

Stratemeyer Edward

**Dave Porter in the South Seas:
or, The Strange Cruise of the
Stormy Petrel**



Edward Stratemeyer

**Dave Porter in the South Seas: or, The
Strange Cruise of the Stormy Petrel**

«Public Domain»

Stratemeyer E.

Dave Porter in the South Seas: or, The Strange Cruise of the Stormy
Petrel / E. Stratemeyer — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	12
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	19
CHAPTER VI	22
CHAPTER VII	25
CHAPTER VIII	29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

Stratemeyer Edward

Dave Porter in the South Seas; or, The Strange Cruise of the Stormy Petrel

PREFACE

"Dave Porter in the South Seas" is a complete story in itself, but forms the second volume in a line issued under the general title of "Dave Porter Series."

In the first volume of this series, called "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," I introduced a typical American boy, and gave something of his haps and mishaps at an American boarding school of to-day. At this school Dave made a number of warm friends, and also a few enemies, and was the means of bringing one weak and misguided youth to a realization of his better self. Dave was poor and had to fight his way to the front, and this was not accomplished until he had shown those around him what a truly straightforward and manly fellow he was.

The one great cloud over Dave's life was the question of his parentage. He had been raised by those who knew practically nothing of his past, and when he thought that he saw a chance to learn something about himself, he embraced that opportunity eagerly, even though it necessitated a long trip to the South Seas and a search among strange islands and still stranger natives. Dave makes the trip in a vessel belonging to the father of one of his school chums, and is accompanied by several of his friends. Not a few perils are encountered, and what the boys do under such circumstances I leave for the pages that follow to tell.

In penning this tale, I have had a twofold object in view: first, to give my young readers a view of a long ocean trip and let them learn something of the numerous islands which dot the South Seas, and, in the second place, to aid in teaching that old truth – that what is worth having is worth working for.

Again I thank the many thousands of boys and girls, and older persons, too, who have shown their appreciation of my efforts to amuse and instruct them. I can only add, as I have done before, that I sincerely trust that this volume fulfills their every reasonable expectation.

Edward Stratemeyer.

April 10, 1906.

CHAPTER I

THE BOYS OF OAK HALL

"Hello, Dave; where are you bound?"

"For the river, Phil. I am going out for a row. Want to come along?"

"That suits me," answered Phil Lawrence, throwing down the astronomy he had been studying. "But I can't stay out late," he added, reaching for his cap. "Got two examples in algebra to do. Have you finished up?"

"Yes," answered Dave Porter. "They are not so hard."

"And your Latin?"

"That's done, too."

Phil Lawrence eyed the boy before him admiringly. "Dave, I don't see how you manage it. You're always on deck for fun, and yet you scarcely miss a lesson. Let me into the secret, won't you?"

"That's right, Dave; pull the cover off clean and clear," came from a youth who had just entered the school dormitory. "If I can get lessons without studying –"

"Oh, Roger, you know better than that," burst out Dave Porter, with a smile. "Of course I have to study – just the same as anybody. But when I study, I study, and when I play, I play. I've found out that it doesn't pay to mix the two up – it is best to buckle your mind down to the thing on hand and to nothing else."

"That's the talk," came from a boy resting on one of the beds. "It puts me in mind of a story I once heard about a fellow who fell from the roof of a house to the ground –"

"There goes Shadow again!" cried Roger Morr. "Shadow, will you ever get done telling chestnuts?"

"This isn't a chestnut, and I haven't told it over twice in my life. The man fell to the ground past an open window. As he was going down, he grabbed another man at the window by the hair. The hair – it was a wig – came off. 'Say,' yells the man at the window. 'Leave me alone. If you want to fall, 'tend to business, and fall!'" And a smile passed around among the assembled schoolboys.

"Perhaps Roger would like to come along," continued Dave. "I was going out for a row, and Phil said he would go, too," he explained.

"That suits me," answered Roger Morr. "It will give us an appetite for supper."

"What about you, Shadow?" and Dave turned to the youth on the bed.

Maurice Hamilton shook his head slightly. "Not to-day. I am going to take a nap, if I can get it. Remember, I was up half the night."

"So he was," affirmed Phil Lawrence. "But he hasn't said what it was about."

"Not much," growled the boy called Shadow. He was very tall and very thin, hence the nickname. Turning over, he pretended to go to sleep.

"There is something wrong about Shadow," said Dave as he and his two companions left the school building and hurried for the river at the back of the grounds. "He has not been himself at all to-day."

"I think he has had something to do with that bully, Gus Plum," said Phil. "I saw them together two days ago, and both were talking earnestly. I don't know exactly what it was about. But I know Shadow has been very much disturbed ever since."

"Well, the best he can do is to leave Plum alone," returned Dave, decidedly. "I can tell you, fellows, that chap is not to be trusted; you know that as well as I do."

"Of course we know it," said Roger Morr. "Didn't I warn you against Gus Plum before you ever came to Oak Hall? And now that Chip Macklin has turned over a new leaf and refused to be Plum's toady any longer, the bully is worse than ever. Only yesterday Buster Beggs caught him back of the

gym., abusing one of the little fellows. Buster is generally too lazy to rouse up, but he said it made him mad, and he told Plum to stop, or it would be the worse for him, and Plum went off grumbling."

"It's a great pity Plum can't reform, like Macklin. I declare, Chip is getting to be quite a decent sort, now."

"It's not in Plum to reform," exclaimed Phil Lawrence. "If I were Doctor Clay, I'd get rid of him. Why, such a chap can keep a whole school in hot water."

"Somebody said that Plum's father had lost a good bit of his money," observed Roger Morr. "If that is so, it must be a bitter pill for Gus to swallow."

"Well, I wouldn't taunt him with it, if it's true," replied Dave, quickly.

"Oh, I shan't say a word – although he deserves to have it rubbed in, for the way he treated you, Dave."

"Yes, that was a jolly shame," commented Phil. "It makes me angry every time I think of it."

"I am willing to let bygones be bygones," said Dave, with a little smile. "As it was, it only showed me who my true friends were, and are. I can afford to get along without the others."

"And especially after we waxed Plum and his crowd at baseball, and then won our great victory over the Rockville boys," said Roger. "Oh, but wasn't that a dandy victory! And didn't we have a dandy celebration afterwards!"

"And do you remember the big cannon cracker we set off in the courtyard?" Dave's eyes began to twinkle. "I heard afterwards that Pop Swingly, the janitor, was scared almost to death. He thought somebody was trying to blow up the building."

"Yes, and Job Haskers said if he could catch the fellow who – " Phil broke off short. "Here comes Gus Plum, now," he whispered.

The others looked up, and saw coming toward them across the school grounds a tall, broad-shouldered individual, loudly dressed, and with a shock of uncombed hair and a cap set over on one ear.

"Hello, Plum," said Dave, pleasantly, while his two companions nodded to the newcomer.

"Hello, yourself," came shortly from Gus Plum. "Hold up a minute," he went on, planting himself in front of the three.

"What's wanted?" questioned Phil, in a little surprise.

"I want to know if Shadow Hamilton has been saying anything about me to you," growled the bully of Oak Hall.

"I haven't heard anything," answered Phil, while Dave and Roger shook their heads.

"Humph! He had better not!" muttered Plum, with a scowl. "If he does – " The bully did not finish.

"I hope there is no more trouble in the air," was Dave's comment.

"There will be trouble, if Hamilton opens his trap. I won't allow anybody in this school to talk about me, and all of you had better understand it," and the bully glared at the others defiantly.

"I am sure I don't know what you are talking about," said Dave. "I haven't said anything about you."

"And you haven't heard anything?" inquired Gus Plum, with a look of keen anxiety showing on his coarse face.

"I've heard some roundabout story about your father losing money," said Roger, before Dave could answer. "If it is true, I am sorry for you, Gus."

"Bah! I don't want your sympathy. Did Hamilton tell you that story?"

"No."

"I suppose you are spreading it right and left, eh? Making me out to be a pauper, like your friend Porter, eh?" continued Gus Plum, working himself up into a magnificent condition of ill-humor.

"I am not spreading it right and left," answered Roger, quietly.

"And I am not a pauper, Plum!" exclaimed Dave, with flashing eyes. "I thought we had settled that difference of opinion long ago. If you are going to open it up again – "

"Oh, don't mind what he says, Dave," broke in Phil, catching his chum by the arm. "You know nobody in the school pays attention to him."

"I won't let any of you run me down!" roared Gus Plum. "Now, just you remember that! If any of you say a word about me or my father, I'll make it so hot for you that you'll wish you had never been born. My father has lost a little money, but it ain't a flea-bite to what he is worth, and I want everybody in this school to know it."

"And I want you to know that you cannot continue to insult me," blazed out Dave. "I am not as rich as most of the boys here, but – "

"He is just as good as any of us, Plum, remember that," finished Phil. "It is an outrage for you to refer to Dave as a pauper."

"Well, didn't he come from the poorhouse, and ain't he a nobody?" sneered the bully.

"He is a better fellow than you will ever be, Plum," said Roger, warmly. He and Phil were both holding Dave back. "Don't listen to him, Dave."

"Yes, but, fellows – " Dave's face was white, and he trembled all over.

"I know it cuts you," whispered Roger. "But Plum is a – a brute. Don't waste your breath on him."

"Ho! so I am a brute, am I?" blustered the big bully, clenching his fists.

"Yes, you are," answered Roger, boldly. "Any fellow with a spark of goodness and honor in him would not speak to Dave as you have done. It simply shows up your own low-mindedness, Plum."

"Don't you preach!" shouted the bully. "Say another word, and I'll – I'll – "

"We are not afraid of you," said Phil, firmly. "We've told you that before. We intend to leave you alone, and the best thing you can do is to leave us alone."

"Bah! I know you, and you can't fool me! You say one thing to my face and another behind my back. But don't you dare to say too much; and you can tell Shadow Hamilton not to say too much, either. If you do – well, there will be war, that's all – and all of you will get what you don't want!" And with this threat, Gus Plum hurried around a corner of the school building and out of sight.

"What a cad!" murmured Phil.

"He is worked up; no disputing that," was Roger's comment. "He acts as if he was afraid something was being told that he wished to keep a secret."

The hot blood had rushed to Dave's face, and he was still trembling.

"I wish I had knocked him down," he said in a low tone.

"What good would it have done?" returned Roger. "It would only get you into trouble with the doctor, and that is just what Plum would like. When it comes to a standing in the class, he knows he hasn't as much to lose as you have. He is almost at the bottom already, while you are close to the top."

"But, Roger, he said – oh, I can't bear to think about it! I suppose he blabs it to everybody, too, and they will think – "

"Don't give it another thought, Dave," said Phil, soothingly, and he turned his chum toward the river again. "Dismiss Plum and all his meanness from your mind."

"I wish I could," answered Dave, and his voice had a great deal of seriousness in it.

CHAPTER II

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST

As the three boys hurried to the river, Dave Porter felt that all his anticipated sport for that afternoon had been spoiled. He had been brought face to face once more with the one dark spot in his history, and his heart was filled with a bitterness which his two loyal chums could scarcely comprehend.

Dave was indeed a poorhouse boy, and of unknown parentage. When but a few years of age, he had been found one evening in the summer wandering close to the railroad tracks just outside of the village of Crumville. How he was found by some farm hands and taken to a house and fed and cared for otherwise, has already been related in the first volume of this series, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall."

At first, every effort to learn his identity was made, but, this failing, he was turned over to the poorhouse authorities. He said his name was Dave, or Davy, and sometimes added Porter, and then Dun-Dun, and from this he was called Dave Porter – a name which suited him very well.

Dave remained at the poorhouse until he was about nine years old, when he was taken out of that institution by a broken-down college professor named Caspar Potts, who had turned farmer. He remained with the old professor for several years, and a warm friendship sprang up between the pair. Caspar Potts gave Dave a fair education, and, in return, the boy did all he could for the old man, who was not in the best of health, and rather eccentric at times.

Unfortunately for Professor Potts, there was in the neighborhood a hard-hearted money-lender named Aaron Poole, who had a mortgage on the old educator's farm. The money-lender had a son named Nat, who was a flippant youth, and this boy had trouble with Dave. Then the money-lender would have sold out the old professor, had not aid come opportunely from a most unexpected quarter.

In this volume it is unnecessary to go into the details of how Dave became acquainted with Mr. Oliver Wadsworth, a rich manufacturer of the neighborhood, and how the boy saved Jessie Wadsworth from being burned to death when the gasoline tank of an automobile exploded and enveloped the young miss in flames. For this service the Wadsworths were all more than grateful, and when Dave told his story Oliver Wadsworth made the discovery that Caspar Potts was one of the professors under whom he had studied in his college days.

"I must meet him and talk this over," said the rich manufacturer, and the upshot of the matter was that the professor and Dave were invited to dine at the Wadsworth mansion.

This dinner proved a turning point in the life of the poorhouse youth. Mr. Wadsworth had lost a son by death, and Dave reminded him strongly of his boy. It was arranged that Caspar Potts should come to live at the Wadsworth mansion, and that Dave should be sent to some first-class boarding school, the manufacturer agreeing to pay all bills, because of the boy's bravery in behalf of Jessie.

Oak Hall was the school selected, a fine institution, located not far from the village of Oakdale. The school was surrounded by oaks, which partly shaded a beautiful campus, and the grounds, which were on a slight hill, sloped down in the rear to the Leming River.

Dave's heart beat high when he started off for Oak Hall, and he had a curious experience before he reached that institution. The house of a Senator Morr was robbed, and the boy met the robber on the train, and, after a good deal of trouble, managed to recover a valise containing a large share of the stolen goods. This threw Dave into the company of Roger Morr, the senator's son, and the two became warm friends. Roger was on his way to Oak Hall, and it was through him that Dave became acquainted with Phil Lawrence – reckoned by many the leader of the academy; Maurice Hamilton, generally called Shadow; Sam Day, Joseph Beggs, – who always went by the name of Buster, because

he was so fat, – and a number of others. In Crumville Dave had had one boy friend, Ben Basswood, and Ben also came to Oak Hall, and so did Nat Poole, as flippant and loud-mouthed as ever.

But Dave soon found out that Nat Poole was not half so hard to get along with as was Gus Plum, the big bully of the Hall. There was a difference of opinion almost from the start, and Plum did all he could to annoy Dave and his friends. Plum wanted to be a leader in baseball and in athletics generally, and when he found himself outclassed, he was savagely bitter.

"I'll get square!" he told his toady, Chip Macklin, more than once; but his plans to injure Dave and his chums fell through, and, in the end, Macklin became disgusted with the bully and left him. Most of the boys wanted nothing to do with the boy who had been the bully's toady, but Dave put in a good word for him, and, in the end, Macklin was voted a pretty fair fellow, after all.

With the toady gone, Gus Plum and Nat Poole became very thick, and Poole lost no opportunity of telling how Dave had been raised at the poorhouse. Gus Plum took the matter up, and for a while poor Dave was made miserable by those who turned their backs on him. But Doctor Clay, who presided over the academy, sided with Dave, and so did all of the better class of students, and soon the affair blew over, at least for the time being. But now the bully was agitating it again, as we have just seen.

During the winter term at Oak Hall one thing of importance had occurred, of which some particulars must be given, for it has much to do with our present tale. Some of the boys, including Dave, had skated up the river to what was locally called the old castle – a deserted stone dwelling standing in a wilderness of trees. They had arrived at this structure just in time to view a quarrel between two men – one a sleek-looking fellow and the other an elderly man, dressed in the garb of a sailor. The sleek-looking individual was the man who had robbed Senator Morr's house, and just as he knocked the old sailor senseless to the ground, the boys rushed in and made him a prisoner.

When the old sailor came to his senses, he stared at Dave as if the boy were a ghost. He said his name was Billy Dill and that he had sailed the South Seas and many other portions of the briny deep. He insisted that he knew Dave well, and wanted to know why the youth had shaved off his mustache. The boys imagined that the tar was out of his head, and he was removed to a hospital. Later on, as Dave was so interested in the man, Mr. Wadsworth had him taken to a private sanitarium. Here he lingered for awhile between life and death, but at last grew better physically, although his mind was sadly unbalanced, and he could recall the past only in a hazy way.

Yet he insisted upon it, over and over again, that he had met Dave before, or, if not the youth, then somebody who looked exactly like him, although older. Pressed to tell his story, he said he had met this man on Cavasa Island, in the South Seas. He also mentioned a crazy nurse and a lost child, but could give no details, going off immediately into a wild flight about the roaring of the sea in his ears and the dancing of the lighthouse beacon in his eyes.

"He must know something of my past," Dave said, when he came away from visiting the old tar. "Oh, if only his mind were perfectly clear!"

"We must wait," answered Oliver Wadsworth, who was along. "I think his mind will clear after awhile. It is certainly clearer now than it was some months ago."

"The man he knows may be my father, or some close relative."

"That may be true, Dave. But don't raise any false hopes. I should not like to see you disappointed for the world."

Dave knew that Phil Lawrence's father was a shipping merchant of considerable standing, owning an interest in a great number of vessels. He went to Phil and learned that the boy was going to take a trip to the South Seas that very summer, and was going to stop at Cavasa Island.

"I am going on business for my father," explained Phil. "It is something special, of which he wishes the supercargo to know nothing." And then he told Dave all he knew of Cavasa Island and its two towns and their inhabitants. After that, Dave sent a letter to both of the towns, asking if there

were any persons there by the name of Porter, or if any English-speaking person had lost a child years ago, but so far no answer had been received.

Of course, Phil wanted to know why Dave was so anxious to learn about his proposed trip, and, in the end, the poorhouse boy told his story, to which his chum listened with interest.

"Phil, what would you say if I wanted to go with you on that trip to Cavasa Island?" Dave had said, after his story was finished.

"Do you really mean it, Dave?" had been the return question, and Phil's face had shown his astonishment.

"I do – if matters turn out as I think they may."

"That is, if that old sailor gets around so that he can tell a pretty straight story?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'd like your company, first-rate. But – " Phil drew a deep breath – "I'd hate to see you go on a wild-goose chase. Think of traveling thousands of miles and then being disappointed at the end of the trip. That old sailor may simply be crazy."

"I don't think so. Why should he mention a lost child – a boy?"

"Well, that is the only thing that makes it look as if there was something in the story. But couldn't I do the looking for you?"

"No, I'd prefer to do that myself. Besides, you must remember, that sailor did not come directly from Cavasa Island to this country. So, whoever was on the island – I mean the person I may be interested in – may have gone elsewhere – in which case I should want to follow him."

"I see. Well, Dave, do what you think is best, and may good luck go with you!" Phil had said; and there the conversation on the subject had come to a close.

It was not until a week later that Dave had called on Billy Dill again – to find the old tar sitting on a porch of the sanitarium, smoking his pipe contentedly.

"On deck again, my hearty!" had been the greeting. "Give us your flipper," and a warm handshake had followed.

But the visit had been productive of little good. Billy Dill could remember nothing clearly, excepting that he knew a man who looked very much like Dave, and that that man had been his friend while he was stranded on Cavasa Island and looking for a chance to ship. He said he could recall a bark named the *Mary Sacord* and a crazy nurse called Polly, but that was all.

"I had a picter o' that man once – the feller that looks like you," he said. "But I dunno what's become o' it," and then he had scratched his head and gone off into a rambling mumble that meant nothing at all. And Dave had gone back to Oak Hall more mystified than ever.

CHAPTER III

THREE CHUMS ON THE RIVER

Down at the boathouse the three boys procured a round-bottomed rowboat, and were soon on the river. Roger took one pair of oars and motioned to Phil to let Dave take the other.

"Let him do the most of the rowing – it will help him to forget his troubles," he whispered, and Phil understood.

It was a beautiful afternoon in the early summer, with just the faintest breeze stirring the trees which lined the river bank on either side. The boys pulled a good stroke, and Roger purposely kept Dave at it, until both were thoroughly warmed up.

"You're improving in your stroke," remarked Dave, as they came to a bend in the watercourse and rested on their oars for a minute. "Perhaps you are training for the boat races."

"Well, I shouldn't mind going into a race," returned the senator's son. "It would be lots of sport, even if I didn't win."

"I am going into some of the field contests this summer," said Phil. "That is, if they come off before I go away."

"When do you expect to start?"

"I don't know yet. It depends upon when one of my father's vessels gets back to San Francisco and ships her cargo."

"I've heard a rumor that the Hall is to be shut up early this summer," said Dave. "The doctor is thinking of building an addition before the fall term begins, and he wants to give the masons and carpenters as much of a show as possible."

"Do you remember that day we were on the river, and Gus Plum ran into us with that gasoline launch?" observed Phil. "My, what a mess we were in!"

"I've had trouble with him ever since I clapped eyes on him," answered Dave.

"Oh, let's talk about something else!" cried Roger. "No matter where we start from, we always end up with Gus Plum. And, by the way, do you notice how thick he is with Nat Poole since Macklin has refused to toady to him?"

"They are almost of a stripe, Roger," answered Dave. "I know Nat Poole thoroughly. The only difference is that Poole is more of a dandy when it comes to dress."

"Poole says he is going in for athletics this summer," said Phil. "I overheard him telling Luke Watson so."

"Is Luke going into training?"

"I don't think so. He loves his banjo and guitar too much."

"Well, I'd love them, too, if I could play as he does," returned Dave.

"Luke told me he had noticed something strange about Shadow," put in Roger. "He asked me if I knew what made Shadow so worried. He said he hadn't heard a funny story out of him for a week, and that's unusual, for Shadow is generally telling about a dozen a day."

"It is possible that he may be fixing for a regular spell of sickness," was Dave's comment. "That's the way some things come on, you know."

The boys resumed their rowing, and Roger put on a burst of speed that made Dave work with a will in order to keep up with him. Then, of a sudden, there came a sharp click and the senator's son tumbled over backwards, splashing the water in every direction.

"Whoop! look out!" yelled Phil. "I don't want any shower-bath! Did you catch a crab, Roger?"

"N – no, I didn't," spluttered the senator's son, when he had regained a sitting position. "There's the trouble," and he pointed to a broken oarlock.

"That's too bad," declared Dave. "Boys, we shall have to have that fixed before we take the boat back to the boathouse – or else we'll have to tell Mr. Dale." The man he mentioned was the first assistant instructor at the Hall.

"Let us row down to Ike Rasmer's boathouse and see if he will sell us an oarlock," suggested Roger. "He ought to have plenty on hand."

"All right," said Phil; "and, as both of you must be tired now, I'll take my turn," and he motioned to Dave to change seats with him, while Roger drew in his remaining oar.

The man whom Roger had mentioned was a boatman who rented out craft of various kinds. His boathouse was about half a mile away, but Phil covered the distance with ease. They found Rasmer out on his little dock, painting a tiny sloop a dark green.

"How do you do, boys?" he called out, pleasantly. "Out for an airing?"

"No, we came down to see if you needed any painters," answered Dave.

"Well, I dunno. What do you think of this job of mine? Ain't it pretty slick?" And Ike Rasmer surveyed his work with evident satisfaction.

"It's all right, Ike," answered Roger. "When you give up boating, take to house-painting, by all means."

"House-painting?" snorted the man. "Not fer me! I ain't goin' to fall off no slippery ladder an' break my neck. I'd rather paint signs. What's that you've got, a broken oarlock?"

"Yes, and I want to know if you'll sell me one to match?"

"Sure I will," answered Ike Rasmer, with a twinkle in his eye. He threw down his paint brush and walked into his boathouse. "Here you be, my boy!" And he held up the parts of a broken oarlock.

"Well – I – I didn't want a broken one," stammered the senator's son.

"Didn't ye say you wanted one to match? Ho, ho! I reckon I cotched you that trip, didn't I?" And the man continued to laugh, and Dave and Phil joined in.

"Ike must have swallowed a whetstone this morning," observed Dave.

"A whetstone?" queried the old boatman. "Why?"

"You're so awfully sharp."

"Ho, ho! That's one on me, sure enough." The man slapped Dave on the shoulder. "You Hall boys are the cute ones, ain't ye? Well, if you want a good oarlock, you shall have it," and he brought forth a number, that Roger might make his selection. The senator's son did so, and paid for it out of his pocket-money.

"We ought to pay for part of that," said Dave, always ready to do what was fair.

"Oh, don't bother, Dave; it's only a trifle," answered his chum.

"Say, some of you boys are out pretty late nights," observed Ike Rasmer, as he resumed his painting, and while Roger was adjusting the new oarlock to the gunwale of the Hall boat.

"Out late?" queried Phil.

"Yes, mighty late."

"I haven't been out for a month."

"Nor I," added Dave and Roger.

"I see that young Hamilton not long ago – the fellow that tells stories whenever he can get the chance. And I saw Gus Plum, too."

"Together?" asked Dave, with sudden interest.

"Oh, no. But they were out the same night."

"Late?"

"I should say so – after twelve o'clock."

"What were they doing, Ike?" asked Phil.

"Rowing along the river. Each had a small boat – I guess one from the school. It was bright moonlight, and I saw them quite plainly when they passed Robbin's Point, where I was fishing."

"And each was alone?"

"Yes. Hamilton was right ahead of Plum, and both rowing along at good speed, too. I thought it was mighty strange, and made up my mind I'd ask you boys about it. But, say, I don't want you to get them into trouble," added the old boatman, suddenly. "They are both customers of mine, sometimes."

"I shan't say anything," answered Roger. "But this puzzles me," he continued, turning to his friends.

"Each boy was alone in a boat?" queried Dave.

"Yes."

"And Plum was following Hamilton?"

"He seemed to be. Anyway, his boat was behind the other."

"Was anybody else around?" asked Phil.

"I didn't see a soul, and the river was almost as bright as day."

"Did you see them a second time?" asked Dave.

"No, for I was getting ready to go home when they came along. I don't know where they went, or when they got back."

Ike Rasmer could tell no more than this, and as it was getting late the three boys lost no time in shoving off once more and pulling for the Hall boathouse.

"This stumps me," declared the senator's son. "What do you make of it? Do you think Shadow and Plum are up to something between them?"

"No, I don't," answered Dave, decidedly. "Shadow is not the fellow to train with Gus Plum. He doesn't like the bully any more than we do."

"No wonder Shadow feels sleepy, if he spends his nights on the river," said Phil. "But I can't make out what he is up to, I must confess. If it was some fun, he would surely take somebody with him."

The boys pulled with all their strength, yet when they arrived at the Hall boathouse, they found that they were exactly twelve minutes behind the supper hour.

"No time to wash up," said Roger. "We'll be lucky if we can slip into the dining room without being observed."

With all speed they tied up their craft and ran for the school building. They were just entering the side door when they were brought face to face with Job Haskers, the second assistant teacher and a man who was very dictatorial in his manner.

"Stop!" cried Job Haskers, catching Dave by the shoulder. "What do you mean by coming in at this hour?"

"We were out on the river and broke an oarlock, Mr. Haskers," replied Dave.

"Humph! an old excuse."

"It is the truth, sir," and Dave's face flushed.

"I broke the oarlock," said Roger. "We got back as soon as we could – as soon as we got a new lock at Ike Rasmer's boathouse."

"We cannot allow pupils to come in half an hour late," went on Job Haskers, loftily. "Directly after supper, report to me in classroom 7," and he passed on.

"We are in for it now," grumbled Phil. "It's a shame! It wasn't our fault that the oarlock broke."

"Wonder what he will make us do?" came from the senator's son.

"Something not very pleasant," answered Dave. He had encountered the second assistant many times before and knew the harsh instructor well.

They were soon in their seats at the table. Some of the other students looked at them inquiringly, but nothing was said. Not far from Dave sat Gus Plum and Nat Poole, and both favored the poor boy with a scowl, to which Dave paid no attention.

The meal finished, Dave, Phil, and the senator's son brushed up a bit, and then hurried to classroom 7, located in an angle of the building. They were soon joined by Job Haskers.

"The three of you may remain here and each write the word 'Oarlock' two hundred times," said the second assistant. "As soon as all of you have finished, ring the bell, and I will come and inspect the work. It must be neatly done, or I shall make you do it over again." And then he left them to themselves, going out and closing the door tightly after him.

CHAPTER IV

A PLOT TO "SQUARE UP"

"Phew! but this is a real picnic!" came softly from Phil. "He's as kind as they make 'em, isn't he?"

"It's a jolly shame," grumbled the senator's son. "To make us stay in this stuffy classroom on such a fine evening as this."

"I am glad I finished with my lessons," was Dave's comment. "But I am sorry for you two. But, as there is no help for it, we might as well get to work. The sooner begun, the sooner done, you know." And he began to write away vigorously on one of the pads the teacher had pointed out to them.

"I wish old Haskers had to write it himself," growled Roger, as he, too, went at the task. "Oh, but isn't he the mean one! I don't see why the doctor keeps him."

"He's smart, that's why," answered Phil. "I wish we could get square for this. I'm sure Doctor Clay would have excused us, had he known the facts. I've a good mind to go to him about it."

"Don't you do it, Phil," cried Dave. "It's not worth it. Get to work – and we'll think about squaring up afterwards."

In a minute more all three of the boys were writing as rapidly as their fingers could travel over the paper. Roger was the best penman of the three and finished several minutes before the others. He began to walk up and down the room, whistling softly to himself.

"Yes, I go in for squaring up with old Haskers," he said, rather loudly. "He's about as mean –" And then he stopped short, as the door swung open and the second assistant appeared.

"Huh!" he snorted. "Were you alluding to me, Master Morr?" he demanded.

Roger stammered, and his face turned red.

"Her – here are the words," he stammered.

"Two hundred, eh? Well, you may write a hundred more, and after this be careful of what you say." And then Job Haskers turned to Dave and Phil. "That is all right, you two can go."

"Can I stay with Roger?" asked Dave.

"No, I shall remain here myself," was the cold answer, and then Dave and Phil had to leave.

"I'll wager Roger feels like hugging him," was Phil's comment. "He will want to get square now, sure."

The two boys went out on the campus for awhile and then up to their dormitory, where they found a small crowd assembled, some talking, and a few studying. The door to the adjoining dormitory was open, and there Luke Watson was playing on a banjo, while another student was singing a negro song in a subdued voice.

"I say, Dave, will you explain something to me?" said a voice from a corner. The question came from Chip Macklin, Gus Plum's former toady. The small boy was working over a sheet of algebra sums.

"Certainly," said Dave, readily, and sat down by the other's side. "Now, what is it? Oh, I see. I got twisted on that myself once. This is the proper equation, and you can reduce it this way," and he was soon deep in the problem, with Chip looking on admiringly. When the problem had been worked out and explained in detail, the small boy was very grateful.

"And, Dave," he went on, in a low tone, "I – I want to tell you something. Be on your guard against Plum and Nat Poole."

"Why?"

"Because they are plotting mischief. I heard them talking in the gym. I don't know what it is about, but they are surely up to something."

"I'll remember, Chip, and much obliged," answered Dave, and then he turned to the other boys, leaving the small youth to finish his examples.

"Hello, where have you been?" came from stout and lazy Buster Beggs. He was sprawled out on the end of a couch. "I noticed you didn't get to supper till late, and went right off, directly you had finished."

"Had a special session with Haskers," answered Dave. "He wants me to improve my handwriting."

There was a smile at this, for all the boys knew what it meant.

"Oh, that fellow is a big peach, he is!" came from Sam Day, who sat in one of the windows. "Yesterday, he made me stay in just because I asked Tolliver for a lead pencil."

"He was mad because Polly Vane caught him in an error in grammar," added another youth. "Didn't you, Polly?" he added, addressing a rather girlish-looking boy who sat near Chip Macklin.

"I did," was the soft answer. "It was rather a complicated sentence, but perfectly clear to me," explained the boy.

"I don't wonder, for Polly fairly lives on grammar and language," put in Phil. "I don't believe anybody could trip him up," and this compliment made Bertram Vane blush like a girl. He was in reality one of the best scholars in the academy.

"Which puts me in mind of a story," came from one of the cots. "An –"

"Hello, are you awake, Shadow?" cried Sam Day. "I thought you were snoozing."

"So I was, but I am slept out, and feel better now. As I was saying, an old farmer and a college professor went out rowing together. Says the college professor, 'Can you do sums in algebra?' 'No,' answers the farmer. 'Then you have missed a great opportunity,' says the professor. Just then the boat struck a rock and went over. 'Save me!' yells the professor. 'Can't you swim?' asked the farmer. 'No.' 'Then you have lost the chance of your life!' says the farmer, and strikes out and leaves the professor to take care of himself."

"Two hundredth time!" came in a solemn voice from the doorway to the next room.

"Wha – what do you mean? I never told any story two hundred times," cried Shadow Hamilton. "And that puts me in mind –"

"Shadow, if you tell another as bad as that, I'll heave you out of the window," came from Sam Day. "That has moss on it three inches th –"

"Oh, I know you, Lazy; you're jealous, that's all. You couldn't tell a story if you stood on your head."

"Can you, Shadow?" and then a general laugh went up, in the midst of which the door opened, and Job Haskers entered. On catching sight of the unpopular teacher, Sam Day lost no time in sliding from the window-sill to a chair.

"Boys, we cannot permit so much noise up here!" cried Job Haskers. "And that constant strumming on a banjo must be stopped. Master Day, were you sitting in the window?"

"I – er – I think I was," stammered Sam.

"You are aware that is against the rules. If you fell out, the Hall management would be held responsible. After school to-morrow you can write the words, 'Window-sill,' two hundred times. Hamilton, get up, and straighten out that cot properly. I am ashamed of you." And then the hated teacher passed on to the next dormitory.

"I told you to get out of the window," said Macklin, as soon as they were alone. "I was caught that way myself once, and so was Gus Plum."

"Lazy is going to learn how to write a little better, too," said Dave, with a grin.

At that moment Roger came in, looking thoroughly disgusted.

"Made me write half of it over again," he explained. "Oh, it's simply unbearable! Say, I am going to do something to get square, as sure as eggs is eggs."

"Eggs are eggs," corrected Polly Vane, sweetly.

"Oh, thanks, Polly. What about a tailor's goose?"

"Eh?"

"If one tailor's goose is a goose, what are half a dozen?"

"Tailor's geese, I suppose – but, no, you'd not say that. Let me see," and the girlish youth dove into his books. "That's a serious question, truly!" he murmured.

"Well, I am willing to get square, too," put in Sam Day.

"So am I," grunted Shadow Hamilton. "There was no need to call me down as he did, simply because the cot was mussed up a bit. The question is, what's to be done?"

The boys paused and looked at each other. Then a sudden twinkle came into Dave's clear eyes.

"If we could do it, it would be great," he murmured.

"Do what, Dave?" asked several at once.

"I don't care to say, unless I am certain we are all going to stand together."

"We are!" came in a chorus from all but Polly Vane, who was still deep in his books.

"What about you, Polly?" called out Roger.

"Me? Why – er – if a tailor's goose is a real goose, not a flatiron goose – "

"Oh, drop the goose business. We are talking about getting square with Haskers. Will you stand with the crowd?"

"You see, we don't want to make geese of ourselves," said Phil, with a wink at Polly Vane.

"I'll stand by you," said Polly. "But please don't ask me to do something ridiculous, as when we dumped that feather bed down from the third-story landing, and caught those visitors, instead of Pop Swingly."

"I was only thinking of Farmer Cadmore's ram," said Dave, innocently. "He is now tied up in a field below here. I don't think he likes to be out over night. He'd rather be under shelter – say in Mr. Haskers' room."

"Whoop!" cried Roger. "Just the thing! We will store him away in old Haskers' closet."

This plan met with instant approval, and the boys drew straws as to which of them should endeavor to execute the rather difficult undertaking. Three were to go, and the choice fell upon Dave, Phil, and Sam Day. The others promised to remain on guard and issue a warning at the first intimation of danger.

"I think the coast will be fairly clear," said Sam Day. "I heard Haskers tell Doctor Clay he was going out to-night and would not be back until eleven, or after. That ought to give us plenty of time in which to do the trick."

The three boys could not leave the dormitory until the monitor, Jim Murphy, had made the rounds and seen to it that all was right for the night and the lights put out. Then they stole out into the hallway and down a back stairs. Soon they were out of the building and making for Farmer Cadmore's place.

As they left the Hall they did not see that they were being watched, yet such was a fact. Nat Poole had been out on a special errand and had seen them depart. At once that student hurried to tell his friend, Gus Plum.

"Going out, eh?" said the big bully.

"Yes, and I heard them say something about making it warm when they got back," returned Nat Poole.

"Humph! Nat, we must put a spoke in their wheel."

"I'm willing. What shall we do?"

"I'll think something up – before they get back," replied the bully of Oak Hall. "They haven't any right to be out, and I guess we've got 'em just where we want 'em."

CHAPTER V

WHAT THE PLOT LED TO

It was a clear night, with no moon, but with countless stars bespangling the heavens. All was quiet around Oak Hall, and the three boys found it an easy matter to steal across the campus, gain the shade of a row of oaks, and get out on the side road leading to the Cadmore farm.

"We don't want to get nabbed at this," was Phil's comment. "If Farmer Cadmore caught us, he would make it mighty warm. He's as irritable as old Farmer Brown, and you'll remember what a time we had with him and his calf."

"Does he keep a dog?" asked Dave. "I haven't any use for that sort of an animal, if he is savage."

"No, he hasn't any dog," answered Phil. "I was asking about it last week." But Phil was mistaken; Jabez Cadmore did have a dog – one he had purchased a few days before. He was a good-sized mastiff, and far from gentle.

Walking rapidly, it did not take the three boys long to reach the first of Farmer Cadmore's fields. This was of corn, and passing through it and over a potato patch, they came to an orchard, wherein they knew the ram was tied to one of the trees.

"Now, be careful!" whispered Dave, as he leaped the rail-fence of the orchard. "Somebody may be stirring around the farmhouse" – pointing to the structure some distance away.

"Oh, they must be in bed by this time," said Phil. "Farmers usually retire early. Cadmore is a close-fisted chap, and he won't want to burn up his oil or his candles."

With hearts which beat rather rapidly, the boys stole along from one tree to another. Then they saw a form rise out of the orchard grass, and all gave a jump. But it was only the ram, and the animal was more frightened than themselves.

"Look out that he doesn't butt you," warned Dave. "Some of 'em are pretty *rambunctious*."

They approached the ram with caution, and untied him. Then Phil started to lead him out of the orchard, with Dave and Sam following. At first he would not go, but then began to run, so that Phil kept up with difficulty.

"Stop!" cried the boy. "Not so fast! Don't you hear?" But the ram paid no attention, and now turned to the very end of the orchard. Here the ground was rough, and in a twinkling all three of the boys went down in a hollow and rolled over and over, while the ram, finding himself free, plunged on, and was hidden from view in the darkness.

"He got away!" gasped Phil, scrambling up. "We must – Hark!"

He stopped short, and all of the boys listened. From a distance came the deep baying of the mastiff. The sounds drew closer rapidly.

"A dog – and he is after us!" cried Dave. "Fellows, we have got to get out of this!"

"If we can!" replied Sam Day. "Which is the way out? I am all turned around."

So were the others, and they stared into the darkness under the apple trees in perplexity. The dog was coming closer, and to get away by running appeared to be out of the question.

"Jump into a tree!" cried Dave, and showed the way. The others followed, clutching at some low-hanging branches and pulling themselves up as rapidly as possible. Dave and Sam were soon safe, but the mastiff, making a bound, caught Phil by the sole of his shoe.

"Hi!" roared Phil. "Let go!" And he kicked out with the other foot. This made the mastiff make another snap, but his aim was poor, and he dropped back to the ground, while Phil hauled himself up beside his companions.

"Phew! but that was a narrow escape and no mistake," was the comment of the big youth, after he could catch his breath. "I thought sure he had me by the foot!"

"We are in a pickle," groaned Sam. "I suppose that dog will camp right at the foot of this tree till Farmer Cadmore comes."

"Yes, he is camping now," announced Dave, peering down into the gloom. The moment the mastiff saw him, the canine set up a loud barking.

For a full minute after that none of the boys spoke, each being busy with his thoughts.

"We are treed, that is certain," said Phil, soberly. "And I must say I don't see any way to escape."

"Yes, and don't forget about the ram," added Sam. "Old Jabez Cadmore will want to know about him, too."

"I've got an idea," said Dave, presently. "Perhaps it won't work, but it won't do any harm to try it."

"Give it to us, by all means!"

"The trees are pretty thick in this orchard. Let us try to work our way from one tree to another until we can reach the fence. Then, perhaps, we can drop outside and get out of the way of that animal."

This was considered a good plan, and they proceeded to put it into execution at once. It was no easy matter to climb from tree to tree, and each got a small rent in his clothing, and Sam came near falling to the ground. The mastiff watched them curiously, barking but little, much to their satisfaction.

At last, they came to the final row of apple trees. A long limb hung over a barbed-wire fence, and the boys paused, wondering if it would be safe to drop to the ground.

"If that mastiff should come through the fence, it would go hard with us," was Phil's comment. "I'd rather stay up here and take what comes."

"I am going to risk it," answered Dave. "I see a stick down there, and I'll grab that as soon as I land," and down he dropped, and caught up the stick with alacrity. The dog pounced forward, struck the sharp barbs of the fence, and retreated, howling dismally with pain. Then he made another advance, with like results.

"Hurrah! he can't get through!" ejaculated Dave. "Come on, fellows, it's perfectly safe." And down his chums dropped, and all hurried away from the vicinity of the orchard.

"We had better be getting back," said Sam, after the orchard and potato patch had been left behind. "That farmer may be coming after us before we know it. He must have heard the dog." But in this he was mistaken, the distance from the house was too great, and the farmer and his family slept too soundly to be disturbed.

"It's too bad we must go back without the ram," observed Dave. "The other fellows will think we got scared and threw up the job."

"Well, it can't be helped," began Phil, when he caught sight of something moving along the road ahead of them. "Look! Is that the ram?"

"It is!" exclaimed Dave. "Wait! If you are not careful, he'll run away again. Stay here, and I'll catch him. I was brought up on a farm, and I know all about sheep."

The others came to a halt, and Dave advanced with caution until he was within a few feet of the ram. Then he held out his hand and made a peculiar sound. The ram grew curious and remained quiet, while the youth picked up the end of the rope which was around the animal's neck.

"I've got him," he said, in a low, even tone. "Now, keep to the rear and I'll manage him." And on they went. Once in a while the ram showed a disposition to butt and to stop short, but Dave coaxed him, and the trouble was not great.

When they came in sight of the school building, they realized that the most difficult part of the task lay before them. It was decided that Dave should keep the ram behind the gymnasium building until Sam and Phil ascertained that the coast was clear.

Left to himself, Dave tied the ram to a post and crawled into the gymnasium by one of the windows. He procured several broad straps, and also a small blanket. Just as he came out with the things, Sam and Phil came hurrying back, each with a look of deep concern on his face.

"The jig is up!" groaned Sam. "Plum and Poole are on to our racket, and they won't let us in!"

"Plum and Poole!" exclaimed Dave. "Are they at that back door?"

"Yes, and when we came up, they jeered us," said Phil. "Oh, but wasn't I mad! They said if we tried to force our way in, they'd ring up the doctor, or Mr. Dale."

"Does our crowd know about this?"

"I don't think they do."

"Plum and Poole intend to keep us out all night, eh?"

"It looks that way. They said we could ask Haskers to let us in when he came."

"I am not going to Haskers," said Dave, firmly. "Sam, you look after this ram for a few minutes. I'll make them let us in, and not give us away, either. Phil, you come along."

"But I don't see how you are going to do it," expostulated the big boy.

"Never mind; just come on, that's all. Plum isn't going to have a walk-over to-night."

Somewhat mystified, Phil accompanied Dave across the campus and to the rear door of the Hall. Here the barrier was open only a few inches, with Plum peering out, and Poole behind him. The face of the bully wore a look of triumph.

"How do you like staying out?" he whispered, hoarsely. "Fine night for a ramble, eh? You can tell old Haskers what a fine walk you have had! He'll be sure to reward you handsomely!"

"See here, Plum, I am not going to waste words with you to-night," said Dave, in a low, but intense, tone. "You let us in, and at once, or you'll regret it."

"Will I?"

"You will. And what is more: don't you dare to say a word to anybody about what is happening now."

"Oh, dear, but you can talk big! Maybe you want me to get down on my knees as you pass in," added the bully, mockingly.

"If you don't let us in, do you know what I shall do?" continued Dave, in a whisper. "I shall go to Doctor Clay and tell him that you are in the habit of going out after midnight to row on the river."

If Dave had expected this statement to have an effect upon the bully, his anticipations were more than realized. Gus Plum uttered a cry of dismay and fell back on Nat Poole's shoulder. His face lost its color, and he shook from head to foot.

"Yo-you – " he began. "Wha-what do you know about my – my rowing on the river?"

"I know a good deal."

"Yo-you've been – following – me?" For once the bully could scarcely speak.

"I shan't say any more," said Dave, giving his chum a pinch in the arm to keep quiet. "Only, are you going to let us in or not?"

"N-no – I mean, yes," stammered Gus Plum. He could scarcely collect himself, he seemed so upset. "You can come in. Poole, we'll have to let them in this time."

"And you will keep still about this?" demanded Dave.

"Yes, yes! I won't say a word, Porter, not a word! And – and I'll see you to-morrow after school. I – that is – I want to talk to you. Until then, mum's the word on both sides." And then, to the astonishment of both Dave and Phil, Gus Plum hurried away, dragging Nat Poole with him.

CHAPTER VI

THE FUN OF A NIGHT

"My gracious, Plum acts as if he was scared to death," observed Phil, after the bully and his companion had departed, leaving the others a clear field.

"He certainly was worked up," returned Dave. "I wonder what he'll have to say to-morrow?"

There was no answering that question, and the two boys hurried to where they had left Sam without attempting to reach a conclusion. They found their chum watching out anxiously.

"Well?" came from his lips as soon as he saw them.

"It's all right," answered Dave, and told as much as he deemed necessary. "Come, we must hurry, or Job Haskers will get back before we can fix things."

"This ram is going to be something to handle," observed Phil. "No 'meek as a lamb' about him."

"I'll show you how to do the trick," answered the boy from the country, and with a dexterous turn of the horns, threw the ram over on one side. "Now sit on him, until I tie his legs with the straps."

In a few minutes Dave had the animal secured, and the blanket was placed over the ram's head, that he might not make too much noise. Then they hoisted their burden up between them and started toward the Hall.

It was no easy matter to get the ram upstairs and into Job Haskers' room. On the upper landing they were met by Roger and Buster Beggs, who declared the coast clear. Once in the room of the assistant teacher, they cleared out the bottom of the closet and then, releasing the animal from his bonds, thrust him inside and shut and locked the door, leaving the key in the lock.

"Now, skip!" cried Dave, in a low voice. "He may cut up high-jinks in another minute."

"Here is an apple he can have – that will keep him quiet for awhile," said Roger, and put it in the closet, locking the door as before. The ram was hungry, and began to munch the fruit with satisfaction.

A few minutes more found the boys safe in their dormitory, where they waited impatiently for the second assistant teacher to get back to Oak Hall. At last they heard him unlock the front door and come up the broad stairs. Then they heard his room door open and shut.

"Now for the main act in the drama," whispered Roger. "Come on, but don't dare to make any noise."

All of the boys, including little Macklin and Polly Vane, were soon outside of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 – the two rooms the "crowd" occupied. They went forth on tiptoe, scarcely daring to breathe.

Arriving at Job Haskers' door, they listened and heard the teacher preparing to go to bed. One shoe after another dropped to the floor, and then came a creaking of the bed, which told that he had lain down.

"That ram isn't going to do anything," began Sam, in disgust, when there came a bang on the closet door that caused everybody to jump.

"Wha-what's that?" cried Job Haskers, sitting up in bed. He fancied somebody had knocked on the door to the hall.

Another bang resounded on the closet door. The ram had finished the apple, and wanted his freedom. The teacher leaped to the middle of the bedroom floor.

"Who is in there?" he demanded, walking toward the closet. "Who is there, I say?"

Getting no answer, he paused in perplexity. Then a grin overspread his crafty face, and he slipped on some of his clothing.

"So I've caught you, eh?" he observed. "Going to play some trick on me, were you? I am half of a mind to make you stay there all night, no matter who you are. I suppose you thought I wouldn't get back quite so early. In the morning, I'll – "

Another bang on the door cut his speculations short. He struck a match and lit the light, and then unlocking the closet door, threw it wide open.

What happened next came with such suddenness that Job Haskers was taken completely by surprise. As soon as the door was opened, the ram leaped out. He caught one glimpse of the teacher, and, lowering his head, he made a plunge and caught Job Haskers fairly and squarely in the stomach, doubling up the man like a jack-knife. Haskers went down in a heap, and, turning, the ram gave him a second prod in the side.

"Hi! stop! murder! help!" came in terror. "Stop it, you beast! Hi! call him off, somebody! Oh, my!" And then Job Haskers tried to arise and place a table between himself and the ram. But the animal was now thoroughly aroused, and went at the table with vigor, upsetting it on the teacher and hurling both over into a corner.

By this time the noise had aroused nearly the entire school, and pupils and teachers came hurrying from all directions.

"What is the trouble here?" demanded Andrew Dale, as he came up to where Dave was standing.

"Sounds like a bombardment in Mr. Haskers' room, sir," was the answer.

"Mr. Haskers is trying some new gymnastic exercises," came from a student in the rear of the crowd.

"Maybe he has got a fit," suggested another. "He didn't look well at supper time."

The racket in the room continued, and now Doctor Clay, arrayed in a dressing-gown and slippers, came upon the scene, followed by Pop Swingly, the janitor.

"Has Mr. Haskers caught a burglar?" asked the janitor.

"That's it!" shouted Phil, with a wink at his friends. "Look out, Swingly, that you don't get shot!"

"Shot?" gasped the janitor, who was far from being a brave man. "I don't want to get shot, not me!" and he edged behind some of the boys.

Doctor Clay hurried to the door of the room, only to find it locked from the inside.

"Mr. Haskers, what is the trouble?" he demanded.

Another bang and a thump was the only reply, accompanied by several yells. Then, of a sudden, came a crash of glass and an exclamation of wonder.

"Something has gone through the window, as sure as you are born!" whispered Dave to Roger.

"Oh, Dave, you don't suppose it was Haskers? If he fell to the ground, he'd be killed!"

"Open the door, or I shall break in!" thundered Doctor Clay, and then the door was thrown open and Job Haskers stood there, a look of misery on his face and trembling from head to foot.

"What is the trouble?" asked the doctor.

"The ram – he butted me – knocked me down – nearly killed me!" spluttered the assistant teacher.

"The ram – what ram?"

"He's gone now – hit the window and jumped out."

"Mr. Haskers, have you lost your senses?"

"No, sir. There was a ram in this room – in the closet. I heard him, and opened the door – I – oh! I can feel the blow yet. He was a – a terror!"

"Do you mean a real, live ram?" questioned Andrew Dale, with a slight smile on his face – that smile which made all the boys his friends.

"I should say he was alive! Oh, it's no laughing matter!" growled Job Haskers. "He nearly killed me!"

"An' did he go through the winder?" asked Pop Swingly, as he stepped to the broken sash.

"He did – went out like a rocket. Look at the wreck of the table! I am thankful I wasn't killed!"

"How did the ram get here?" asked Doctor Clay.

"How should I know? He was in the closet when I came in. Some of those villainous boys – "

"Gently, Mr. Haskers. The boys are not villains."

"Well, they put the ram there, I am sure of it."

The doctor turned to the janitor.

"Swingly, go below and see if you can see anything of the ram. He may be lying on the ground with a broken leg, or something like that. If so, we'll have to kill him, to put him out of his misery."

The janitor armed himself with a stout cane and went downstairs, and after him trooped Andrew Dale and fully a score of boys. But not a sign of the ram was to be seen, only some sharp footprints where he had landed.

"Must have struck fair an' square, an' run off," observed the janitor. "Rams is powerful tough critters. I knowed one as fell over a stone cliff, an' never minded it at all."

"Let us take a look around," said the first assistant. "Boys, get to bed, you'll take cold in this night air." And then the students trooped back into the Hall.

Upstairs they found that Job Haskers and Doctor Clay had gotten into a wrangle. The assistant wanted an examination of the boys at once, regardless of the hour of the night, but Doctor Clay demurred.

"We'll investigate in the morning," said he. "And, as the window is broken out, Mr. Haskers, you may take the room next to mine, which is just now vacant."

"Somebody ought to be punished – "

"We'll investigate, do not fear."

"It's getting worse and worse. By and by there won't be any managing these rascals at all," grumbled the assistant teacher. "Some of them ought to have their necks wrung!"

"There, that is enough," returned the doctor, sternly. "I think we can manage them, even at such a time as this. Now, boys," he continued, "go to bed, and do not let me hear any more disturbances." And he waved the students to their various dormitories.

"Say, but isn't old Haskers mad!" exclaimed Roger, when he and his chums were in their dormitory. "He'd give a good bit to find out who played the joke on him."

"I hope that ram got away all right," came from Dave. "I didn't want to see the animal injured."

"I think Pop Swingly is right, animals like that are tough," was Buster Beggs' comment. "More than likely he is on his way back to Farmer Cadmore's farm."

"We'll find out later on," put in Sam Day.

"There is another thing to consider," continued Dave. "It wouldn't be right to let Doctor Clay stand for the expense of that broken window. I think I'll send him the price of the glass out of my pocket money."

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Phil. "Let us pass around the hat. We are all in this as deep as you." And so it was decided that all of the students of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 should contribute to the fund for mending the broken sash. Then, as Andrew Dale came around on a tour of inspection, all hopped into bed and were soon sound asleep.

CHAPTER VII

GUS PLUM'S MYSTERIOUS OFFER

When Doctor Clay came to his desk on the following morning, he found an envelope lying there, on which was inscribed the following:

"To pay for the broken window. If it costs more, please let the school know, and we'll settle the bill." Three dollars was inclosed.

This caused the worthy doctor to smile quietly to himself. It took him back to his college days, when he had aided in several such scrapes.

"Boys will be boys," he murmured. "They are not villains, only real flesh-and-blood youngsters."

"You are going to punish those boys?" demanded Job Haskers, coming up.

"If we can locate them."

"Humph! I'd catch them, if it took all day."

"You may do as you think best, Mr. Haskers; only remember you have young gentlemen to deal with. I presume they thought it only a harmless prank."

"I'll prank them, if I catch them," growled the assistant to himself, as he walked away.

Word had been passed around among the boys, and when the roll was called all were ready to "face the music."

"Who knows anything about the proceedings of last night?" began Job Haskers, gazing around fiercely.

There was a pause, and then a rather dull boy named Carson arose.

"Great Cæsar! Is he going to blab on us?" murmured Phil.

"What have you got to say, Carson?" asked the teacher.

"I – I – I kn-know wh-what happened," stammered Carson.

"Very well, tell me what you know?"

"A ra-ra-ra-ram got into your ro-ro-ro-room, and he kno-kno-kno-knocked you d-d-d-down!" went on the boy, who was the worst stammerer at Oak Hall.

"Ahem! I know that. Who put the ram in my room?"

"I d-d-d-d – "

"You did!" thundered the teacher. "How dare you do such a thing!"

"I d-d-d-d – "

"Carson, I am – er – amazed. What made you do it?"

"I d-d-d-didn't say I d-d-d-did it," spluttered poor Carson. "I said I d-d-d-didn't know."

"Oh!" Job Haskers' face fell, and he looked as sour as he could. "Sit down. Now, then, whoever knows who put that ram in my room last night, stand up."

Not a boy arose.

"Will anybody answer?" stormed the teacher.

There was utter silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock on the wall. Dave looked at Gus Plum and Nat Poole, but neither budged.

"I shall call the roll, and each boy must answer for himself," went on Job Haskers. "Ansberry!"

"I can tell you nothing, Mr. Haskers," was the reply, and the pupil dropped back into his seat.

"Humph! Aspinwell!"

"I can tell you nothing, Mr. Haskers."

"Babcock!"

"I can tell you nothing, Mr. Haskers."

"This is – er – outrageous! Beggs!"

"Sorry, but I can tell you nothing, Mr. Haskers," drawled the fat youth.

After that, one name after another was called, and every pupil said practically the same thing, even Plum and Poole stating that they could tell nothing. When the roll-call was finished, the teacher was fairly purple with suppressed rage.

"I shall inquire into this at some future time!" he snapped out. "You are dismissed to your classes." And he turned away to hide his chagrin.

"Do you think we are safe?" whispered Phil to Dave, as they hurried to their room.

"I think so," was the country boy's reply. And Dave was right – the truth concerning the night's escapade did not come out until long after, when it was too late to do anything in the matter.

Dave was anxious to make a record for himself in his studies, and, with the end of the term so close at hand, he did his best over his books and in the classroom. He was close to the top of his class, and he was already certain of winning a special prize given for mathematics. Roger was just behind him in the general average, and Phil was but five points below, with a special prize for language to his credit. The best scholar of all was Polly Vane, who, so far, had a percentage of ninety-seven, out of a possible hundred.

Dave had not forgotten what Gus Plum had said, and just before the session for the day was ended received a note from the bully, asking him to come down to a point on the lake known as the Three Rocks, and located at the extreme limit of the academy grounds. Plum asked him particularly to come alone.

"Aren't you afraid Plum will play some trick on you?" asked Phil, who saw the note delivered, and read it.

"I'll be on my guard," answered Dave. "I am not afraid of him, if it should come to an encounter between us."

Having put away his books, Dave sauntered down to the spot mentioned, which was behind a thick fringe of bushes. Plum was not yet there, but soon came up at a quick walk.

"I couldn't get away from Poole," explained the bully. "Are you alone?" and he gazed around anxiously.

"Yes, I am alone," answered Dave, coolly.

There was a silence, and each boy looked at the other. Dave's eyes were clear, but the bully's had something of the haunted in them.

"You said something about me last night," began Plum, lamely, "something about my being on the river."

"I did."

"Did you see me on the river?"

"I am not going to answer that question just yet, Plum."

"Huh! Maybe you are only joking?"

"Very well, you can think as you please. If you want to talk to me, very well; if not, I'll go back to the school," and Dave started to walk away.

"Hold on!" The bully caught the country boy by the arm. "If you saw me on the river, what else did you see?"

"You were following Shadow Hamilton in a boat."

"I wasn't – I didn't have anything to do with Hamilton. I – I didn't know he was out till afterwards," went on the bully, fiercely. "Don't you say such a thing – don't you dare!" His face was very white. "You are not going to get me into trouble!"

"Is that all you have to say, Plum?"

"N-no. I want to talk this over, Porter. I – that is – let us come to terms – that's the best way. It won't do you any good to try to get me into trouble. I – I haven't done anything wrong. I was out on the river by – by accident, that's all – got it into my head to have a lark that night, just as you went out for a lark last night."

"Well, what do you want to see me about, then?" questioned Dave. He could readily see that the bully had something on his mind which troubled him greatly.

"I think we might as well come to terms – you keep still and I'll keep still."

"I haven't said anything, Plum."

"Yes, but you might, later on, you know. I – that is, let us make a sure thing of this," stammered the bully.

"What are you driving at, Plum? Talk out straight."

"I will." The bully looked around, to make certain that nobody was within hearing distance. "You're a poor boy, Porter, aren't you?"

"I admit it."

"Just so. And, being poor, some pocket money comes in mighty handy at times, doesn't it?"

"I have some spending money."

"But not as much as you'd like; ain't that so?"

"Oh, I could spend more – if I had it," answered Dave, trying to find out what the other was driving at.

"Well, supposing I promised to give you some money to spend, Porter, how would that strike you?"

Dave was astonished, the suggestion was so entirely unexpected. But he tried not to show his feelings.

"Would you give me money, Gus?" he asked, calmly.

"Yes, I would – if you'd only promise to keep quiet."

"How much?"

"Well – I – er – I'd do the right thing. Did Phil Lawrence see me on the river?"

"No."

"Any of the other boys?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then you were alone." Gus Plum drew a sigh of relief. "Now, let us come to terms, by all means. I'll do the square thing, and you'll have all the pocket money you want."

"But how much are you willing to give me?" queried Dave, his curiosity aroused to its highest pitch.

"I'll give you" – the bully paused, to add impressiveness to his words – "I'll give you fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars!" ejaculated Dave. He was bewildered by the answer. He had expected Plum to name a dollar or two at the most.

"Ain't that enough?"

"Do you think it is enough?" asked the country boy. He scarcely knew what to say. He was trying to study the bully's face.

"Well – er – if you'll give me your solemn word not to whisper a word – not a word, remember – I'll make it a – a hundred dollars."

"You'll give me a hundred dollars? When?"

"Before the end of the week. I haven't the money now, but, if you want it, I can give you ten dollars on account – just to bind the bargain," and the bully drew two five-dollar bills from his vest pocket. "But, remember, mum's the word – no matter what comes."

He thrust the bills at Dave, who merely looked at them. Then the country boy drew himself up.

"I don't want a cent of your money, Gus Plum," he said, in a low, but firm, voice. "You can't bribe me, no matter what you offer."

The bully dropped back and his face fell. He put his money back into his pocket. Then he glared savagely at Dave.

"Then you won't come to terms!" he fairly hissed between his teeth.

"No."

"You had better. If you dare to tell on me – breathe a word of what you saw that night – I'll – I'll make it so hot for you that you'll wish you had never been born! I am not going to let a country jay like you ruin me! Not much! You think twice before you make a move! I can hurt you in a way you least expect, and if I have to leave this school, you'll have to go, too!" And shaking his fist at Dave, Gus Plum strode off, leaving Dave more mystified than ever before.

CHAPTER VIII

SHADOW HAMILTON'S CONFESSION

"I simply can't understand it, Phil. Gus Plum was frightened very much, or he would never have offered me a hundred dollars to keep quiet."

Dave and his chum were strolling along the edge of the campus, an hour after the conversation recorded in the last chapter. The boy from the poorhouse had told Phil all that had occurred.

"It is certainly the most mysterious thing I ever heard of, outside of this mystery about Billy Dill," answered Phil. "Plum has been up to something wrong, but just what, remains to be found out."

"And what about Shadow Hamilton?"

"I can't say anything about Shadow. I never thought he would do anything that wasn't right."

"Nor I. What would you advise?"

"Keep quiet and await developments. Something is bound to come to the surface, sooner or later."

"Hello, you fellows, where are you bound?" came in a cry, and looking up they saw a well-known form approaching.

"Ben!" cried Dave, rushing up to the newcomer and shaking hands warmly. "When did you come in? And how are all the folks at Crumville? Did you happen to see Professor Potts and the Wadsworths?"

"One question at a time, please," answered Ben Basswood, as he shook hands with Phil. "Yes, I saw them all, and everybody wants to be remembered to you. Jessie sends her very sweetest regards –"

"Oh, come now, no fooling," interrupted Dave, blushing furiously. "Tell us the plain truth."

"Well, she sent her best regard, anyway. And all the others did the same. The professor is getting along finely. You'd hardly know him now, he looks so hale and hearty. It did him a world of good to go to live with the Wadsworths."

"You must have had a pretty nice vacation," observed Phil.

"Yes, although it was rather short. But, say, have you fellows heard about Plum's father?" went on Ben Basswood, earnestly.

"We've heard that he lost some money."

"Yes, and he has tied himself up in some sort of underhanded get-rich-quick concern, and I understand some folks are going to sue him for all he is worth. That will be rather rough on Gus – if his father loses all his money."

"True enough," said Dave. "But tell us all the news," he continued, and then Ben related the particulars of affairs at Crumville, and of a legal fight between his father and Mr. Aaron Poole, in which Mr. Basswood had won.

"That will make Nat more sour on you than ever," observed Phil.

"Maybe; but I can't help it. If he leaves me alone I'll leave him alone."

The following day passed quietly at Oak Hall. Gus Plum and Nat Poole kept by themselves. Shadow Hamilton appeared to brighten a little, but Dave observed that the youth was by no means himself. He did not care to play baseball or "do a turn" at the gym., and kept for the most part by himself.

Saturday passed, and on Sunday a large number of the students marched off to three of the town churches. Dave, Roger, and Phil attended the same church and Ben went with them, and all listened to a strong sermon on Christian brotherhood, which was destined to do each of them good.

"It makes a fellow feel as if he's got to help somebody else," said Roger.

"Well, it is our duty to help others," answered Dave. "The fellow who isn't willing to do that is selfish."

"You've certainly helped Macklin, Dave," said Ben. "I never saw such a change in a fellow. I'll wager he is more than happy to be out of Gus Plum's influence."

"I'd help Plum, too, if he'd let me," said Dave, and then gave a long sigh.

Two days later there was a sensation at the school. Doctor Clay came into the main classroom in the middle of the forenoon, looking much worried.

"Young gentlemen, I wish to talk to you for a few minutes," he said. "As some of you may know, I am the proud possessor of a stamp collection which I value at not less than three thousand dollars. The stamps are arranged in three books, and I have spent eight years in collecting them. These books of stamps are missing, and I wish to know if anybody here knows anything about them. If they were taken away in a spirit of fun, let me say that such a joke is a poor one, and I trust the books will be speedily returned, and without damage to a single stamp."

All of the boys listened with interest, for many of them had inspected the collection, and they knew that stamp-gathering was one of the kind doctor's hobbies.

"Doctor, I am sorry to hear of this," said one boy, named Bert Dalgart, a youth who had a small collection of his own. "I looked at the collection about ten days ago, as you know. I haven't seen it since."

"Nor have I seen it," said Roger, who also collected stamps.

"Is there any boy here who knows anything at all about my collection?" demanded the doctor, sharply. "If so, let him stand up."

There was a pause, but nobody arose. The master of Oak Hall drew a long breath.

"If this is a joke, I want the collection returned by to-morrow morning," he went on. "If this is not done, and I learn who is guilty, I shall expel that student from this school."

He then passed on to the next classroom, and so on through the whole academy. But nothing was learned concerning the missing stamp collection, and the end of the inquiry left the worthy doctor much perplexed and worried.

"That is too bad," was Dave's comment, after school was dismissed. "That was a nice collection. I'd hate to have it mussed up, if it was mine."

"The fellow who played that joke went too far," said the senator's son. "He ought to put the collection back at once."

The matter was talked over by all the students for several days. In the meantime Doctor Clay went on a vigorous hunt for the stamp collection, but without success.

"Do you think it possible that somebody stole that collection?" questioned Dave of Phil one afternoon, as he and his chum strolled in the direction of Farmer Cadmore's place, to see if they could learn anything about the ram.

"Oh, it's possible; but who would be so mean?"

"Maybe some outsider got the stamps."

"I don't think so. An outside thief would have taken some silverware, or something like that. No, I think those stamps were taken by somebody in the school."

"Then maybe the chap is afraid to return them – for fear of being found out."

So the talk ran on until the edge of the Cadmore farm was gained. Looking into a field, they saw the ram grazing peacefully on the fresh, green grass.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.