

THE MYSTERY AT

PUTNAM HALL

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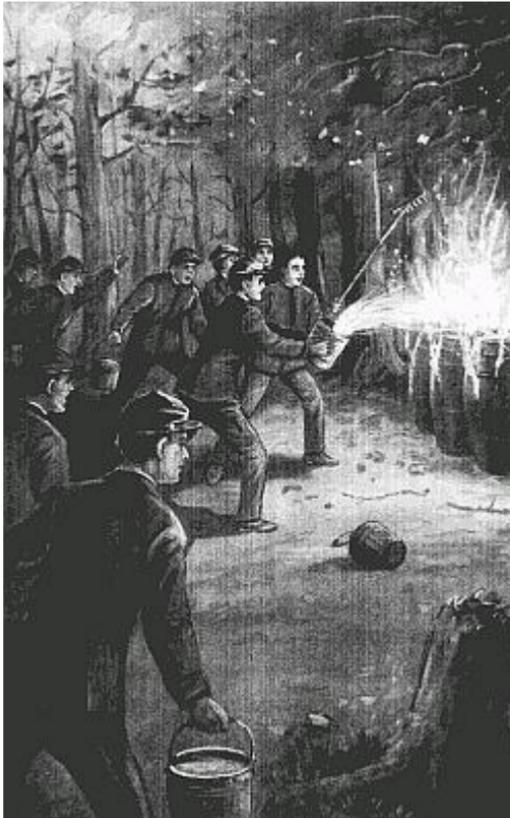
The School Chums' Strange Discovery

BY

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ILLUSTRATED





SOME CADETS CAME INTO VIEW, EACH CARRYING A BUCKET OF WATER.

The Mystery of Putnam Hall — Frontispiece.

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INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys:

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

As mentioned several times, this line was started because many young folks wanted to know what happened at Putnam Hall Military School previous to the arrival at that institution of the Rover boys, as already related in my "Rover Boys Series."

To gratify this curiosity I wrote the first volume of this series, called "The Putnam Hall Cadets," showing how Captain Putnam organized his famous school, and how it was Jack Ruddy and Pepper Ditmore came to be among his first pupils.

In the second book, entitled "The Putnam Hall Rivals," I gave the particulars of several contests on the field of sports, and also told about a thrilling balloon ride and of an odd discovery in the woods.

Following the second book came a third, "The Putnam Hall Champions," with more bitterly- [Pg vi] contested games, in one of which young Major Ruddy's enemies played him a foul trick.

From the opening of the school there had been dissatisfaction with one of the teachers, and when another was engaged who proved to be a man of peculiar whims, the boys went into open revolt, as related in another volume, called "The Putnam Hall Rebellion." The cadets literally ran away, and did not return to the Hall until Captain Putnam came upon the scene to straighten matters out.

The rebellion was followed by a grand outing, as related in "The Putnam Hall Encampment." The cadets marched far away from the school, to the shore of a beautiful lake, and there our heroes managed to have a good time in spite of the mean work of several of their enemies.

In the present volume are related the particulars of a most puzzling mystery which at one time threatened to bring disaster to the whole school. How the mystery was at last solved I leave for the pages which follow to explain.

Again I thank both young and old for all the nice things they have said about my books. I hope the reading of the volumes affords all both pleasure and profit.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,
Edward Stratemeyer.

THE MYSTERY AT PUTNAM HALL

CHAPTER I

AN ENCOUNTER ON THE ROAD

"Here we are again, as the clown says in the circus!"

"Right you are, Pepper. And I'll be glad to get back to Putnam Hall once more," responded Major Jack Ruddy, as he followed his chum from the lake steamer to the Cedarville dock.

"Hello, there is Andy!" cried Pepper Ditmore, as he caught sight of a familiar face in the crowd of cadets, "Andy, where have you been? Why didn't you come on the boat with us?"

"I got in last night," answered Andy Snow. "How are you, anyway?" And he shook hands cordially.

"Oh, I'm as fine as a new-tooth comb," answered Pepper Ditmore, with a grin. "Ready for study and fun." [Pg 2]

"Especially fun, I'll wager. How about it, Jack?"

"Oh, Pepper usually manages to get his share," came from the young major of the Putnam Hall battalion. "But, Andy, did you — — Hi, look where you are going, will you, Ritter!" cried Jack, rather angrily.

A tall youth, carrying a big dress-suit case, had forced his way through the crowd, hitting Jack in the knee with his baggage.

"What do you want to block the way for?" demanded Reff Ritter, sourly. "Think you own the dock?"

"I've got as much right here, Ritter, as you have!" retorted the young major, sharply. "Don't you knock me again like that."

"I will — if you get in my way."

"If you do, you'll take the consequences."

"Bah! Don't you try to dictate to me, Jack Ruddy!" growled Reff Ritter. "You got the best of me last term, but you'll not get the best of me this term, I'll tell you that!"

"Phew! Ritter is somewhat peppery!" whispered Andy Snow.

"I guess I know the reason," came from a student named Dale Blackmore.

"What is it?" [Pg 3]

"I'll tell you later — too much of a crowd here," rejoined Dale.

About twenty cadets, all bound for Putnam Hall Military Academy, had arrived on the boat from Ithaca, and these, along with some others who had come down to the dock to see the boat come in, gathered around Jack Ruddy and Reff Ritter to see the outcome of the unexpected encounter.

Jack Ruddy had good cause to consider Reff Ritter his enemy. But he had hoped that during the term now opening at the school the bully of Putnam Hall would keep his distance.

"I am not trying to dictate to you, Ritter," answered Jack, as calmly as he could. "But I don't propose to let you hit me with your suitcase."

"Huh! It was an accident!" growled Reff.

"Oh, come on, Reff!" put in Gus Coulter, the bully's close crony. "Let us get good seats in the carryall."

"That's the talk! Let us get in before the others take the seats!" came from Nick Paxton, another crony.

He pushed ahead, and his elbow caught Pepper Ditmore directly in the ribs.

"Not quite so swift, Paxton!" cried Pepper, and he gave the cadet a quick shove backwards. Pax [Pg 4] ton bumped into Reff Ritter, lost his footing, and fell over the dress-suit case in the bully's hand.

"Hurrah! One down!" cried Andy Snow. "How many yards to gain for a touchdown, Nick?"

"What do you mean by knocking me down!" roared Nick Paxton, as he scrambled to his feet. "I'll not stand for it."

"Then sit down again," answered Pepper, merrily. "And next time keep your elbow out of my ribs," he added. "Come on, we don't want to get left!" he added to his chums.

A bolt was made by many of the cadets for the Putnam Hall carryall, and soon a crowd was inside and on the front seat, talking, joking and cheering, as suited the mood of each individual. Jack, Pepper, Andy and Dale managed to crowd inside throwing their suitcases on the top. Gus Coulter got in also, but when he saw that Reff Ritter and Nick Paxton had been left, he scrambled out again, and his place was taken by Fred Century, another student.

"Hello, Peleg, old sport!" cried Pepper, gaily, to the driver of the turnout. "How have you been for the past fifty years?"

"Oh, I'm very well, thank you," responded Peleg Snuggers.

"Heard you had a fortune left to you," went on [Pg 5] Pepper, with a wink at his chums. "Old uncle died and left you half a million."

"Three-quarters of a million," put in Andy Snow, scenting fun. "All in gold, too."

"Isn't that fine!" said Jack. "Peleg, how about lending me ten or fifteen dollars?"

"I could use a five-spot myself," added Dale.

"I'd like to borrow about fifty for a new bicycle," came from Fred Century.

"Don't be modest about lending us the cash," went on Pepper. "Just hand it out as if you had always had it."

"I ain't had no fortune left to me!" burst out the general utility man, desperately. "Who said I had?"

"Why, everybody knows it, Peleg," responded Pepper. "Come, don't be modest about it. Was it really three-quarters of a million?"

"Maybe it was more," suggested Jack.

"If I were you, Peleg, I'd not carry so much around in my pockets," said Dale.

"I ain't had a cent left to me!" shouted the driver of the carryall. "This is some of your jokes, an' I want you to stop it! Oh, dear, now the school's opened ag'in I suppose there won't be no rest fer no-buddy!" And he heaved a mountainous sigh.

"Oh, Peleg! Don't be angry with me!" mur [Pg 6] mured Pepper, with a trace of tears in his voice. "If you get angry I'll die!"

"You behave yourself, Pepper Ditmore, or I won't drive you to the Hall."

"Peleg, don't you want me to drive?" asked Andy, who was on the front seat. "I'm a cracker-jack at driving."

"Not much! Don't you tech them hosses!" shouted the general utility man in alarm. "That off hoss is a new one an' he's mighty skit-tish, I can tell you. This mornin' when I was hookin' him up he nigh kicked the leg off o' me!"

"Say, how are we going to get to the Hall?" came in ugly tones from Reff Ritter. He, with six other boys, was standing beside the carryall.

"Captain Putnam said he'd send down some carriages," answered Peleg Snuggers. "There they come now," and he pointed to the turn-outs.

"Pshaw! I wanted to go in the carryall," grumbled Ritter.

"So did I," added Gus Coulter.

"Well, this is full, so you'll have to take the carriages," answered Peleg Snuggers. "Everybody hold fast!" he shouted, as he took up the reins.

"We are off!" shouted Pepper, gaily. "Farewell to Cedarville and ho! for Putnam Hall!" [Pg 7]

"Wish I had room, I'd turn a handspring for you," came from Andy, who was quite an acrobat.

"Now don't you cut up any monkey-shines," pleaded the driver of the carryall. "That new hoss won't stand for 'em."

"All right, Peleg, I'll keep as quiet as a lamb without a tail."

"Why is a lamb without a tail quiet?" asked Fred Century, quickly.

"Give it up, Fred. Why?"

"Because he has no tale to tell."