

Castlemon Harry

Don Gordon's Shooting-Box



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CHAPTER I

THE MILITARY ACADEMY

“Well, now, I am disgusted.”

“So am I. I call it a most unusual proceeding.”

“That is a very mild term to be applied to it. *I* call it an outrage. The Professor has deliberately gone to work to disgrace the school and every student in it.”

“That’s my opinion. I shall give my father a full history of the case in the next letter I write to him; and I incline to the belief that he will order me to pack my trunk and start for home.”

“I know that is what my father will do. Why, fellows, just think of it for a moment! What if this street gamin, who has been brought here as the Professor’s pet, should accidentally win a warrant at the next examination?”

“Or a commission! That would be worse yet. Wouldn’t a gentleman’s son look nice obeying his orders – the orders of a bootblack?”

“I’ll never do that. I’ll stay in the guard-house until I am gray-headed first.”

“Well, I won’t. I’ll go home first.”

This conversation took place one cold, frosty morning in the latter part of January, 18 – , among the members of a little party of boys who were walking up the path that led to the door of the Bridgeport Military Academy. There were a dozen of them in all, and their ages varied from thirteen to sixteen years. They looked like young soldiers, dressed as they were in their neat, well-fitting uniforms of cadet gray, set off by light blue trimmings; but it seems that they were anything but good soldiers just then, for their words indicated a determination on their part to rebel against lawful authority.

The Bridgeport Military School was a time-honored, wealthy, and aristocratic institution. It was modeled after the school at “the Point,” and although its course of study differed materially from that pursued at the national academy, its rules of discipline were almost the same. It was intended to fit boys for college, for business, for civil or mining engineering, or for West Point, if they wanted to go there and could command influence enough to secure the appointment; and in order that they might begin early in life to realize the majesty and dignity of law, and to see the necessity of submitting to it as becomes good citizens of the republic, they were put through a course of military drill as strict as that to which they would have been subjected if they had been private soldiers in the regular army.

The majority of the students – there were nearly three hundred of them in all – were deeply in love with the school, and with every body and every thing connected with it. Although they were obliged to study hard for seven months in the year to avoid being dropped from their classes, and to watch themselves closely in order to keep within the rules, they were allowed two seasons of rest and recreation during the year; a faithful student could always obtain a pass for an evening, provided his standing as a soldier was what it should be, and warrants and commissions were to be obtained by anybody who was willing to work for them. More than that, the institution was endeared to them by a thousand old-time associations. The fathers of some of the present students had sat in those same seats, pronounced their orations from that very rostrum, handled those same muskets and swords, and been drilled at the identical guns that still composed the battery, and their sons had heard them speak in the highest terms of the benefits derived from the instructions they

had there received during the days of their boyhood. Under these circumstances it was no wonder that the students took pride in their school, and that the most of them had come there with the determination that no act of theirs should in any way detract from its high and long-established reputation.

But if these were the sentiments of some of the boys, there was a small but busy minority who cherished feelings that were exactly the reverse – boys who had been sent there because they could not be controlled at home, who were restive under the restraints that were imposed upon them, and whose sole object was to complete the course and get away from the school with as little trouble to themselves as possible. These were the fellows who were always in trouble. They did not mind their hard lessons so much as they did the fatiguing drills with muskets and broadswords. They envied the officers in their class on account of the authority they possessed, the extra privileges that fell to their lot, and the respect they demanded from the rest of the students; but they were not willing to work for a commission themselves, and they did not like those who were. They ran the guard at every opportunity to eat pancakes with Cony Ryan, who was quite as important a personage at Bridgeport as Benny Havens is, or used to be, at West Point, and did penance for it the next Saturday by performing extra duty as sentries with bricks in their knapsacks. When they saluted a member of the class above them, as the law required them to do, they did it in a very sullen and ungracious manner; but if a member of the class below them neglected his duty in this respect, they were prompt to take him to task for it.

The two meanest boys in school were Tom Fisher and Clarence Duncan, who, at the time our story opens, had been members of the academy just two years. They were smart enough at their books and stood well in their classes when they felt in the humor to apply themselves; but their record as soldiers was something of which they ought to have been ashamed. Tom, to put it in plain English, was a sneak, and Clarence was a bully, who boasted of his ability to whip any boy in school. These boys had a good many adherents among the students, and if there were any mischief done about the village it was pretty certain to be traced home to them.

The two seasons of rest and recreation of which we have spoken were the camping-out frolic, that came off in August, and the vacation, which began on the 15th of September and continued until the 15th of January. Then the boys went home to spend the holidays and show their uniforms. When the time came to go into camp no one was excused except upon the surgeon's certificate of disability. In fact there were very few among them who ever asked to be excused. Even the most studious had grown tired of their books by this time, and were anxious to get out among the hills where they could breathe invigorating air, go trout-fishing and botanizing, and in various other ways brace up their nerves in readiness for the searching examination that was to be held immediately on their return to the academy.

This camp was intended as a school of review. Theory was reduced to practice, and those of the students who kept their eyes and ears open, and tried to profit by the instructions there received, were almost sure to pass the examination with flying colors. The civil engineers surveyed the bar in the river, just as their fathers had done before them; staked out the best route for a canal around the falls, and laid out a railroad and got everything in readiness for tunneling the hills to let it through. The military engineers, under cover of a hot fire of blank cartridges from the battery, threw pontoon bridges over the creek, and when they were finished, the infantry, which had been concealed in a ravine close by, charged across them and swarmed up the opposite heights to dislodge an enemy that was supposed to be intrenched there. They fortified the hills to prevent the approach of an invading army, sent out scouts to scour the surrounding country, held drumhead courts-martial, and tried everybody who was reported for any misdemeanor; in fact, they did everything that soldiers do when they are in the field.

Perhaps two or three days would be spent in this way, and then there would come two or three days of rest, during which the young soldiers would roam about the woods and fields, going

wherever their fancy led them. When the examination came off, the graduates were presented with their diplomas and the degrees that the institution was empowered to confer, new officers were appointed from among the students, the classes were reorganized, new applicants were received, and everything was made ready for work at the beginning of the new school year.

At the time of which we write the school had been in session about two weeks. Two hundred and fifty of the old students had returned, and the places of the large number who were graduated at the close of the last term were filled by the second class, which became the first; the third became the second, the fourth became the third, and the new fourth was made up of the "Plebes" who had signed the muster-roll. Why the new-comers were called "Plebes," which is short for "plebeians," it is hard to tell. Perhaps it was because their fathers, in the days of their boyhood, had given that name to all new scholars, or it may have been for the reason that everybody was down on them. They certainly looked out of place there. They still wore their citizens' clothes, the uniforms for which they had been measured when they first arrived not having yet been received. They were not allowed to go on dress-parade because they could not handle a musket; and as they had not yet been "broken in," they were a little too independent in their conduct to suit the old students, who exacted the greatest show of respect from those who were below them.

Among these "Plebes" was one whose advent created the profoundest astonishment among some of the students. The boys we have already introduced to the reader were talking about him as they came up the path. They were Tom Fisher and his crowd. Having drawn the capes of their overcoats over their heads, they were strolling leisurely along, paying no heed to the cutting wind that swept across the snow-covered parade-ground; but the thinly clad young fellow who came up the path behind them was shivering violently under its influence. His hands and face were blue with cold, and his feet were so poorly protected that he was obliged to stop now and then and stamp them on the ground to get them warm. The noise he made attracted the attention of Tom Fisher and his companions, who turned to see what had occasioned it.

"Here he comes now," exclaimed Dick Henderson, a fair-haired, sunny-faced little fellow, whose mother would have been ashamed of him if she had known what sort of company he was keeping at the academy. "Say, you fellow, where are your manners?"

Only one short year ago Dick was a "Plebe" himself; but now he was a third class boy, and he was resolved that everybody should know it and treat him accordingly.

"Let him go, Dick," said Tom Fisher, in a tone of disgust. "You would be highly honored by a salute from a bootblack, wouldn't you, now?"

"Who are these?" said Clarence Duncan, in a low tone.

Tom and his crowd looked down the path and saw two other new-comers approaching. In appearance they were very unlike the shivering, half-frozen boy who had just gone along the path. They were warmly clad, wore sealskin caps and gloves, and there was something in their air and bearing that proclaimed them to be boys who respected themselves, and who intended that others should respect them. One of them was tall and broad-shouldered, and carried himself as though he had never been in the habit of submitting to any nonsense, and the other was small, slender, and apparently delicate.

"Why, they are the Planter and his brother," said one of the students, all of whom had had opportunity to learn more or less of the history of the boys who composed the fourth class. "They're from Mississippi. Their father is worth no end of money, and they say he gives his boys a very liberal allowance."

"Then they'll be good fellows to foot the bills at Cony Ryan's, will they not?" said Fisher.

"They say that the little one is a saint," chimed in Dick Henderson. "He never does anything wrong; but his brother must be a brick, for he was expelled from the last school he attended on account of some violation of the rules."

“Then he’s the fellow for us,” said Tom Fisher. “We must make it a point to see him after taps.”

The near approach of the new-comers cut short the conversation. Tom and his crowd strolled leisurely on, filling up the path so completely that it was impossible for any one to pass them without stepping out into the deep snow that had been thrown up on each side. This the new scholars did not seem inclined to do. The smaller one came up behind Dick Henderson, and placing the back of his hand against his arm, said pleasantly:

“Will you be good enough to give us a little room?”

Tom and his friends faced about at once, and the former stepped up to the speaker and laid his hand rather heavily on his shoulder.

“Look here, Plebe,” said he, in an insolent tone. “‘Subordination is of discipline the root; when you address an old cadet, forget not to salute.’ Mind that in future.”

“Take your hand off that boy, or I will salute you with a blow in the face that will bury you out of sight in that snowdrift,” said he who had been called the “Planter.”

“Who are you?” demanded Fisher.

“Take a good look at me so that you will remember me,” was the reply.

The boy drew off his gloves and pulled down his muffler, revealing the familiar features of our old friend, Don Gordon. Just then the clear notes of a bugle rang out on the frosty air. It was the “study call,” and all the students within hearing made haste to respond to it.

CHAPTER II

DON AND BERT AT SCHOOL

Don Gordon and his brother Hubert were two of the heroes of the *Boy Trapper* series. Those who have met them before will not need to be told what sort of boys they were; and strangers we will leave to do as the boys of the Bridgeport Academy did – become acquainted with them by degrees. They lived near the little town of Rochdale, in the State of Mississippi, where their father owned an extensive cotton plantation. That was the reason why the students, who had a new name for every new-comer, called Don the Planter. The last time we spoke of him and Hubert was in connection with the building of a *Shooting-Box* on the site of the one that had been burned by Bob Owens and Lester Brigham. We then informed the reader that the new structure was much better than the old one, and that is all we shall say about it until such time as the owners get ready to take possession of it.

After Bob Owens ran away from home to become a hunter, and Godfrey Evans and his son Dan went to work to earn an honest living, and David Evans became *mail carrier*, and Lester Brigham withdrew himself from the society of the boys in the neighborhood, the inhabitants of Rochdale and the surrounding country settled back into their old ways, and waited for something to happen that would create an excitement. They marveled greatly at the sudden change that had taken place in Godfrey and Dan, talked of the indomitable courage Bob Owens had displayed on the night the steamer Sam Kendall was burned, and cast jealous eyes upon David Evans, who, they thought, was making money a little too rapidly, and throwing on a few more airs than were becoming in a boy who had a woodchopper, and a lazy and worthless one at that, for a father.

Rochdale was like some other country towns that you may have heard of. The people, most of whom had been impoverished by the war, were envious of one another, though outwardly they were friendly, and all one had to do to gain enemies was to be successful. If he made money one year by planting potatoes, when the next season came around everybody planted potatoes. If he set up a blacksmith shop or opened a store, and seemed to be prospering, some one was sure to start opposition to him. When David Evans began riding the mail route for Don Gordon's father, who had the contract, and exchanged his rags for warm and durable clothing, and purchased a fine horse for himself, there were a good many who thought that he was getting on in the world altogether too fast. His most bitter enemy was Mr. Owens, who had tried so hard to secure the contract for his son Bob, the runaway. He generally rode a very dilapidated specimen of horse-flesh, and whenever David passed him on the road, mounted on his high-stepping colt, Mr. Owens always felt as though he wanted to knock him out of his saddle.

"Just look at that beggar on horseback!" he would say to himself. "Things have come to a pretty pass when white trash like that can hold their heads so high in the air. If it hadn't been for him and that meddlesome Gordon, Bob might have been riding that route now instead of roaming about the world, nobody knows where. If the opportunity ever presents itself I'll get even with both of them for that piece of business."

As for Don and Bert, they hardly knew what to do with themselves. Their private tutor left them – being a Northern man he could not stand the climate – and then they were as uneasy as fish out of their native element. They galloped their ponies about the country in search of adventure, paddled around the lake in their canoe, roamed listlessly through the woods with their guns in their hands; in short, to quote from Don, "they became as shiftless and of as little use in the world as ever Godfrey Evans had been."

"I don't at all like this thing," the general one day said to his wife, "and there must be a stop put to it. The boys will grow up as ignorant as the negroes. I shall pack them both off to school."

Mrs. Gordon thought of the way in which Don had conducted himself at the last school he attended (he had been expelled from it on account of the “scrapes” that his inordinate love of mischief brought him into), and made no reply.

“I have not forgotten that unfortunate occurrence,” said the general, who well knew what was passing in his wife’s mind. “But I think it was a lesson to Don, and one that will never fade from his memory. Being blessed with wonderful health and strength, he is fairly overflowing with animal spirits, and some of his surplus energy must be worked off in some way. I’ll put him where he will be held with his nose close to the grindstone. I’ll send him to Bridgeport.”

“Do you think he can endure the discipline?” asked the anxious mother, who knew how easily Don could be governed by kindness, and how obstinate he was under harsh treatment.

“He’ll have to; it is just what he needs. After he has spent six hours in racking his brain over the hardest kind of problems in mathematics, and two hours and a half more in handling muskets and broadswords under the eye of a strict drillmaster, he will feel more like going to bed than he will like running the guard to eat Cony Ryan’s pancakes and drink his sour buttermilk. I know, for I have been right there.”

When General Gordon once made up his mind to a course of action he lost no time in carrying it into effect. Before the week was passed he and his two boys were on their way to Bridgeport, where they arrived in time to learn something of the life the students led while they were in camp. The veteran superintendent welcomed the general as an old friend and pupil, received him and his boys into his marquee, and took pains to see that the latter made some agreeable acquaintances among the members of the first class, who showed them every thing there was to be seen. Bert did not have much to say, but Don was all enthusiasm.

“That’s the school for me,” said he to his father when they were on their way to Rochdale, after Don and Bert had passed their examination and been admitted as members of the academy. “How nicely those fellows were drilled, and what good-natured gentlemen all the instructors are! We shall have easy times during the first year. It will seem like play for me to go back to the beginning of algebra again.”

The general smiled, but said nothing until they reached home and the boys began to get ready to go back to the academy at the beginning of the school year. Then he tried to make them understand that “easy times” were entirely unknown in Bridgeport; that the instructors, although they were “good-natured” enough to the guests they met while in camp, were the sternest and most inflexible of disciplinarians in the barracks; and that there was as wide a gulf between them and the students as there was between the officers and privates in the army. Somehow Don could not bring himself to believe it, but before many months more had passed over his head he found out that his father knew what he was talking about. He made his mother the most solemn promises in regard to his behavior, assuring her that he had been in “scrapes” enough, and that henceforth he would give her and his teachers no trouble; and when he made those promises he was fully resolved to live up to them. He was then entirely unacquainted with the temptations that fell to the lot of a Bridgeport student. Cony Ryan’s pancakes and surreptitious sleigh-rides had no charms for him, neither had the guard-house and extra duty any terrors, because he did not know that there were any such things. But they were soon brought to his notice, and perhaps we shall see how he kept his promises after that.

The night of the 15th of January found Don and Bert installed in their room in the academy. It was large enough to accommodate two single beds, a steam-heater, a washstand, a table, and two chairs. At the foot of each bed was a small cupboard, in which they were to keep their uniforms, after they got them, and also their officers’ swords, if they were fortunate enough to win them at the next examination. Bert was poring over his French lesson, while Don, who was more than a year ahead of his class in all his studies, was reading the “Rules and Regulations” that hung upon the wall. There were fifty rooms on that floor, all occupied by boys who were supposed to be studying

their lessons for the morrow. The only sound that broke the stillness was a steady tramping in the hall.

"I wish that fellow, whoever he is, would go into his room and keep still," said Bert, after he had waited a long time for the tramping to cease.

"He'll not go away until he is relieved," replied Don. "He is a sentry. I have just been reading about him. He has charge of all the rooms on this floor, and it is his duty to suppress all loud talking or laughing, and to inspect the rooms occasionally to see that the occupants have not slipped out."

"Where would they go if they did slip out?" asked Bert.

"I am sure I don't know," replied Don, as he walked up to the heater and held his hands over it. "Neither do I see why one should want to leave a comfortable room like this to parade around in the deep snow, even if there *were* a place to go to pass the evening. It's fearful cold up here in this country, isn't it?"

When Don and Bert left their Southern home the air was balmy, the birds were singing, a few early flowers were beginning to bud under the genial influence of the sun, and they earned their overcoats done up in shawl-straps; but long before they reached their journey's end they had put on all their heaviest clothing, and when the train brought them into Bridgeport they found the streets blocked with snow, and the river covered with a sheet of ice that was fourteen inches in thickness. The dreary winter scene that met their gaze every time they looked out of the academy windows made them shiver involuntarily, and it was no wonder that they wanted to hug the fire.

"Suppose that sentry should find a room empty when he looked into it?" said Bert, without replying to his brother's question. "What then?"

"It would be his duty to report the owners," said Don.

"That looks almost too much like tale-bearing," answered Bert. "I don't like the idea; do you?"

"No, I don't; but what is a fellow to do about it? If it ever comes our turn to stand sentry during study hours, we can take our choice between doing our full duty, without fear or favor, and being reported and punished ourselves for negligence. I know what my choice will be. If the boys don't want me to report them, they must live up to the regulations."

When Don said this he meant every word of it; but after he had been at the academy a few weeks, Bert noticed that he never gave expression to such ideas as these. He learned how to keep his back turned toward a room when he had reason to believe that the owners desired to "take French" for the evening; and when he was certain that they were out of harm's way, he could open the door of that very room, and without much stretching of his imagination convert the "dummies" that occupied the beds into living, breathing students. It soon became known to a certain class of boys that the Planter was a "brick," who would rather get into trouble himself than report any of his schoolmates; and they were not slow to take advantage of his good-nature. That was the term the students applied to his neglect of duty; but the superintendent called it disobedience of orders, and Don was punished accordingly.

"What was that noise?" exclaimed Bert, suddenly.

"It sounded like a drum," answered Don.

And that was just what it was. A couple of drummers were walking around the building, every now and then giving their instruments a single tap.

"It certainly means something," said Bert, with no little anxiety in his tone; "but I am all in the dark."

So was Don. He was about to propose that they should step out into the hall and ask the sentry to enlighten them, when the door suddenly opened and that dreaded functionary thrust his head into the room.

"I say, Plebe," he exclaimed, nodding to Don, "give us your name, will you?"

Don wonderingly complied, and the sentry drew a note-book from his pocket and wrote something in it.

"Very unpleasant piece of business," said he, "but it can't be helped. Orders are orders, as you will find before you have been here a great while. Next time keep your ears open."

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Don. "Have we done anything wrong?"

"I should say so. Why didn't you douse your glim? Did you not hear the signal?"

"We heard a drum, if that's what you mean," said Bert.

"That was 'taps,' and it meant 'lights out.' Put that lamp out at once."

"We'll do it just as soon as we get ready for bed," replied Bert, jumping up and pulling off his coat.

"Put it out, I tell you," exclaimed the sentry. "Put it out *now*, and undress in the dark, as the rest of the fellows do. You had better take my advice and slumber lightly, for after the morning gun is fired you will have just six minutes in which to get into your clothes and fall in for roll-call. Pleasant dreams."

"Humph!" said Bert, as the sentry closed the door and went out into the hall to inspect the other rooms. "How can a fellow's dreams be pleasant when he knows that he is going to be reported in the morning? This is a bad beginning, Don. Although we have not been here twenty-four hours, we have got ourselves into trouble already."

This reflection worried Bert, who always tried hard to obey the rules of the school he attended, and considered himself disgraced if he were taken to task for violating any of them; but it had no more effect upon Don than water has on a duck's back. He tumbled into bed and slept soundly, while Bert, who was very much afraid that he might not hear the morning gun, lay awake during the greater part of the night. Toward morning he sank into a troubled slumber, from which the solemn booming of the field-piece aroused him.

He and Don were out on the floor and putting on their clothes before the deep-toned reverberations that came from the hills on the other side of the river had fairly died away. There was no time lost in stretching and yawning – not a second wasted in waking up. The drums were beating in the drill-room, and the fifes were shrilly piping forth the first strains of the three tunes that constituted the morning call. Before the second tune was finished, Don and Bert, following the lead of the crowd of students they found in the hall, ran into the drill-room and took their places in line.

There were four companies in all, each one numbering, when the school was full, seventy-five members. They were all officered by boys, the highest in rank being the lieutenant-colonel, while the superintendent of the academy, or one of the instructors, acted as commandant of the battalion. The companies were drawn up on the four sides of the spacious drill-room, in which all the battalion and company exercises and ceremonies were held during bad weather, the members standing at "parade rest." In front of each company stood the upright, soldierly figure of the first sergeant, note-book in hand. Behind him stood his boy captain, while the officer of the day, his arms folded across his breast, critically surveyed the scene from his post near the door. The instant the last notes of the reveille died away business commenced.

"Attention, company!" shouted all the first sergeants in a breath; whereupon the students brought their heels in line, dropped their hands by their side, turned their eyes to the front, and assumed the position of a soldier.

The roll was called in less than two minutes, and after the first sergeants had reported to their captains, and the captains had reported to the adjutant, and the adjutant had reported to the officer of the day, whose duty it was to report the absentees to the superintendent, the guards for the day were detailed, the ranks were broken, and the students hurried away to wash their hands and faces, comb their hair, and put their rooms in order for morning inspection. After that came two hours of hard study. Then the sick-call was sounded, followed shortly afterward by the enlivening strains of "Peas upon the Trencher," which was the summons to breakfast. The different companies were

marched to and from the dining-hall by their quartermaster-sergeants, and when the ranks were broken the students were allowed an hour to “brush up” on their lessons for the day, or to stroll about the grounds and watch guard-mount. At nine o’clock the bugle called them to their respective recitation-rooms, and from that time until one they were kept at work at their books. After dinner an hour was allowed for rest and recreation. From two until half-past three there were more recitations, followed by a long and fatiguing drill, and then liberty until sunset. Then came the dress-parade of the battalion; and when that was ended the day’s work was over with everybody except the guards and those who were behind with their lessons for the next day. After supper and another hour of recreation, the bugle called “to quarters,” and that was a sound that nobody liked to hear. It meant that all the fun was over for that day, that every boy must go to his room at once and keep quiet after he got there, under penalty of being reported by the sentry who had charge of that floor.

After this description of the routine of study and drill that was pursued at the academy, the reader will understand how Don Gordon passed the most of his school-days during the next four years. How he passed his vacations it is the purpose of this series of books to relate. It will be seen also that he was allowed very little time in which to study up plans for mischief. In fact he did not think of such a thing *yet*, for he had come there firmly resolved to do his best, and to win a record for himself that his father should be proud of; but still he did feel very revengeful while he and his brother were standing in front of the superintendent’s desk, listening to the sharp reprimand that was administered to them for neglecting to extinguish their light at taps. This was the same “good-natured gentleman” who had greeted them and their father so cordially when they visited his camp during the previous summer, but he did not talk as he did then. He used cutting words, and laid down the law in tones that had made more than one culprit tremble. Don did not mind it in the least, for he was used to being scolded by his teachers; but when he saw how Bert took it to heart, he became so angry that he could hardly hold his peace.

“That’s just the kind of a man that I like to get the advantage of,” said he to himself; “and if I had a few good fellows to help me, I would set him and his rules at defiance. I just know I could slip out of my room and get off the grounds at night; and if I had any place to go to spend the evening, I would try it and see what he would do about it.”

Don made this up all out of his own head. He had never heard of such a thing as running the guard, and he thought of it now simply as a daring exploit, and one that he would undertake without a moment’s hesitation if there were anything to be gained by it. He was in just the right humor to be manipulated by such fellows as Fisher and Duncan; and into their hands he fell before he had worn the academy uniform forty-eight hours. They took him up because they hated him and wanted to get him into trouble, and it was only by an unexpected stroke of good fortune that he escaped from their clutches. What he did to arouse their animosity shall be told further on.

CHAPTER III

HAZING A "PLEBE."

"We'll settle with you at some future time my fine gentleman," said Tom Fisher, as he and his companions ran toward the academy in obedience to the call of the bugle. They had spent the hour after breakfast in strolling about the grounds, discussing the history of one of the new students, as we have related in the first chapter.

"All right," replied Don Gordon, winking at his brother, who laid his finger on his lips and shook his head warningly. "Whenever you want to see me just send me word, and I will be on hand."

"You may get some of that independence whipped out of you before you have been here many more days," chimed in Clarence Duncan.

"Who'll do it?" asked Don, cheerfully.

"I will," replied Duncan, in savage tones.

"O, you can't. It's bred in the bone. But I'll tell you one thing – you and your partner there," added Don, nodding his head toward Tom Fisher. "You want to keep your hands off my brother, or I'll make spread-eagles of the pair of you."

"Well, that beats anything I ever heard of!" exclaimed Dick Henderson, opening his eyes in surprise. "You have good cheek to talk of making 'spread-eagles' of such fellows as Fisher and Duncan, haven't you, now?"

"Do you think so, little one?" asked Don. As he said this he patted Dick on the head in a most patronizing way – an action on his part that caused Dick to jump aside and bristle up like a bantam that had been poked with a stick. "Well, you hang around and you will see it done, unless they take my advice and mind their own business," added Don.

Fisher and Duncan did not have an opportunity to reply to this threat, for just then they reached the door and found one of the teachers standing there. They were somewhat behind time, and they were obliged to hasten to their dormitories and take off their caps and overcoats so that they could march to their recitation-rooms with their classes. They looked daggers at Don as they went up the stairs, but he smiled back at them in the most unconcerned manner possible.

"I knew he was a tough one the moment I put my eyes on him," said Fisher that night after drill hours, when he and about fifty other students were exercising their muscles in the gymnasium. "There isn't another fellow in school who can do that."

The subject of these remarks was Don Gordon, who had just come out dressed in neat dark-blue trunks and flesh-colored tights. His arms were bare to the shoulder, revealing muscles at which the boys around him gazed in admiration. His first act was to walk up to the nearest swing, take hold of one of the rings and draw himself up to his chin twice in succession with one hand.

"I tell you, Duncan, you had better let him alone," continued Fisher, still watching Don, who was now going hand over hand up a rope toward the lofty ceiling.

"And swallow everything he said to me this morning?" exclaimed the bully.

"No, I didn't mean that," Fisher hastened to reply. "Those insulting remarks must of course be taken back and apologized for; but you can't make him do it alone."

"Just give me the chance, and I'll show you whether I can or not," answered Duncan, who was always angry whenever there was any imputation cast upon his prowess. "He has come here intending to set at naught all the old-time customs of the institution – haven't you noticed how persistently he refuses to salute everybody but an officer? – and if we are willing to stand by and let him do it, I say we are a pack of cowards. He must be made to come down from his high horse."

"And he shall be," said Fisher, encouragingly. "We will attend to that bootblack's case to-night, and the first good chance we get we'll take Mr. Gordon in hand. By the way, Duncan –"

The two boys drew off on one side and entered into a whispered consultation, now and then beckoning to one or another of their friends, until there were a dozen or more students gathered about them. They conversed earnestly together for a few minutes, and then put on their clothes and left the gymnasium. Don and Bert Gordon followed them soon after, and on giving their names to the orderly in the hall, were admitted to the presence of the superintendent. After they had both saluted him, Don said:

“Colonel, we have brought with us a letter of introduction from our father, addressed to Mr. Packard, who is a relative of one of our nearest neighbors, and if you have no objections we should like permission to present it to-night.”

“Certainly,” said the superintendent, as he picked up a pen and pulled a sheet of paper toward him. “You can go immediately after supper, and I will write you a pass. You ought to have presented it when you first came. Why did you put it off so long?”

“Why – I – you know, sir, that we received a reprimand on the morning following our arrival here for not putting out our light at ten o’clock,” faltered Don, “and I was afraid you would think we ought to stay inside the grounds until we had learned to obey the rules.”

“Ah, yes,” said the superintendent with a smile. “I believe I remember something about that. Well, it did you good, did it not? You haven’t been reported since. I hope your record at the end of your course will be as good as that of your father, who, I must say, was a very exemplary student. It is true that he did run the guard now and then, the temptations at Cony Ryan’s proving rather too strong for him; and when he was here with you last August, I think he told me that while he was a member of my school he spent forty-three Saturdays in walking extras; but, for all that, he was a good boy – a *very* good boy. Here’s your pass.”

Don expressed his thanks for the favor, and he and Bert saluted and retired, lost in wonder.

“Running the guard!” repeated the former, in a loud tone. “What does that mean?”

“What’s walking an extra?” said Bert, in the same low voice; “and who is Cony Ryan?”

“Here comes Egan; we’ll ask him,” said Don.

The individual referred to was a first-class boy, and the first sergeant of Don’s company. When he was on duty he was a soldier all over; but during the hours of recreation he was as jovial and friendly a fellow as there was to be found about the academy.

“Say, sergeant,” said Don, not forgetting to salute, “what does a cadet do when he runs the guard?”

“What does he do?” repeated the sergeant. “Why, he spends a good portion of the next Saturday afternoon in walking an extra to pay for it.”

“I mean, how does he run the guard?” explained Don.

“Now, Gordon, isn’t that just the least bit – you know,” said the sergeant, laying his finger by the side of his nose and looking very wise. “You surely don’t expect me to tell you how it is done, do you? You had better ask Fisher or Duncan, or some of that crowd. They have had considerable experience in it.”

“We want to know what the meaning of the expression is,” said Bert.

“O, that’s it! Well, when a fellow slips out of his room, gets off the grounds without being caught, and comes back in the morning in time to fall in and answer to roll-call, we call that running the guard. By walking an extra we mean doing additional guard duty. The reason that Saturday is selected as a day of punishment is because the afternoon is given over almost entirely to recreation; but those who have been arrested while attempting to run the guard, or who have been caught in other acts of disobedience, are not allowed to take advantage of those hours of recreation, because they have already had their fun. Understand?”

Don said he did; and then he inquired who Cony Ryan was, and what he did to tempt the boys.

“Cony Ryan!” repeated the sergeant, his eyes growing brighter and a smile overspreading his face, as the memory of old times came back to him. “Why, he is a part of the academy, and I

have seen the day when I thought we could not possibly get along without him. He keeps a neat little house down by the big pond, where he serves up the best pancakes *I* ever ate. His mince and pumpkin pies top the heap; and as for his maple molasses – ah!”

The sergeant walked off, smacking his lips, and Don and Bert kept on up the stairs.

“I rather think Egan has been there,” observed the latter.

“I know he has,” replied Don, “and the taste of that maple syrup clings to his palate yet.”

On entering their room Don threw himself into a chair, stretched his legs out before him, buried his hands in his pockets, and gazed down at the floor in a brown study; while Bert leaned his elbows on the table, rested his chin on his hands, and looked at him. Presently Don threw back his head and laughed so loudly and heartily that his brother was obliged to laugh too.

“I never dreamed of such a thing,” said Bert, who knew what was passing in Don’s mind.

“No more did I. Just think how that dignified father of ours must have looked running the guard and standing punishment for it afterward! He took good care not to say a word to us about it, didn’t he? I say, Bert,” exclaimed Don, suddenly, and then he as suddenly paused.

“Don’t you do it,” said Bert, earnestly. “You will be certain to get yourself into trouble by it.”

“If I did, I should be perfectly willing to take the consequences. But father couldn’t haul me over the coals for it, could he?”

“If father were here now, he wouldn’t think of doing such things.”

“Neither would I if I were a man.”

“But you won’t go to Cony Ryan’s, will you?” pleaded Bert.

“Of course not. Don’t borrow any trouble on that score. I promised mother that I would behave myself, and I am going to do it. But I should like to taste those pies and pancakes, all the same,” added Don, to himself.

That evening, after supper, Don and Bert showed their pass to the sentry at the gate, and set out to pay their long deferred visit to Mr. Packard. Why was it that they did not think to read that pass when it was given to them? If they had, they might have saved themselves from something disagreeable that afterward happened. They passed a very pleasant evening at Mr. Packard’s house, and at half-past ten they took leave of their new friends and started for the academy.

As they were walking briskly along the road that ran around one end of the big pond, they heard an indistinct murmur of voices, and presently saw a crowd of boys, who were walking in a compact body, pass across the road in front of them, and direct their course toward the middle of the pond. They thought at first that it was a skating party; but as they did not stop to put on their skates, Don and Bert became interested in their movements and halted to observe them. Just then a voice, speaking in pleading accents, came to their ears.

“Don’t do it, boys – please don’t,” it said, in piteous tones. “I wouldn’t mind it so much if I could stand it, but I solemnly assure you that I can’t. I have had one attack of pneumonia this winter that was brought on by exposure, and ducking me in this icy water will surely give me another.”

“No it won’t,” replied another voice that Don knew belonged to Tom Fisher. “This is a time-honored custom, and we are not going to give it up; are we, boys?”

“Not much,” answered the others, in concert.

“Our fathers were hazed when they went to this school; they, in turn, hazed others, and we couldn’t think of disgracing them by refusing to follow in their footsteps,” continued Tom. “Everyone of the fellows you see around you – myself among the rest – has been hazed in one way or another; and are you, a New York boot-black, any better than we are?”

“Hurry him on and pitch him in,” said Clarence Duncan, in his deep base tones. “Wash some of the black out of him.”

“Yes, in with him,” piped little Dick Henderson.

"Well, boys, if you must do it to preserve your honor, let me take my clothes off first," said the pleading voice. "This is the only suit I have in the world, and if I get it wet I shall freeze to death, for I have no fire in my room to dry it by."

"Then go to bed," was the rough rejoinder.

"Why, what in the world are those fellows going to do?" said Bert, who had listened in great amazement to this conversation, every word of which came distinctly to the ears of himself and his brother. "I am afraid they are going to do something to somebody."

"Have you just found it out?" exclaimed Don, who now discovered that the boys were making their way toward a hole that had been previously cut in the ice. "A party of students, led by Fisher and Duncan, are going to haze a Plebe by ducking him in the pond. Now I shall have a word or two to say about that. They are the same fellows who blocked up our path this morning and wouldn't let us go by. You know they promised to settle with me some day for showing so much 'independence,' as they called it, and they might as well do it now as any other time."

"O Don, mind what you are about," cried Bert.

"I will. I'll black the eyes of some of them before they shall stick that boy through the ice. Why, Bert, what would father say to me if he should hear that I stood by and witnessed such a proceeding without lifting a hand to prevent it? He would tell me I wasn't worthy of the name I bear."

No one who knew the temper of the academy boys, and the tenacity with which they clung to the "time-honored customs" of the institution to which they belonged, would have thought Don Gordon a coward if he had taken to his heels and made the best of his way to his room. He knew very well that if he attempted to interfere with Tom and his crowd, he stood a good chance of being ducked himself; but the knowledge of this fact did not deter him from promptly carrying out the plans he had resolved upon. It would have been bad enough, he told himself, if the students had selected as a victim a boy who had an extra suit of clothes, a change of linen to put on, and a fire to warm himself by after his cold bath; but to pitch upon one who had none of these comforts, and who ran the risk of being thrown into a dangerous illness by the folly of his tormentors, was, in his estimation, a most cowardly act, and one that could not be too severely punished.

"Bert, you had better stay here where you will be safe," said Don.

"I'll not do it," was the prompt reply. "If you are going into danger, I am going in too."

Don, knowing that it would be of no use to argue the matter, ran out on the ice, and when he came up with the crowd his coats were off, and he was in his shirt-sleeves. Fisher and his companions stopped when they heard the sound of his approaching footsteps, and some of them acted as if they wanted to run away; but when they discovered that Don and Bert were alone, they waited for them to come nearer, thinking that perhaps they were a couple of the members of their own class who wanted to join in the sport. When they saw Don pull off his overcoat, however, their eyes were opened.

"Here comes an intruder, boys," exclaimed one of the students, "and judging by the way he acts, he is getting ready for a rumpus."

"Let him get ready," said Fisher. "There are a dozen of us. If he turns out to be a Plebe, we'll stick him in too. The more the merrier, you know. Who comes there?" he added, raising his voice.

"A peace-maker," replied Don, throwing his coats on the ice.

"Yes, you look like it," sneered Clarence Duncan. "If that is so, what did you pull your duds off for?"

"Because I did not know how you would receive my overtures, and I thought it the part of wisdom to be prepared for any emergency," answered Don.

So saying, he walked boldly into the crowd, which gave way right and left as he advanced, and took his stand by the side of the prisoner, who was firmly held by two of the largest and strongest students, while two others stood close behind him, in readiness to lend their assistance in case he

made any attempt at escape. Although Don had never exchanged a word with the boy, he knew him at once, for they belonged to the same company. It was the new student whose presence, if we are to believe Fisher and his friends, was a disgrace to the academy and everybody belonging to it. He wore the same thin clothes in which he had shivered as he walked up the path that morning, and the keen wind that swept across the icy surface of the big pond must have chilled him to the very marrow. He had no muffler about his face nor any gloves on his hands, which he held clasped one within the other, as if they were very cold. Don looked at him and then at the comfortably clad boys who were standing around, and his blood, which was none of the coolest at any time, boiled with indignation.

"You are a pack of contemptible cowards," said he, pulling off his gloves and slamming them down on the ice.

"Why, bless our royal heart, it's the Planter!" exclaimed Tom Fisher, who now, for the first time, recognized the intruder. "Here's luck, boys. Grab hold of him, some of you, and we'll wash him too."

"If that's the Planter, this must be his brother," said Dick Henderson.

"Why, so it is," said Fisher, after he had taken a sharp look into Bert's face. "Here's more luck. Take hold of him too, boys; and since they have had the assurance to push themselves in among us without being asked, we will give them the post of honor. We'll duck them first."

In obedience to these orders three or four pairs of hands were laid upon Bert's arms; but when the rest of the crowd moved forward to lay hold of Don, Duncan stepped up and stopped them.

"Stand back, all of you," said he. "I want to have a little talk with this fellow before he is put into that air-hole. Gordon, you insulted me this morning in the presence of my friends, and I want you to apologize for it at once. If you don't do it, I will give you a thrashing right here on this ice that you won't get over for a month."

"How did I insult you?" asked Don, and the bully was somewhat surprised to see that he did not appear to be at all alarmed.

"You said you would make a spread-eagle of me. Now, which will you do, apologize or fight?"

"Well, if it's all the same to you, I'll fight."

Duncan was fairly staggered by this reply. Remembering the exhibition of strength he had witnessed in the gymnasium that afternoon, he had no desire to come to blows with the stalwart youth who stood before him. He had hoped to frighten an apology from Don, and when he found that he could not do it, he wished he had not been in such haste to make overtures of battle to him. But it was too late to think of that now, for his reputation was at stake. Besides he did not believe that his friend Fisher would stand by and see him worsted.

"You need have no fear of these fellows who are standing around," said Duncan, who wanted to put off the critical moment as long as he could. "They will not double-team on you."

"If they do they will take the consequences," said Don, confidently. "I think myself that they had better keep their distance."

These bold words astonished everybody.

"Why I believe he thinks he can whip the whole crowd," said Henderson, who was one of the four who were holding fast to Bert's arms. Bert was a little fellow, like himself, and consequently Dick was not very much afraid of him.

"Come on," said Don, impatiently. "I am getting cold standing here in my shirt-sleeves. Give me a little exercise to warm me up. Remember I wasn't born as near the Arctic Circle as you fellows were, and for that reason I can't stand the cold as well. Hurry up, somebody —*anybody* who thinks he was insulted by the words I uttered this morning."

Driven almost to desperation by this challenge, which he knew was addressed to himself, and which seemed to imply that his prospective antagonist placed a very low estimate upon his powers,

Duncan pulled off both his coats, assumed a threatening attitude and advanced toward Don, who extended his hand in the most friendly manner. The bully, believing that Don wanted to parley with him, took the proffered hand in his own, and in a second more arose in the air as if an exceedingly strong spring had suddenly uncoiled itself under his feet. When he came down again he measured his full length on the ice, landing in such dangerous proximity to the hole that had been cut for the poor student's benefit, that his uniform cap fell into it.

Everybody was struck motionless and dumb with amazement. The bully was so bewildered that he did not get upon his feet again immediately, and the poor student forgot to shiver.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW YORK BOOT-BLACK

“Take your hands off those boys,” said Don, who was in just the right humor to make a scattering among Fisher’s crowd of friends. “Release them both and do it at once, or I will pitch the last one of you into that hole before you can say ‘General Jackson’ with your mouths open. Come over here, Bert.”

He stepped up and took the prisoner by the arm, and his four guards surrendered him without a word of protest. The magical manner in which Don had floored the biggest bully in school, before whom no boy in Bridgeport had ever been able to stand for a minute, either with boxing-gloves or bare fists, and the ease with which he had done it, astounded them. They had never seen anything like it before, and there was something very mysterious in it. Did not this backwoodsman have other equally bewildering tactics at his command which he could bring into play if he were crowded upon? Probably he had, and so the best thing they could do was to let him alone.

“Your name is Sam Arkwright, is it not?” said Don, taking one of the boy’s blue-cold hands in both his own warm ones. “I thought I had heard you answer to that name at roll-call. I am a plebe too, and so we’ll stand together. Put on these gloves and come with me. You will freeze if you stay here any longer. As for you,” he added, waving his hand toward the students to show that he included them all in the remarks he was about to make, “you are a pack of cowards, and I can whip the best man among you right here and *now*. Pick him out and let me take a look at him.”

“I am good for the best of them if they will come one at a time,” said Sam. “But I give in to a dozen when they all jump on me at once.”

“I will leave that challenge open,” said Don, as he led Sam away. “You know where my room is, and any little notes you may choose to shove under my door will receive prompt attention.”

Tom and his crowd did not speak; they had not yet recovered from their amazement. They stood gazing after the rescued boy and his champion until they disappeared in the darkness, and then they turned and looked at one another.

“I declare, Duncan,” exclaimed Tom Fisher, who was the first to speak. “You’ve met your master at last, have you not?”

The defeated bully growled out something in reply, but his friends could not understand what it was. Like every boy who prides himself upon his strength and skill, he did not like to acknowledge that he had been beaten.

“Did he hurt you?” asked one of the students. “I noticed that you didn’t get up right away.”

“How in the name of all that’s wonderful did he do it?” inquired another. “I didn’t see him clinch or strike you.”

“He did neither,” replied Duncan, “and that’s just what bangs me. I am willing to swear that he did not touch me anywhere except on the hand, and he took hold of that just as though he wanted to give it a friendly shake. It’s a trick of some kind – a boss one, too – and I will give him my next quarter’s spending money if he will teach it to me.”

“Humph!” exclaimed Tom Fisher. “You needn’t expect to him to do that. He doesn’t look to me to be such a fool. You and he may come together in earnest some day – if you don’t, he will be about the only boy you haven’t had a fight with since you have been a student at this academy – and then you will probably find out what his tricks are.”

“He didn’t hurt me at all,” continued Clarence; “but he could if he had been so disposed. If he had used a little more exertion he could have thrown me into that air-hole; and if I had happened to come up under the ice – ugh!” exclaimed Clarence, shivering all over as he looked down into the dark water.

“Is there no way in which we can get even with him?” asked Fisher.

“*Is there!*” replied Clarence, angrily. “Do you suppose that I am going to submit tamely to an insult like that? We’ll make a way to get even with him. Things have come to a pretty pass if a plebe is going to be allowed to come here and run this school to suit himself.”

The mere reference to such an unheard-of thing was enough to raise the ire of Tom Fisher and all his companions, who with one voice declared that the Planter, having presumed to lay violent hands on an upper-class boy, and to set at defiance one of the old-established customs of the academy, must be made to suffer the consequences. They held a long and earnest consultation there on the ice, and Fisher and Duncan, who were fruitful in expedients, soon hit upon a plan which promised, if skillfully managed, to bring Sam Arkwright’s champion into serious trouble. It was a most dangerous plan, because it was to be carried out under the guise of friendship.

“That’s the only way to do it, fellows, you may depend upon it,” said Duncan, after their scheme had been thoroughly discussed. “We must bring him into trouble with the faculty, and let them do the hazing, for we couldn’t do it if we wanted to. I was nothing but a child in his grasp, and, to tell the honest truth, I have no desire to face him again.”

“I hope we shall succeed,” said Fisher. “But if the Planter turns out to be one of those good little boys who never do anything wrong, then what?”

If Tom had only known it, he need not have bothered his head on this point. Unfortunately for Don, something happened that very night which made it comparatively easy for the conspirators to carry out the plans they had formed regarding him.

Meanwhile Don and Bert were walking briskly toward the academy in company with the rescued boy, who was somewhat protected from the keen wind by Bert’s muffler, which the latter had wrapped about his neck, and by Don’s gloves which he wore upon his hands. He was lost in admiration of his new friend’s prowess, and complimented him in the best language he could command.

“Are you an Irishman, sir?” Sam asked, at length.

“Look here,” answered Don, “my name is Gordon – there’s no ‘sir’ about it. No, I am not an Irishman. I am an American, I am proud to say; but I understand the Irish ‘hand and foot’ well enough to give it to such fellows as that Clarence Duncan. I can throw a man weighing two hundred pounds in that way if he will let me take hold of his hand.”

“It was well done,” said Sam. “I never saw it done better.”

“I learned it of one of my father’s hired men – a discharged Union soldier who came to our plantation penniless and hungry, and asked for work,” said Don. “I always make it a point to pick up any little thing of that kind that happens to fall in my way. It may come handy some day, you know.”

Perhaps you will now understand how Don had managed to throw the bully of the school so easily; but if you do not, we can only say that it cannot be described on paper so that you can gain even a faint idea of it. If you want to know just how it was done, the easiest way to learn is to ask some Irishman – the fresher he is from the old sod the better – to give you a practical illustration of the “hand and foot.” Simply give him your hand, and if his feelings toward you are friendly, he will send you flying through the air without hurting you in the least; but if he is not friendly, we would not advise you to go to him for information, for he can turn you heels up in an instant, and land you on your head with force enough to knock all your brains into your boots. Don had become so expert in this novel way of wrestling, and so prone to put it into practice at every opportunity, that none of the boys about Rochdale could be induced to shake hands with him.

“How did you ever happen to find your way to this school!” inquired Don, after Sam had exhausted his vocabulary in praising his new friend’s skill as a wrestler. “Were you really a New York boot-black?”

“Yes, I was,” answered Sam, hesitatingly.

"It is nothing to be ashamed of," said Bert, who thought from the way Sam spoke that he did not like to confess that he had once occupied so lowly a position in the world.

"Of course not," Don hastened to add. "Any honest work is honorable. Your presence here proves that you didn't want to remain a boot-black all your days."

"No, I didn't. I was ambitious to be something better," said Sam, who then went on to give Don and his brother a short history of his life. He said that his father, who followed the sea for a livelihood, had gone down with his vessel during a terrific storm off Cape Hatteras; that his mother had survived him but a few months; and that after her death a grasping landlord had seized all the household furniture as security for the rent that was due and unpaid, turning him (Sam) into the streets to shift for himself. He spent the days in roaming about the city, looking in vain for work, and his nights in a lumber-yard to which he had been invited by a friendly boot-black, who found free lodgings there every night, and who, seeing Sam's forlorn condition, gave him a plate of soup to eat and furnished him with a plank to sleep on. Finding that work was not to be had, Sam at last ran in debt for a boot-black's "kit," which he procured from one of the fraternity who had saved money enough to open a corner peanut stand, and after a score or more of battles with boys whose "claims" he unwittingly "jumped," he succeeded in establishing himself in front of a popular hotel in the city, where he was to be found early and late. It was there he met the Superintendent of the Bridgeport Military Academy, who patronized him twice every day, never failing to give him a quarter for each "shine," or to spend a few minutes in conversation, with him after the boy's work was completed.

From the day he was six years old up to the time his father was lost at sea, Sam attended the district school regularly; and as he was a very faithful student, and tried hard to learn, he knew more about books than boys of his age generally do. He felt that he was out of place among the ragged, ignorant little gamins with whom he was daily and hourly thrown in contact, and they, realizing that he was not one of them, and that he believed himself to be fitted for something better than the life of a boot-black, tormented him in every conceivable way. He was so often called upon to protect his brush and his box of blacking from the young rowdies who would have despoiled him of them, that he became an adept at fighting, and it is probable that he would have opened the eyes of Tom Fisher and his crowd, had they not pounced upon him while he was asleep, and overpowered him before he could raise a hand to defend himself.

"I am sure I don't know what it was that made the Professor take a liking to me," said Sam in conclusion, "but it was something; and when he asked me if I wouldn't like to quit that miserable business and go to school and learn to be a civil or a mining engineer, I tell you it almost took my breath away. I jumped at the chance. I gave my kit to a boy who was too poor to buy one, and came out here; and I am very sorry for it. The fellows don't want me here, and they didn't want me in New York, either. I hope I shall some day find a place where I shall not be in everybody's way."

"Don't get down-hearted," said Don, taking one of his hands out of his pocket long enough to give Sam an encouraging slap on the back. "Of course your tuition is free?"

"Yes, everything is furnished me. If it wasn't I couldn't stay here, for I have no money to speak of. The boys in New York badgered me so, and ran such heavy opposition to me that I couldn't earn enough to buy a warm suit of clothes."

"You will have an abundance of them in a day or two," said Don, "for our uniforms will be along by that time. You couldn't get an education on better terms than the Professor offers it to you, could you? And so long as he is willing that you should stay here, you can well afford to let the fellows grumble to their hearts' content. Show the Professor that you appreciate his kindness by doing your duty like a man, and look to me for help whenever you get into trouble. Now the next thing is something else," added Don, as he and his companions came to a halt in front of the high picket-fence which inclosed the academy grounds. "Where's your room, Sam?"

"I haven't any yet. I sleep in the attic. The rooms on the floor occupied by our class are all taken except one. That has been used as a store-room, and as soon as it is cleared out I am to have it for my own."

"Well, do you want the teachers to know anything about this night's work?"

"Of course not," returned Sam, who had all a decent boy's horror of tale-bearing.

"Because, if you do," continued Don, "you can walk up to one of the guards, let him report you for being outside the grounds without a pass, and when you are hauled over the coals for it, you can say that you were taken out against your will."

"But I don't want to say that," answered Sam, quickly. "It would bring Tom and the rest into trouble. I have nothing against them, and I should be glad to be friends with them if they would only let me."

"You'll do to tie to," said Don, approvingly. "Bert and I have a pass that will see us through all right; but what are you going to do? Do you think you can make your way to the attic without being seen by any of the sentries or floor guards?"

"Tom and his crowd brought me out without attracting the attention of any of them, and I don't see why I can't get back without being caught. At any rate I shall try my best. Good-night. I hope that neither of you will ever stand in need of such aid as you have rendered me to-night; but if you do, you may count on me every time."

So saying Sam moved away in one direction, closely examining all the pickets on the fence as he went, and Don and Bert walked off in the other. When the latter arrived within sight of the main gate they were somewhat surprised to see that it was closed. The sound of their footsteps on the frosty snow quickly attracted the attention of the alert sentry, who came out of his box and demanded to know who they were and what they were doing there at that time of night.

"We belong to this academy," replied Don, "and have a pass from the superintendent."

"Corporal of the guard No. 4," yelled the sentry; and the call was caught up and repeated by another sentinel who stood at the farther end of the academy, and finally reached the ears of the corporal, who was toasting his shins in front of a warm fire in the guard-room.

"What do you want the corporal for? Here's our pass," said Don; and taking the paper in question from his pocket he thrust it between the bars of the gate.

Still the sentry made no reply, nor did he seem to know that Don had spoken to him. He brought his musket to a "support," and paced back and forth on the other side of the gate with slow and dignified steps. Don muttered something under his breath, and Bert believing that he was grumbling at the sentry for being so uncivil, laid his hand on his brother's arm and said, in a low tone —

"Don't be angry with him. Perhaps he is not allowed to talk while he is on duty."

Don said nothing. He began to believe that he and Bert had unwittingly got themselves into trouble again, and when the corporal came up, he found that he had not been mistaken.

"What's the matter here?" demanded the officer.

"There are a couple of plebes out there who want to come in," was the sentry's reply.

"Who are you?" said the corporal, peering through the pickets at the two brothers.

Don gave him their names; whereupon the corporal took a key down from a nail in the sentry's box, and after unlocking the gate told the boys to come in. They obeyed, and the officer having returned the key to its place drew a note-book from his pocket and wrote something in it. "That's all right," said he, as he closed the book and put it back in his pocket.

"Have we done anything wrong?" inquired Bert, in anxious tones.

"You will find that out to-morrow," was the corporal's very unsatisfactory answer.

"Why can't you give a civil reply to a civil question?" demanded Don, impatiently. "We had liberty to go outside the grounds for the evening, and here's the pass that says so."

"I don't want to see it," said the corporal, as he buttoned his overcoat and drew the cape over his head. "I know just how it reads. Come on."

"Where are you going to take us?" asked Bert, while visions of the gloomy guard-house danced before his eyes.

"To the officer of the day, of course."

"And what will he do with us?"

"That's for him to tell. Come on. It's too cold to stand here any longer."

Don and Bert fell in behind the corporal, who led the way to the guard-room, and ushered them into a little office where the officer of the day – a stern old Prussian soldier who wore a medal he had won by his gallantry on the field of battle while serving under Prince Frederick Charles – sat reading a newspaper. When the non-commissioned officer entered with his prisoners he laid the paper down and took off his spectacles.

"Vel, gorporal," said he, in a pompous tone, "vat ish the drouble mit dem gadets?"

"They have overstayed their time, sir," said the corporal.

"Vot for you do dot?" demanded the officer of the day, turning fiercely upon the culprits. "Vot for you not come in, ha?"

"We were not aware that we had overstayed our time, sir," answered Don. "If we had known that we were expected to return at a certain hour, we should have been here. We had a pass for the evening, and there it is."

"Dot's no good after daps," said the officer of the day, turning away his head and waving his hand in the air to indicate that he did not care to look at the paper which Don presented for his inspection.

"I assure you, sir, that it was a mistake on our part," said Bert.

But the officer of the day declared, in his broken English and with many gesticulations, that such things as mistakes were not recognized in that academy – that Don and his brother had violated the regulations and might make up their minds to be punished accordingly. Then he ordered them to their quarters, while the corporal went back to his seat by the stove.

"He didn't say that we were in arrest, did he?" said Don, as he and Bert ascended the stairs, at the top of which they met the sentry who had charge of that floor, standing with his note-book in his hand.

"Your names, please," said he, pleasantly.

"The corporal of the guard has them, and so has the officer of the day," answered Don.

"And I must have them, too," returned the sentry, holding his pencil poised, in the air.

Don gave the required information in rather a sullen tone, and closed the door of his dormitory behind him with no gentle hand. As soon as Bert had struck a light he drew the pass from his pocket and read as follows:

"Guards and patrols will pass privates Donald and Hubert Gordon until half-past nine o'clock this evening."

Then he looked at his watch and saw that it lacked only a quarter of eleven. Allowing fifteen minutes for their interviews with the corporal and the officer of the day, they had overstayed their time just an hour. Bert was very penitent, but Don was inclined to be rebellious.

CHAPTER V

DON AND BERT HAVE VISITORS

"I wonder if a fellow can make a move in any direction without breaking some of the numerous rules of this school and being reported for it," said Don, throwing his overcoat and cap spitefully down upon the bed. "I declare, Bert –"

Just then the door opened and the sentry thrust his head into the room. "Put out that light, Plebe," said he. "Two reports in one night make a tolerably bad showing, the first thing you know."

"Catch hold of that gas-fixture and jerk it out of the wall," exclaimed Don, as Bert hastened to obey the sentry's order. "That makes twice it has got us into trouble."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," said the sentry, with a laugh. "You had better read the rules and regulations until you have them firmly fixed in your mind, and then, if you see fit to obey them to the very letter, you will have plain sailing."

Don undressed in the dark and tumbled into bed, telling himself the while that he didn't care a snap of his finger for the rules and regulations. He had not purposely violated any of them, and yet he had been severely reprimanded, and was yet to be punished as though he had been willfully disobedient.

"When the leopard can change his spots and the Ethiopian his skin, I shall believe that there is some hope for me," said Don to himself, as he arranged his pillow and prepared to go to sleep. "But there doesn't seem to be much now, for the harder I try to be good the more rows I get into. I would give something to know how Tom Fisher and his crowd came out, and whether or not Sam succeeded in getting back to his attic without being seen by the guards."

Bert arose the next morning, after an almost sleepless night, full of apprehension and trembling for fear of the punishment that was to be visited upon him, while Don's face wore a defiant expression. He had slept the sleep of the healthy, and awoke refreshed and fully prepared to meet anything that might be in store for him. Greatly to his surprise and Bert's, nothing was said to them regarding what had taken place the night before. They found opportunity to exchange a few words with Sam Arkwright, who gleefully informed them that everything was all right, and that no one was the wiser for the assault that had been made upon him by the third-class boys, and caught a momentary glimpse of Fisher and Duncan, both of whom smiled and saluted in the most courteous manner. Don did not know what this meant, but it was not long before he found out.

That afternoon all the members of the fourth class were ordered to the drill-room, where they found a quartermaster-sergeant, the captain of their company, and one of the teachers, who served out to them their new uniforms, which they were told to put on at once. When ranks were broken, Don and Bert hastened to their dormitory, and had just completed the work of exchanging their citizen's clothes for their natty suits of cadet gray, when there came a knock at the door. Bert's heart seemed to stop beating.

"That must be the orderly," said he, in an excited whisper. "If it is, we shall soon know what is going to become of us."

"Well, we might as well know one time as another," said Don, doggedly. "I hope it is the orderly, for I have been kept in suspense long enough."

Bert opened the door, when who should appear on the threshold but Tom Fisher and Clarence Duncan. The former extended his hand to Bert, who took it after a little hesitation, while Clarence entered the room and greeted Don in the same friendly way.

"Gordon," said Clarence, as Don's sinewy fingers closed about his own, "you're a brick. We came here to tell you and your brother that we and the rest of the fellows are sorry for what happened last night, and that we want to be friends with you."

“Nothing would suit me better,” answered Don.

“We have had time to consider the matter,” said Fisher, seating himself on Bert’s bed and depositing his cap on the table, “and we are all very glad that you didn’t let us duck that Plebe. It would have been a mean piece of business to haze him in that way, seeing that he didn’t have a suit of dry clothes to put on.”

“Or a fire to warm himself by,” chimed in Bert, with some indignation in his tones. “Why, I never heard of such a thing. It would have been the death of him.”

“It was cold, wasn’t it?” said Clarence. “Well, we didn’t haze him, and, as Tom says, we are all glad of it. But, I say, you make nobby-looking soldiers, you two. Did you get in last night all right?”

“We got in twice,” answered Don, ruefully. “We got inside the grounds, and we got into trouble.”

“How was that? Didn’t you have a pass?”

“Yes; but it was only good until half-past nine, and we stayed out until half-past ten.”

“Oh! ah. Well, that’s nothing when you get used to it, is it, Fisher?” said Clarence.

“Nothing at all,” replied Tom. “It has been a very common thing with me, and now I never think of asking for a pass. I go when I please and come back when I feel like it.”

“What do you suppose they will do with us?” asked Bert, who was anxious to have that point settled as soon as possible.

“Let me see,” said Clarence, thoughtfully. “Who was officer of the day yesterday?”

“I don’t know his name,” answered Don, “but he was the same one who instructs our class in mathematics, an old gentleman with gold spectacles, and a medal of some kind on his breast.”

“Oh, that was Dutchy,” said Fisher, in a tone of contempt. “He’s our fencing-master also. Well, he will make the case against you as black as he can, and if he were the one to say how you should be punished, I tell you you would have a lively time of it, for he is a regular martinet. The President is a very strict disciplinarian, but he hasn’t yet forgotten that he was once a boy himself, and he will probably be easy with you.”

“But what will he do?” insisted Bert. “That’s what Don and I want to know. And if he is going to punish us at all, why doesn’t he say so?”

“Because the proper time has not yet arrived. Wait until dress-parade comes off to-night, and then you will find out all about it, for it will be published in general orders.”

“Before the whole school?” cried Bert.

“Of course,” answered Clarence.

Bert grew very red in the face, and looked at Don, who, in turn, stared hard at Bert.

“It is nothing to worry over,” said Fisher. “Some of the best fellows in school have been gated and made to walk extras on Saturday afternoons with packed knapsacks, and that is all the punishment you will receive.”

“What do you mean by ‘gated’?” asked Don.

“What is a ‘packed knapsack?’” inquired Bert.

“Why, when a fellow is gated he is confined inside the grounds, and not allowed to go out under any circumstances,” replied Clarence.

“But he can go out all the same if he feels like it,” said Fisher, with a laugh. “I never knew a fellow to stay inside the grounds simply because he was gated, unless he was one of those milk and water boys who hadn’t spirit enough to say that his soul was his own.”

“How can he get out?” asked Don.

“He can run the guards. Clarence and I have done it many a time.”

“Were you never caught at it?” inquired Bert.

“Once or twice, but that was owing to our own carelessness. It is an easy thing to do when the right kind of fellows are on duty, and really exciting when the posts are held by such boys as Blake

and Walker, and others of that sort. They're a mean set. They are always on the watch for a chance to report somebody, because they believe that that is the way to gain the good-will of the teachers."

"And a packed knapsack," continued Clarence, "is one with something heavy in it, such as bricks or paving-stones. When you are called upon to walk an extra, you have to pace up and down your beat for four hours with that knapsack on your back and a musket on your shoulder."

"That can't be very pleasant," observed Don.

"Well, I am free to confess that it isn't," returned Clarence, "and it is all owing to the way the thing is managed. If they would let us perform the extra duty while the rest of the boys were drilling, or while the class in geometry was reciting, I should not mind it in the least. But you see they won't do that. We have to work hard all the week, and walk our extras on Saturday afternoons during the hours that are given to the good little boys for cricket, ball-playing, fishing, target-shooting and recreations of that sort."

"But overstaying our time was not the only offence of which we were guilty last night," said Don, after a moment's pause. "When we reached our room we struck a light, and I suppose we shall be reported for that."

"Of course you will," said Fisher. "You had no business to have a light in your room after taps."

"But we didn't think," said Bert. "And, besides, we wanted to read our pass, so that we might know just what we had done that was wrong."

"No odds," exclaimed Clarence. "No excuse will be accepted. You will probably be gated for a month."

"But you need not submit to the restriction of your liberty unless you feel like it," chimed in Fisher. "Do as all the best fellows in school do – run the guard, and have a good time in spite of the teachers."

"Oh, we'll never do that," said Bert, quickly. "Will we, Don? That would only make a bad matter worse."

Don looked down at the floor, but said nothing. He always grew restive under restraint, and having been allowed when at home to go and come as he pleased, he could not bear the thought of being confined within bounds. If Fisher and Duncan had known what he was thinking about just then, they would have said that the success of the plans they had formed the night before was a foregone conclusion.

"Well, Gordon," said Tom, at length, "everything is all square between us, I hope."

"Certainly it is, so far as I am concerned," answered Don. "And I know that Arkwright does not bear you any ill-will, for he said so. You fellows ought to make matters straight with him, for he is true blue. He took a good deal of pains to work his way back to the attic without being seen, for he didn't want the teachers to know what you had done."

"We'll see him and have a talk with him," said Tom, as he arose from the bed and picked up his cap. "Perhaps we had better go, Clarence. You know what will happen to us if we fail in our logic to-morrow. What do you think of the prospect?" he added, as soon as he and his crony had reached their own dormitory and closed the door behind them. "Will he bite?"

"I am sure of it," was Duncan's confident reply. "He is a fellow who doesn't like to be held with too tight a rein – I can see that plainly enough; but Bert is a different sort of boy."

"What do we care for Bert?" exclaimed Tom. "Don is the one we are after."

"I know that, and I know, too, that we could get him very easily if his brother were out of the way. These little spooneys sometimes exert a good deal of influence over their big brothers, and if he sets his face against us and our plans, our cake will be turned into dough in short order."

"We must see to it that Don doesn't listen to him," said Tom. "We have done all we can do to-day. We have given him an idea, and now we will let him chew on it for a while. We mustn't

appear to be too eager, you know, for if we give him the least reason to suspect that we are putting up a job on him, it is my opinion that he will prove an unpleasant fellow to have around.”

As Fisher said this he picked up his logic, in which both he and Duncan had failed miserably that day, and read in a listless, indifferent tone —

“What is true with limitations is frequently assumed to be true absolutely. Thus — ‘Deleterious drugs are always to be rejected; opium is a deleterious drug; therefore opium is always to be rejected.’ What’s wrong with that reasoning, Clarence?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care,” answered the latter, snatching the book from his friend’s hand and slamming it down upon the table. “Let it go until this evening, and then we will study it together. Let’s have a game of checkers now, and see if you can beat me as badly as you did the last time we played.”

“I don’t much like those fellows, Don,” said Bert, when Fisher and Duncan had taken their leave.

“I can’t see what there is wrong about them,” replied Don, who knew in a moment what his brother meant. “I am sure they acted very honorably in coming here to make things right with us.”

“I have nothing to say against that,” Bert hastened to answer. “But I don’t like to hear them talk so glibly about disobeying the rules.”

“I don’t know that that is any business of yours or mine either,” said Don, rather impatiently. “If they are willing to take the risk, and abide the consequences if they are detected, that is their own affair. *You* needn’t do it.”

“I!” exclaimed Bert, in great amazement. “You maybe sure that I have no intention of doing anything of the kind, and I hope you haven’t, either.”

“You need not waste any valuable time in worrying about me. I am able to look out for myself. But I’ll tell you what’s a fact, Bert: I don’t think as much of this military business as I did a few weeks ago. If I were only back home with my pony, dogs and guns, I tell you I would stay there. I feel more like going out in the woods and knocking over a wild turkey than I do like sitting here in this gloomy room preparing for to-morrow’s recitations.”

Don opened one of the books that lay upon the table, but the page on which he fastened his eyes might have been blank for all he saw there. His mind was not upon the work that demanded his attention. He was thinking over his recent interview with Fisher and Duncan.

“I wonder if they pass their evenings at Cony Ryan’s when they run the guards?” said Don to himself. “I wonder, too, if Cony’s hotel, or whatever he calls it, was in existence when my father attended this school, and if he went there to eat pancakes. If he did, I don’t see how he can find any fault with me if I go there. Tom and Clarence don’t seem to be such a bad lot, and it is nothing more than fair that I should meet their advances half way.”

When the hour for recreation came, Don did something he had never done before in his life. Watching his opportunity he slipped away from Bert and set out to hunt up Fisher and Duncan. He did not have much trouble in finding them, for they also were looking for him. After returning his salute they slipped their arms through his and led him toward the gymnasium.

“You are a stranger here,” said Clarence, “and as we know you must be lonely we will introduce you to the boys in our set, if you would like to know them.”

“You will find them all tip-top fellows,” added Tom. “You see, there is a little crowd of us who run together, and somehow we manage to have good times. There are some boys here, however, with whom we never have anything to do. We will point them out to you as fast as we can, so that you can steer clear of them.”

“They are high-toned lads,” said Clarence, “and won’t associate with any but the members of their own class. Some of them are preparing for West Point. They pride themselves on being soldiers all over; and if they can’t prove their soldierly qualities in any other way, they will report somebody.”

“Where’s your brother?” asked Tom, suddenly.

Don replied that he didn’t know where he was.

“I rather fancied that he didn’t exactly like what we said about running the guard a while ago,” continued Tom. “Did he?”

“No, he didn’t. He wouldn’t think of doing such a thing.”

“Well, then, he can make up his mind to be gated on an average of once a month as long as he stays here; for no matter how hard he tries, he can’t help breaking some of the rules. If he has a mind to submit to confinement – why, that’s his business and not mine.”

“I haven’t done it since I have been here,” said Fisher, emphatically; “and, what’s more, I won’t.”

“Where do you go when you run the guard?”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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