released from that detention camp." Jack mused for a moment. "This looks more like the work of Gabe Werner to me."

"Oh, Jack! suppose he should attack you some time when you weren't aware?"

"That's a risk a fellow has to run. Of course, I expect to keep on my guard, not only against Gabe Werner but also against Martell, Brown and Glutts. The whole four don't like any of our crowd."

"But just read the dreadful thing he says," continued the girl, as she caught Jack tightly by the arm. "He says he'll pound your face into a jelly! Oh, Jack! don't you ever give him a chance to do that," and Ruth's face showed her solicitude.

"There is one thing you have to remember, Ruth, and that is the writer of an anonymous letter is generally a coward," Jack answered as lightly as he could, more to ease her feelings than anything else. "So don't you worry about this letter. Have you mentioned it to any of the others?"

"No; I didn't want to worry them."

"I'm glad you didn't say anything to Martha and Mary. I know it would upset them a good deal, and maybe they would think they'd have to write to their mothers about it. Just keep it to yourself. And please don't destroy that letter; it might come in useful some time. Maybe we can trace the handwriting."

"But you'll tell your cousins at the Hall, won't you?"

"Yes; I think I had better, so that they can be on their guard, too. We don't want to run any unnecessary chances when it comes to those rascals." And there the talk on this subject came to an end.

It was not until late that evening, when the four Rovers were retiring, that Jack got a chance to mention the anonymous letter to his cousins. All were tremendously interested, and speculated on who the writer could be.

"My opinion is it was either Gabe Werner or Slugger Brown," said Randy. "Neither Nappy Martell nor Bill Glutts would have the nerve to do it."

"I'll side with Jack and say it was Werner," said Fred.

"And I'll side with my brother and say it was either Slugger or Werner," added Andy.

Two days later came word which filled the Rover boys with joy. It was announced that, as the war in Europe was at an end, Colonel Colby might be expected home any day.

"Hurrah! that means that our folks will be coming home too before long!" cried Fred, throwing up his cap. "Isn't this the best ever!"

"Maybe we'll get word from our fathers in a day or two," returned Andy. "Anyway, I hope so."

"My! what a grand old time we ought to have when they do get home," said Randy, his eyes glistening.

"We'll tear the woodpile down!" announced his twin, and then turned a handspring just to ease his feelings.

The talk among the cadets at the Hall was now divided between the return of Colonel Colby and the baseball game with Columbus Academy. In the meantime Hixley High played a game with Longley Academy and lost by a score of 3 to 7.

"Gee! that doesn't look good to me," announced Gif soberly, when the news came in. "All we could do this year was to hold them to that tie."

"That score would seem to prove that the Longley nine is just about twice as good as the Hixley nine," remarked Dan.

"I see by the score that Tommy Flanders struck out nine men. He certainly must have been going some," came from Fred, who was studying the score sheet with interest.

"Yes, and the Longley fellows made two home-runs and three two-baggers," put in Spouter. "I must say they didn't do a thing to Hixley High but punch holes into them."

"We've certainly got our work cut out for us," announced Jack, and then went to practicing harder than ever.

But if the score between Longley and Hixley had been a disappointment to the Colby Hall team, there was quite a little comfort for them in the game with Columbus Academy. The Columbus boys did their level best to win, and yet when the game came to an end Colby Hall was the victor by a score of 8 to 3.

"Well, that shows we are still in the running!" cried Gif that evening. "Those Columbus fellows certainly put up a stiff game."

"They certainly did!" answered Randy. "Their pitcher wasn't such a wonder, but their fielding was certainly great and they have some very good batsmen."

"Yes, and their shortstop is as good as you can find them," added Spouter.

"I've got one complaint to make about that game," said Ralph Mason, who was the major of the school battalion. "I don't know whether I ought to speak to you fellows about it or to Captain Dale."

"What is that, Major?" questioned Gif quickly.

"It has to do with little Henry Stowell," answered the young major seriously.

"Oh, I think I know what you mean!" cried Ned Lowe. "Isn't it the way in which he was talking to some of those Columbus players?"

"It is," was Ralph Mason's reply. "Then you heard it too, did you?"

"I heard a little. I hoped to hear more, but just then somebody came up and took me away."

"If it was about the ball game, Major, I think I ought to know of it," said Gif.

"The trouble is, Gif, I don't really know whether Stowell meant anything by it or not – or rather if he understood what he was doing. He is so very innocent in some things I hate to accuse him of actual wrong-doing. But one thing is certain: Those Columbus Academy fellows pumped him as much as they could about our players, and especially about Jack Rover's style of pitching. And they also asked a great number of questions about the two new players on the nine."

"Codfish is a sneak, and always was!" burst out Dan Soppinger. "Oh, I know you fellows feel inclined to stick up for him," he added, looking at the Rovers; "and once in a while I feel sorry for him myself. But, just the same, he isn't to be trusted."

"If you'll excuse me for saying something, Major, I don't think I'd take the matter to Captain Dale – at least not just yet," put in Jack. This conversation took place during the cadets' off time, and the young captain felt he could talk freely to his superior officer. "If we find that Stowell really tried to injure us, I guess we can take care of him," and he smiled suggestively.

"All right, we'll let it go at that," answered Ralph Mason; and then walked away, satisfied in his own mind that he had said quite enough to the other boys.

By careful inquiry it was ascertained that several other cadets had noticed Stowell talking to some of the Columbus students and had overheard some of the remarks. All were of the opinion that the little cadet had told altogether too much, although it was possible that he was innocent in the matter.

"We certainly ought to teach him some kind of a lesson," remarked Andy.

"I wonder where Codfish is now?" questioned his twin quickly.

"I don't know, but I think we can soon find out. Come on – let us look him up."

"Hi! what are you up to?" demanded Jack, feeling that something was in the air.

"Oh, let them go, Jack!" cried Fred. And then he added to the twins: "If it's anything worth seeing, let us know about it."

"We will!" called back Andy gaily.

The twins hunted around the school, and at last found Henry Stowell in the gymnasium, where he was sitting on a bench watching some other cadets going through their athletic exercises.

"If we can only manage to keep him here a while we might be able to fix up something in his room for him," suggested Randy.

"I guess that would be easy," answered his twin. "There is Walt Baxter. We'll get him to engage Codfish's attention for a while."

Walt was called to one side and the situation explained to him. He readily consented to see to it that Stowell was kept from going up to his room for some time. Then the twins hurried off in the direction of the Hall.

"We must teach him a lesson that he won't forget in a hurry," remarked Randy.

"Right you are!" was his brother's reply.

Half an hour later the other Rovers, along with Gif, Spouter and Dan, were coming up to their rooms when they were met at the head of the stairs by the twins.

"We're all ready for Codfish," announced Randy, somewhat excitedly. "Just wait until I go down to the gym and tip Walt Baxter off."

"Walt and Codfish are in the school library. They just came over," announced Dan. "Ned Lowe is with them. They were asking Codfish a lot of fool questions in history, as to when Hannibal discovered the south pole and things like that."

Randy ran down and in a minute more was in the school library. He caught Walt Baxter's eye and nodded to let the other cadet know that everything was all right. Then Walt did the same to Ned.

"Well, I'm getting sleepy, Stowell," said Walt, stretching himself. "I think I'll go and hit the hay."

"Ditto here," came from Ned.

"I'm real tired myself, and I'd have gone to bed some time ago if you hadn't asked me so many questions," answered Henry Stowell, with a yawn.

"Then you don't really know much about who discovered the south pole?" said Ned seriously. "You see, I want to put it in a composition I'm writing about cats."

"I don't see what cats have to do with the south pole," said Stowell innocently.

"Oh, that's easy, Codfish," said Walt. "Cats like to climb poles, and the south pole is the south pole, isn't it?" And then he and Ned walked off and joined Randy, and all hurried upstairs to the Rovers' rooms.

As luck would have it Henry Stowell this term was occupying a room by himself. It was a fairly large apartment and furnished with a single bed, a chiffonier, a table, and several chairs. In one corner was a closet in which he kept most of his clothing and also a handbag.

"Well, what have you done?" questioned Fred, as the twins appeared.

"We fixed it up so Codfish is going to spend a real pleasant night," answered Andy, with a grin.

"But what did you do?" came from Jack.

"Just you fellows wait and see. Walt, will you go out and let us know when Codfish comes up?"

"I will," answered Walt Baxter, and hurried to a corner of the corridor where he might see without being seen.

In less than five minutes he came back hurriedly with the information that Stowell had just entered his room.

"All right, then, fellows, come with me and maybe you will see or hear something worth while," announced Randy gleefully.

"How are we going to see anything when he shuts his door on us?" questioned Dan.

"His window is right next to the platform of the new fire-escape," answered Andy. "We'll go out on that, and then maybe we'll see everything that goes on. He always keeps a bright light in his room and always pulls down the shade. But we fixed it so the shade will come down only so far, leaving a crack that we can look through with ease."

"I hope you haven't done anything to get us in bad with Captain Dale," remarked Jack.

"Oh, this isn't as bad as all that, Jack," answered Andy. "It's just something to wake Codfish up."

Led by the twins, the other Rovers and their chums hurried down the side corridor to where there was a red light and a sign, "Fire Escape." Then they threw open a window, and in a moment more stood on the escape mentioned. It was of steel, fairly wide, and ran along past several windows, the second of which belonged to the room occupied by Stowell.

As they stepped out on the fire escape they saw a light flash up in the sneak's room and a few seconds later the window shade was pulled down.

"Just as I told you!" Andy exclaimed. "I knew the shade would come down. And see! there is the crack we mentioned. Now, then, line up under the window and we'll see what happens next."

CHAPTER VIII

THE JOKE ON THE SNEAK

The window of Stowell's room had been left open so the boys outside could hear, as well as see, what went on within. They saw the sneak of the school yawn and stretch as if he was tired, and then he lost no time in preparing to retire.

In one of his pockets he carried a piece of cake, and this he ate with satisfaction while undressing. Then, when clad only in his pajamas, he turned off the light and moved in the semi-darkness toward the bed.

"Now watch," murmured Andy, somewhat excitedly.

All outside did so, ranging their heads close together at the open slit of the window. They heard Stowell throw back the covers of the bed and then sit down. An instant later came a cry of surprise.

"What's this? Oh, dear me! something is in the bed!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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