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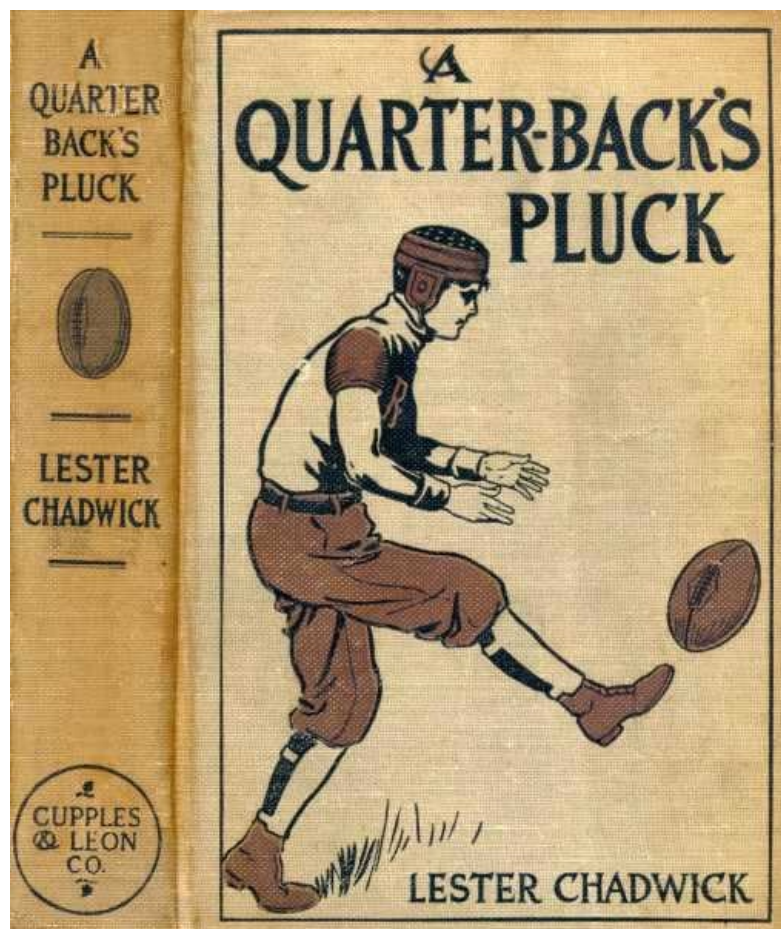
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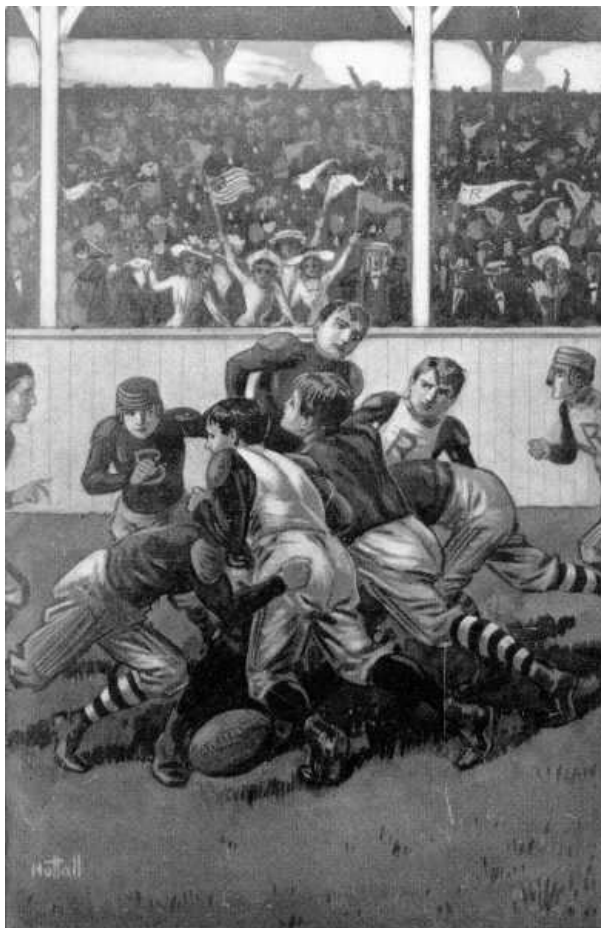
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A QUARTER-BACK'S PLUCK: A STORY OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL ***





"Smash and hammer; hammer and smash!"

A Quarter-Back's Pluck

A Story of College Football

BY

LESTER CHADWICK

AUTHOR OF "THE RIVAL PITCHERS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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A QUARTER-BACK'S PLUCK

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A QUARTER-BACK'S PLUCK

[1]

CHAPTER I

MOVING DAY

Phil Clinton looked critically at the rickety old sofa. Then he glanced at his chum, Tom Parsons. Next he lifted, very cautiously, one end of the antiquated piece of furniture. The sofa bent in the middle, much as does a ship with a broken keel.

"It—it looks like a mighty risky job to move it, Tom," said Phil. "It's broken right through the center."

"I guess it is," admitted Tom sorrowfully. Then he lifted the head of the sofa, and warned by an ominous creaking, he lowered it gently to the floor of the college room which he and his chum, Sid Henderson, were about to leave, with the assistance of Phil Clinton to help them move. "Poor old sofa," went on Tom. "You've had a hard life. I'm afraid your days are numbered."

"But you're not going to leave it here, for some measly freshman to lie on, are you, Tom?" asked Phil anxiously.

[2]

"Not much!" was the quick response.

"Nor the old chair?"

"Nope!"

"Nor the alarm clock?"

"Never! Even if it doesn't keep time, and goes off in the middle of the night. No, Phil, we'll take 'em along to our new room. But, for the life of me, I don't see how we're going to move that sofa. It will collapse if we lift both ends at once."

"I suppose so, but we've got to take it, even if we move it in sections, Tom."

"Of course, only I don't see——"

"I have it!" cried Phil suddenly. "I know how to do it!"

"How?"

"Splice it."

"Splice it? What do you think it is—a rope ladder? You must be in love, or getting over the measles."

"No, I mean just what I say. We'll splice it. You wait. I'll go down cellar, and get some pieces of board from the janitor. Also a hammer and some nails. We'll save the old sofa yet, Tom."

"All right, go ahead. More power to ye, as Bricktop Molloy would say. I wonder if he's coming back this term?"

"Yep. Post graduate course, I hear. He wouldn't miss the football team for anything. Well, you hold down things here until I come back. If the new freshmen who are to occupy this room come along, tell 'em we'll be moved by noon."

[3]

"I doubt it; but go ahead. I'll try to be comfortable until your return, dearest," and with a mocking smile Tom Parsons sank down into an easy chair that threatened to collapse under his substantial bulk. From the faded cushions a cloud of dust arose, and set Tom to sneezing so hard that the old chair creaked and rattled, as if it would fall apart.

"Easy! Easy there, old chap!" exclaimed the tall, good-looking lad, as he peered on either side of the seat. "Don't go back on me now. You'll soon have a change of climate, and maybe that will be good for your old bones."

He settled back, stuck his feet out before him, and gazed about the room. It was a very much dismantled apartment. In the center was piled a collection of baseball bats, tennis racquets, boxing gloves, foils, catching gloves, a football, some running trousers, a couple of sweaters, and a nondescript collection of books. There were also a couple of trunks, while, flanking the pile, was the old sofa and the arm chair. On top of all the alarm clock was ticking comfortably away, as happy as though moving from one college dormitory to another was a most matter-of-fact proceeding. The hands pointed to one o'clock, when it was, as Tom ascertained by looking at his watch, barely nine; but a little thing like that did not seem to give the clock any concern.

[4]

"I do hope Phil can rig up some scheme so we can move the sofa," murmured the occupant of the easy chair. "That's like part of ourselves now. It will make the new room seem more like home. I wonder where Sid can be? This is more of his moving than it is Phil's, but Sid always manages to get out of hard work. Phil is anxious to room with us, I guess."

Tom Parsons stretched his legs out a little farther, and let his gaze once more roam about the room. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation, as his eye caught sight of something on the wall.

"Came near forgetting that," he said as he arose, amid another cloud of dust from the chair, and removed from a spot on the wall, behind the door, the picture of a pretty girl. "I never put that there," he went on, as he wiped the dust from the photograph, and turned it over to look at the name written on the back—Madge Tyler. "Sid must have done that for a joke. He thought I'd forget it, and leave it for some freshy to make fun of. Not much! I got ahead of you that time, Sid, my boy. Queer how he doesn't like girls," added Tom, with the air of an expert. "Well, probably it's just as well he doesn't take too much to Madge, for—"

[5]

But Tom's musings, which were getting rather sentimental, were interrupted by the entrance of Phil Clinton. Phil had under one arm some boards, while in one hand he carried a hammer, and in the other some nails.

"Just the cheese," he announced. "Now we'll have this thing fixed up in jig time. Hasn't Sid Henderson showed up?"

"No. I guess he's over to the new room. He took his books and left some time ago. Maybe he's studying."

"Not much!" exclaimed Phil. "I wish he'd come and help move. Some of this stuff is his."

"Most of it is. I'm glad you're going to help, or I'd never have the courage to shift. Well, let's get the sofa fixed. I doubt if we can make it hold together, though."

"Yes, we can. I'll show you."

Phil went to work in earnest. He was an athletic-looking chap, of generous size, and one of the best runners at Randall College. He was one of Tom Parson's particular chums, the other being Sidney Henderson. Tom and Sid, of whom more will be told presently, had roomed together during their freshman year at Randall, and Phil's apartment was not far away. Toward the close of the term the three boys were much together, Phil spending more time in the room of Tom and Sid than he did in his own. In this way he became very much attached to the old chair and sofa, which formed two of the choicest possessions of the lads.

[6]

With the opening of the new term, when the freshmen had become more or less dignified sophomores, Phil had proposed that he and his two chums shift to a large room in the west dormitory, where the majority of the sophomores and juniors lived. His plan was enthusiastically adopted by Sid and Tom, and, as soon as they had arrived at college, ready for the beginning of the term, moving day had been instituted. But Sid, after helping Tom get their possessions in a pile in the middle of the room they were about to leave, had disappeared, and Phil, enthusiastic about getting his two best friends into an apartment with him, had come over to aid Tom.

"Now, you see," went on Phil, "I'll nail this board along the front edge of the sofa—so."

"But don't you think, old chap—and I know you'll excuse my mentioning it," said Tom—"don't you think that it rather spoils, well, we'll say the artistic beauty of it?"

"Artistic fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Phil. "Of course it does! But it's the only way to hold it together."

"One could, I suppose, put a sort of drapery—flounce, I believe, is the proper word—over it," went on Tom. "That would hide the unsightly board."

[7]

"I don't care whether it's hid or not!" exclaimed Phil. "But if you don't get down here and help hold this end, while I nail the other, I know what's going to happen."

"What?" asked Tom, as he carefully put in his pocket the photograph of the pretty girl.

"Well, you'll have a mob of howling freshmen in here, and there won't be any sofa left."

"Perish the thought!" cried Tom, and then he set to work in earnest helping Phil.

"Now a board on the back," said the amateur carpenter, and for a few minutes he hammered vigorously.

"It's a regular anvil chorus," remarked Tom.

"Here, no knocking!" exclaimed his chum. "Now let's see if it's stiff enough."

Anxiously he raised one end of the sofa. There was no sagging in the middle this time.

"It's like putting a new keel on a ship!" cried the inventor of the scheme gaily. "A few more nails, and it will do. Do you think the chair will stand shifting?"

"Oh, yes. That's like the 'one-horse shay'—it'll hold together until it flies apart by spontaneous combustion. You needn't worry about that."

Phil proceeded to drive a few more nails in the boards he had attached to the front and back of the sofa. Then he got up to admire his work.

[8]

"I call that pretty good, Tom; don't you?" he asked.

The two chums drew back to the farther side of the room to get the effect.

"Yes, I guess with a ruffle or two, a little insertion, and a bit of old lace, it will hide the fractured places, Phil. It's a pity—"

"Here, what are you scoundrels doing to my old sofa?" exclaimed a voice. "Vandals! How dare you spoil that antique?" and another lad entered the room. "Say, why didn't you put new legs on it, insert new springs, and cover it over while you were about it?" he asked sarcastically.

"Because, you old fossil, we *had* to put those boards on," said Tom. "Where have you been, Sid?"

Phil and I were getting ready to move without you.”

“Oh, I’ve been cleaning out the new room we’re going into. The juniors who were there last term must have tried to raise vegetables in it, judging by the amount of dirt I found. But it’s all right now.”

“Good! Now if you’ll catch hold here, we’ll move the old sofa first. The rest will be easy.”

Sid Henderson grasped the head of the couch, while Tom took the foot. Phil acted as general manager, and steadied it on the side. [9]

“Easy now, easy boys,” he cautioned, as they moved toward the door leading to the hall.

CHAPTER II

 [10]

LANGRIDGE HAS A TUMBLE

Out into the corridor went the three lads with the old sofa. It was no easy task, but they managed to get it out of the east dormitory, where they had roomed for a year, and then they began the journey across a stretch of grass to the west building.

The appearance of the three boys, carrying a dilapidated sofa, as tenderly as though it were some rare and fragile object, attracted the attention of a crowd of students. The lads swarmed over to surround the movers.

“Well, would you look at that!” exclaimed Holman, otherwise known as “Holly,” Cross. “Have you had a fire, Tom?”

“No; they’ve been to an auction sale of antiques, and this is the bed on which Louis XIV slept the night before he ate the Welsh rarebit,” declared Ed Kerr, the champion catcher on the ‘varsity nine. “Why don’t you label it, Phil, so a fellow would know what it is?”

“You get out of the way!” exclaimed Tom good-naturedly. [11]

“This side up, with care. Store in a cool, dry place, and water frequently,” quoted Billy Housenlager, who rejoiced in the title of Dutch. “Here, let me see if I can jump over it while it is in motion,” he added, for he was full of “horseplay,” and always anxious to try something new. He took a running start, and was about to leap full upon the sofa, when, at a signal from Phil, the three chums set the spliced piece of furniture on the grass.

“What’s the matter?” asked Dutch indignantly. “Can’t you give a fellow a chance to practice jumping? I can beat Grasshopper Backus, now.”

“You can not!” exclaimed the owner of the title. “I’m sure to make the track team this term, and then you’ll see what—”

“Say,” put in another student, “my uncle says that when he was here he used to jump—”

“Drown him!”

“Stuff grass in his mouth!”

“Make him eat the horsehair in the sofa!”

“Swallow it!”

“Chew it up!”

These were some of the cries of derision that greeted Ford Fenton’s mention of his uncle. The gentleman had once been a coach at Randall, and a very good one, too, but his nephew was doing much to spoil his reputation. [12]

For, at every chance he got, and at times when there was no opportunity but such as he made, Ford would quote his aforesaid uncle, upon any and all subjects, to the no small disapproval of his college mates. So they had gotten into the habit of “rigging” him every time he mentioned his relative.

“I don’t care,” Ford said, when the chorus of exclamations had ceased. “My uncle—”

But he got no further, for the students made a rush for him and buried him out of sight in a pile of wriggling arms and legs.

“First down; ten yards to gain!” yelled some one.

“Come on, now’s our chance,” said Tom. “First thing we know they’ll do that to our sofa, and then it will be all up with the poor old thing. Let’s move on.”

Once more the chums took up their burden, and walked toward the west dormitory. By this time the throng had done with punishing poor Fenton, and once more turned its attention to the movers.

“Going to split it up for firewood?” called Ed Kerr.

“No; it’s full of germs, and they’re going to dig ‘em out and use ‘em in the biology class,” suggested Dan Woodhouse, who was more commonly called Kindlings. [13]

“Maybe they’re going to make a folding bed of it,” came from Bricktop Molloy. “Come on,

fellows, let's investigate."

The crowd of fun-loving students hurried after the three lads carrying the sofa.

"They're coming!" exclaimed Tom.

"Let's drop the sofa and cut for it?" proposed Sid. "They'll make a rough house if they catch us."

"I'm not going to desert the sofa!" exclaimed Tom.

"Nor I. I'll stick by you—I will stand at thy right hand, and guard the bridge with thee," quoted Phil. "But if we put a little more speed on we can get to the dormitory, and that will be sanctuary, I guess. Come on; run, fellows!"

It was awkward work, running and carrying a clumsy sofa, but they managed it. Holly Cross caught up to them as they were at the door of the building.

"Ah, let's have the old ark," he pleaded. "We'll make a bonfire of it, and circle about it to-night, after we haze some freshies. Give us the old relic, Tom."

"Not on your life!" exclaimed the crack pitcher of the 'varsity nine. "This is our choicest possession, Holly. It goes wherever we go."

"Well, it won't go much longer," observed Holly. "One of its legs is coming off."

[14]

Almost as he spoke one of the sofa legs, probably jarred loose by the unaccustomed rapid rate of progress, fell to the dormitory steps.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" exclaimed Phil. "It's beginning to fall apart, Tom."

"Never mind, you can nail it on. Sid, you carry the leg. The stairs are so narrow that only two of us can manage the sofa. Phil and I will do that, and you come in back to catch me, in case I fall."

Seeing that there was no chance to get the sofa away from its owners, to make a college holiday with it, Holly Cross and his friends turned back to look for another source of sport. Sid picked up the leg, and then, with Phil mounting the stairs backward, carrying one end, and Tom advancing and holding the other, the task was begun. Up the stairs they went, and when they were half way there appeared at the head of the flight two lads. They were both well dressed in expensive clothes, and there was about them that indefinable air of "sportiness" which is so easily recognizable but hard to acquire.

"Hello, what's this?" asked the foremost of the two, as he looked down on the approaching cavalcade and the sofa. "Here, what do you fellows mean by blocking up the stairway? Don't you know that no tradesmen are allowed in this entrance?"

[15]

"Who are you talking to?" demanded Phil, not seeing who was speaking.

"It's Langridge," explained Tom, as he looked up and saw his former enemy and rival.

"Oh, it's Parsons, Henderson and Clinton," went on Fred Langridge, as he recognized some fellow students. Then, without apologizing for his former words, he went on: "I say, you fellows will have to back down and let me and Gerhart past. We are in a hurry."

"So are we," said Tom shortly. "I guess you can wait until we come up."

"No, I can't!" exclaimed Langridge. "You back up! You have no right to block up the stairs this way!"

"Well, I guess we have," put in Sid. "We're moving some of our things to our new room."

Langridge, followed by the other well-dressed lad, came down a few steps. He saw the old sofa, and exclaimed:

"What! Do you mean to say that you fellows are moving that fuzzy-wuzzy piece of architecture into this dormitory? I'll not stand for it! I'll complain to the proctor! Why, it's full of disease germs!"

"Yes, and you're full of prune juice!" cried Phil Clinton, unable to stand the arrogant words and manner of Langridge.

[16]

"Don't get gay with me!" exclaimed Tom's former rival.

"I'll lay you five to three that you can't jump over their heads and clear the sofa," put in the other student, whom Langridge had called Gerhart. "Do any of you fellows want to bet?" he asked rather sneeringly, as he looked down at Tom, Phil and Sid.

"I guess not," answered Tom, good-naturedly enough.

"Ah, you're not sports, I see," rejoined Gerhart. "I thought you said this was a sporty college, Langridge?"

"So it is, when you strike the right crowd, and not a lot of greasy digs," was the answer. "I say, are you chaps going to move back and let me and Gerhart pass?" he went on.

"No, we're not," replied Phil shortly. "You can wait until we get up. Go on back now, Langridge, and we'll soon have this out of the way."

"Burning it up would be the best method of getting it out of the way," declared Langridge, still with that sneer in his voice. "I never saw such a disgraceful piece of furniture. What do you fellows want with it? Surely you're not going to put it in your room."

"That's just what we are going to do," declared Sid. "We wouldn't part with this for a good bit, would we, fellows?"

[17]

"Nope," chorused Phil and Tom.

"Did it come over in the *Mayflower*?" asked Gerhart. "I'm willing to bet ten to one that if you think it's an antique that you're stuck. How about it?"

"You're quite a sport, aren't you, freshie?" asked Phil suddenly, for he knew that the new student must belong to the first-year class.

"Of course I'm a sport, but if you go to calling names I'll show you that I'm something else!" exclaimed the other fiercely. "If you want to do a little something in the boxing line——"

"Dry up!" hastily advised Langridge in a whisper. "You're a freshman, and you know it. They're sophomores, and so am I. Don't get gay."

"Well, they needn't insult a gentleman."

"Tell us when one's around, and we'll be on our good behavior," spoke Phil with a laugh.

"Come, now, are you fellows going to back down and let us pass?" asked Langridge hastily.

"Like the old guard, we die, but never surrender," spoke Tom. "We're not going to back down, Langridge. It's easier for you to go back than for us."

"Well, I'm not going to do it. You have no right to move your stuff in here, anyhow. The rooms are furnished."

"We want our old chair and sofa," explained Sid.

[18]

"I should think you'd be ashamed to bring such truck into a decent college," expostulated Langridge. "It looks as if it had been through a fire in a second-hand store."

"That'll do you," remarked Phil. "This is our sofa, and we'll do as we please with it."

"You won't block up my way, that's one thing you won't do," declared Langridge fiercely. "I'm going down. Look out! If I upset you fellows it won't be my fault."

He started down the stairs, and managed to squeeze past Phil, who, though he did not like Langridge, moved as far to one side as possible in the narrow passage. As Langridge passed the sofa he struck it with a little cane he carried. A cloud of dust arose.

"Whew!" exclaimed the sporty lad. "Smell the germs! Wow! Get me some disinfectant, Gerhart."

Whether it was the action of Langridge in hitting the sofa that caused Tom to stagger, or whether Phil was unsteady on his feet and pushed on the sofa, did not develop. At any rate, just as Langridge came opposite to Tom on the stairs, the former pitcher was jostled against his rival. Langridge stumbled, tried to save himself by clutching at Tom and then at the sofa. He missed both, and, with a loud exclamation, plunged down head first, bringing up with a resounding thud at the bottom.

[19]

CHAPTER III

[20]

PHIL GETS BAD NEWS

For a moment after he struck the bottom of the stairs, Fred Langridge remained stretched out, making no move. Tom Parsons feared his former rival was badly hurt, and was about to call to Sid to go and investigate, when Langridge got up. His face showed the rage he felt, though it was characteristic of him that he first brushed the dust off his clothes. He was nothing if not neat about his person.

"What did you do that for?" he cried to Tom.

"Do what?"

"Shove me down like that. I might have broken my neck. As it is, I've wrenched my ankle."

"I didn't do it," said Tom. "If you'd stayed up where you were, until we got past with the sofa, it wouldn't have happened. You shouldn't have tried to pass us."

"I shouldn't, eh? Well, I guess I've got as good a right on these stairs as you fellows have, with your musty old furniture. You oughtn't be allowed to have it. You deliberately pushed me down, Tom Parsons, and I'll fix you for it!" and Langridge limped about, exaggerating the hurt to his ankle.

[21]

"I didn't push you!" exclaimed Tom. "It was an accident that you jostled against me."

"I didn't jostle against you. You deliberately leaned against me to save yourself from falling."

"I did not! And if you——"

"You brought it on yourself, Langridge," interrupted Phil. "You got fresh and hit the sofa, and that made you lose your balance. It's your own fault."

"You mind your business! When I want you to speak I'll address my remarks to you. I'm talking

to Parsons now, and I tell him——”

“You needn’t take the trouble to tell me anything,” declared Tom. “I don’t want to hear you. I’ve told you it was an accident, and if you insist that it was done purposely I have only to say that you are intimating that I am not telling the truth. In that case there can be but one thing to do, and I’ll do it as soon as I’ve gotten this sofa into our room.”

There was an obvious meaning in Tom’s words, and Langridge had no trouble in fathoming it. He did not care to come to a personal encounter with Tom.

“Well, if you fellows hadn’t been moving that measly old sofa in, this would never have happened,” growled Langridge as he limped away. “Come on, Gerhart. We’ll find more congenial company.” [22]

“I guess I’ll wait until they get the sofa out of the way,” remarked the new chum Langridge appeared to have picked up.

Tom, Sid and Phil resumed their journey, and the old piece of furniture was carried to the upper hall. The stairs were clear, and Gerhart descended. As he passed Tom he looked at him with something of a sneer on his face, and remarked:

“I’ll lay you even money that Langridge can whip you in a fair fight.”

“Why, you little freshie,” exclaimed Phil, “fair fights are the only kind we have at Randall! We don’t have ’em very often, but every time we do Tom puts the kibosh all over your friend Langridge. Another thing—it isn’t healthy for freshies to bet too much. They might go broke,” and with these words of advice Phil caught up his end of the sofa and Tom the other. It was soon in the room the three sophomore chums had selected.

“Now for the chair and the rest of the truck,” called Phil.

“Oh, let’s rest a bit,” suggested Sid, as he stretched out on the sofa. No sooner had he reached a reclining position than he sat up suddenly.

“Wow!” he cried. “What in the name of the labors of Hercules is that?” [23]

He drew from the back of his coat a long nail.

“Why, I must have left it on the sofa when I fixed it,” said Phil innocently. “I wondered what had become of it.”

“You needn’t wonder any longer,” spoke Sid ruefully. “Tom, take a look, that’s a good chap, and see if there’s a very big hole in my back. I think my lungs are punctured.”

“Not a bit of it, from the way you let out that yell,” said Phil. “That will teach you not to take a siesta during moving operations.”

“Not much damage done,” Tom reported with a laugh, as he inspected his chum’s coat. “Come on now, let’s get the rest of it done.”

“Do you think it will be safe to leave the sofa here?” asked Sid. “Perhaps I’d better stay and keep guard over it, while you fellows fetch the rest of the things in.”

“Well, listen to him!” burst out Phil. “What harm will come to it here?”

“Why, Langridge and that sporty new chum of his may slip in and damage it.”

“Say, if they can damage this sofa any more than it is now, I’d like to see them,” spoke Tom. “I defy even the fingers of Father Time himself to work further havoc. No, most noble Anthony, the sofa will be perfectly safe here.”

“I wouldn’t say as much for you, if Langridge gets a chance at you,” said Phil to Tom. “You know what tricks he played on you last term.” [24]

“Yes; but I guess he’s had his lesson,” remarked Tom. “Now come on, and we’ll finish up.”

The three lads went back to the room formerly occupied by Sid and Tom during their freshman year. The chums were pretty much of a size, and they made an interesting picture as they strolled across the campus.

Tom Parsons had come to Randall College the term previous, from the town of Northville, where his parents lived. He did not care to follow his father’s occupation of farming, and so had decided on a college education, using part of his own money to pay his way.

As told in the first volume of this series, entitled “The Rival Pitchers,” Tom had no sooner reached Randall than he incurred the enmity of Fred Langridge, a rich youth from Chicago, who was manager of the ’varsity ball nine, and also its pitcher. Tom had ambitions to fill that position himself, and as soon as Langridge learned this, he was more than ever the enemy of the country lad.

Randall College was located near the town of Haddonfield, in one of our middle Western States, and was on the shore of Sunny River, not far from Lake Tonoka. Within a comparatively short distance from Randall were two other institutions of learning. One was Boxer Hall, and the other Fairview Institute, a co-educational academy. These three colleges had formed the Tonoka Lake League in athletics, and the rivalry on the gridiron and diamond, as well as in milder forms of sport—rowing, tennis, basketball and hockey—ran high. When Tom arrived there was much talk of baseball, and Randall had a good nine in prospect. Her hopes ran toward winning the Lake League pennant in baseball, but as her nine had been at the bottom of the list for several seasons, the chances were dubious. [25]

After many hardships, not a few of which Langridge was responsible for, Tom got a chance to play on the 'varsity nine. Langridge was a good pitcher, but he secretly drank and smoked, to say nothing of staying up late nights to gamble; and so he was not in good form. When it came to the crucial moment he could not "make good," and Tom was put in his place, in the pitching box, and by phenomenal work won the deciding game. This made Randall champion of the baseball league, and Tom Parsons was hailed as a hero, Langridge being supplanted as pitcher and manager.

But if Langridge and some of the latter's set were his enemies, Tom had many friends, not the least among whom were Phil Clinton and Sidney Henderson, to say nothing of Miss Madge Tyler. This young lady and Langridge were, at first, very good friends, but when Madge found out what sort of a chap the rich city youth was, she broke friendship with him, and Tom had the pleasure of taking her to more than one college affair. This, of course, did not add to the good feeling between Tom and Langridge.

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With the winning of the championship game, baseball came practically to an end at Randall, as well as at the other colleges in the Tonoka Lake League, and a sort of truce was patched up between Tom and Langridge. The summer vacation soon came, and the students scattered to their homes. Tom and his two chums agreed to room together during the term which opens with this story, and it may be mentioned incidentally that both Tom and Phil hoped to play on the football eleven. Phil was practically assured of a place, for he had played the game at a preparatory school, and had as good a reputation in regard to filling the position of quarter-back as Tom had in the pitching box.

It was due to a great catch which Phil made in the deciding championship game, almost as much as to Tom's wonderful pitching, that Randall had the banner, and Captain Holly Cross, of the eleven, had marked Phil for one of his men during the season which was about to open on the gridiron.

"Now we'll take the old armchair over," proposed Tom, when he and his chums had reached the room they were vacating. "I guess I can manage that alone. You fellows carry some of the other paraphernalia."

[27]

Phil and Sid prepared to load themselves down with gloves, balls, bats, foils and various articles of sport. Before he left with the chair, Tom observed Sid looking behind the door as if for something.

"It's not there, old man. I took it down," said the pitcher, and he patted the pocket that held Madge Tyler's photograph. "You thought you'd make me forget it, didn't you?"

"Do you mean to say you're going to stick girls' pictures up in our new room?" asked Sid.

"Not girls' pictures, in general," replied Tom, "but one in particular."

"You make me tired!" exclaimed Sid, who cared little for feminine society.

"You needn't look at it if you don't like," responded his chum. "But I call her a pretty girl, don't you, Phil?"

"She's an all right looker," answered the other with such enthusiasm that Tom glanced at him a trifle sharply.

"She's no prettier than Phil's sister," declared Sid.

"Have you a sister?" demanded Tom.

Phil bowed in assent.

"Why didn't you say so before?" asked Tom grumblingly.

"Because you never asked me."

[28]

"Where is she?"

"Going to Fairview this term, I believe."

"So is Madge—I mean Miss Tyler," burst out Tom. "I'd like to meet her, Phil; your sister, I mean."

"Say, you're a regular Mormon!" expostulated Sid. "If we're going to get this moving done, let's do it, and not talk about girls. You fellows make me sick!"

"Wait until he gets bitten by the bug," said Tom with a laugh, as he shouldered the easy chair.

It took the lads several trips to transfer all their possessions, but at last it was accomplished, and they sat in the new room in the midst of "confusion worse confounded," as Holly Cross remarked when he looked in on them. Their goods were scattered all over, and the three beds in the room were piled high with them.

"It's a much nicer place than the old room," declared Tom.

"It will be when we get it fixed up," added Phil.

"I s'pose that means sticking a lot of girls' photos on the wall, some of those crazy banners they embroidered for you, a lot of ribbons, and such truck," commented Sid disgustedly. "I tell you fellows one thing, though, and that is if you go to cluttering up this room too much, I'll have something to say. I'm not going to live in a cozy corner, nor yet a den. I want a decent room."

[29]

"Oh, you can have one wall space to decorate in any style you like," said Tom.

"Yes; he'll probably adopt the early English or the late French style," declared Phil, "and have

nothing but a calendar on it. Well, every one to his notion. Hello, the alarm clock has stopped," and he began to shake it vigorously.

"Easy with it!" cried Tom. "Do you want to jar the insides loose?"

"You can't hurt this clock," declared Phil, and, as if to prove his words, the fussy little timepiece began ticking away again, as loudly and insistingly as ever. "Well, let's get the room into some decent kind of shape, and then I'm going out and see what the prospects are for football," he went on. "I want to make that quarter-back position if I have to train nights and early mornings."

"Oh, you'll get it, all right," declared Tom. "I wish I was as sure of a place as you are. I believe ___"

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. Sid opened it. In the hall stood one of the college messengers.

"Hello, Wallops; what have you there?" asked Tom.

"Telegram for Mr. Phil Clinton."

"Hand it over," spoke Sid, taking the envelope from the youth. "Probably it's a proposition for him to manage one of the big college football teams." [30]

As Wallops, who, like nearly everything and every one else about the college had a nickname, departed down the corridor, Phil opened the missive. It was brief, but his face paled as he read it.

"Bad news?" asked Tom quickly.

"My mother is quite ill, and they will have to operate on her to save her life," said Phil slowly.

CHAPTER IV

FOOTBALL PRACTICE

There was a moment of silence in the room. No one cared to speak, for, though Tom and Sid felt their hearts filled with sympathy for Phil, they did not know what to say. It was curiously quiet—oppressively so. The fussy little alarm clock, on the table piled high with books, was ticking away, as if eager to call attention to itself. Indeed, it did succeed in a measure, for Tom remarked gently.

"Seems to me that sounds louder than it did in the other room."

"There are more echoes here," spoke Sid, also quietly. "It will be different when we get the things up."

The spell had been broken. Each one breathed a sigh of relief. Phil, whose face had become strangely white, stared down at the telegram in his hand. The paper rustled loudly—almost as loudly as the clock ticked. Tom spoke again.

"Is it—is it something sudden?" he asked. "Was she all right when you left home to come back to college?" [31]

"Not exactly all right," answered Phil, and he seemed to be carefully picking his words, so slowly did he speak. "She had been in poor health for some time, and we thought a change of air would do her good. So father took her to Florida—a place near Palm Beach. I came on here, and I hoped to hear good news. Now—now—" He could not proceed, and turned away.

Tom coughed unnecessarily loud, and Sid seemed to have suddenly developed a most tremendous cold. He had to go to the window to look out, probably to see if it was getting colder. In doing so he knocked from a chair a football, which bounded erratically about the room, as the spherical pigskin always does bounce. The movements of it attracted the attention of all, and mercifully came as a relief to their overwrought nerves.

"Well," said Sid, as he blew his nose with seemingly needless violence, "I suppose you'll have to give up football now; for you'll go to Florida."

"Yes," said Phil simply, "of course I shall go. I think I'll wire dad first, though, and tell him I'm going to start."

"I'll take the message to the telegraph office for you," offered Tom eagerly.

"No, let me go," begged Sid. "I can run faster than you, Tom."

"That's a nice thing to say, especially when I'm going to try for end on the 'varsity eleven," said Tom a bit reproachfully. "Don't let Holly Cross or Coach Lighton hear you say that, or I'll be down and out. I'm none too good in my running, I know, but I'm going to practice." [32]

"Oh, I guess you'll make out all right," commented Phil. "I'm much obliged to you fellows. I guess I can take the message myself, though," and he sat down at the littered table, pushing the things aside, to write the dispatch.

Tom and Sid said little when Phil went out to take the telegram to the office. The two chums, one on the old patched sofa and the other in the creaking chair, which at every movement sent up a cloud of dust from the ancient cushion, maintained a solemn silence. Tom did remark once:

"Tough luck, isn't it?"

To which Sid made reply:

"That's what it is."

But, then, to be understood, you don't need to talk much under such circumstances. In a little while footsteps were heard along the corridor.

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Tom, and he arose from the sofa with such haste that the new boards, which Phil had put on to strengthen it, seemed likely to snap off.

"Go easy on that, will you?" begged Sid. "Do you want to break it?"

"No," answered Tom meekly, and he fell to arranging his books, a task which Sid supplemented by piling the sporting goods indiscriminately in a corner. They wanted to be busy when Phil came in. [34]

"Whew! You fellows are raising a terrible dust!" exclaimed Phil. He seemed more at his ease now. In grief there is nothing so diverting as action, and now that he had sent his telegram, and hoped to be able to see his mother shortly, it made the bad news a little easier to bear.

"Yes," spoke Tom; "it's Sid. He raises a dust every time he gets into or out of that chair. I really think we ought to send it to the upholsterer's and have it renovated."

"There'd be nothing left of it," declared Phil. "Better let well enough alone. It'll last for some years yet—as long as we are in Randall."

"Did you send the message?" blurted out Tom.

"Yes, and now I'll wait for an answer."

"Is it—will they have to—I mean—of course there's some danger in an operation," stammered Sid, blushing like a girl.

"Yes," admitted Phil gravely. "It is very dangerous. I don't exactly know what it is, but before she went away our family doctor said that if it came to an operation it would be a serious one. Now—now it seems that it's time for it. Dear old mother—I—I hope—" He was struggling with himself. "Oh, hang it all!" he suddenly burst out. "Let's get this room to rights. If—if I go away I'll have the nightmare thinking what shape it's in. Let's fix up a bit, and then go out and take a walk. Then it will be grub time. After that we'll go out and see if any more fellows have arrived." [35]

It was good advice—just the thing needed to take their attention off Phil's grief, and they fell to work with a will. In a short time the room began to look something like those they had left.

"Here, what are you sticking up over there?" called Sid to Tom, as he detected the latter in the act of tacking something on the wall.

"I'm putting up a photograph," said Tom.

"A girl's, I'll bet you a new hat."

"Yes," said Tom simply. "Why, you old anchorite, haven't I a right to? It's a pity you wouldn't get a girl yourself!"

"Humph! I'd like to see myself," murmured Sid, as he carefully tacked up a calendar and a couple of football pictures.

"Oh, that's Miss Tyler's picture, isn't it?" spoke Phil.

"Yes."

Phil was sorting his books when from a volume of Pliny there dropped a photograph. Tom spied it.

"Ah, ha!" he exclaimed. "It seems that I'm not the only one to have girls' pictures. Say, but she's a good-looker, all right!" [36]

"She's my sister Ruth," said Phil quietly.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," came quickly from Tom. "I—I didn't know."

"That's all right," spoke Phil genially. "I believe she is considered quite pretty. I was going to put her picture up on the wall, but since Sid objects to—"

"What's that?" cried the amateur misogynist. "Say, you can put that picture up on my side of the room if you like, Phil. I—I don't object to—to all girls' pictures; it's only—well—er—she's your sister—put her picture where you like," and he fairly glared at Tom.

"Wonders will never cease," quoted the 'varsity pitcher. "Your sister has worked a miracle, Phil."

"You dry up!" commanded Sid. "All I ask is, don't make the room a photograph gallery. There's reason in all things. Go ahead, Phil."

"The next thing he'll be wanting will be to have an introduction to your sister," commented Tom.

"I'd like to have both you fellows meet her," said Phil gravely. "You probably would have, only for this—this trouble of mother's. Now I suppose sis will have to leave Fairview and go to Palm Beach with me. I must take a run over this evening, and see her. She'll be all broken up." It was not much of a journey to Fairview, a railroad was well as a trolley line connecting the town of [37]

that name with Haddonfield.

The room was soon fitted up in fairly good shape, though the three chums promised that they would make a number of changes in time. They went to dinner together, meeting at the table many of their former classmates, and seeing an unusually large number of freshmen.

"There'll be plenty of hazing this term," commented Tom.

"Yes, I guess we'll have our hands full," added Sid.

Old and new students continued to arrive all that day. After reporting to the proper officials of the college there was nothing for them to do, save to stroll about, as lectures would not begin until the next morning, and then only preliminary classes would be formed.

"I think I'll go down to the office and see if any telegram has arrived for me," said Phil, as he and his chums were strolling across the campus.

"I hope you get good news," spoke Tom. "We'll wait for you in the room, and help you pack if you have to go."

"Thanks," was Phil's answer as he walked away.

"Well, Tom, I suppose you're going to be with us this fall?" asked Holly Cross, captain of the football eleven, as he spied Tom and Sid.

"I am if I can make it. What do you think?"

"Well, we've got plenty of good material for ends, and of course we want the best, and——"

"Oh, I understand," said Tom with a laugh. "I'm not asking any favors. I had my honors this spring on the diamond. But I'm going to try, just the same."

"I hope you make it," said Holly fervently. "We'll have some try-out practice the last of this week. Where's Phil? I've about decided on him for quarter-back."

"I don't believe he can play," remarked Sid.

"Not play!" cried Holly.

Then they told him, and the captain was quite broken up over the news.

"Well," he said finally, "all we can hope is that his mother gets better in time for him to get into the game with us. We want to do the same thing to Boxer Hall and Fairview at football as we did in baseball. I do hope Phil can play."

"So do we," came from Tom, as he and Sid continued on to their room.

It was half an hour before Phil came in, and the time seemed three times as long to the two chums in their new apartment. When he entered the room both gazed apprehensively at him. There was a different look on Phil's face than there had been.

"Well?" asked Tom, and his voice seemed very loud.

"Dad doesn't want me to come," was Phil's answer.

"Not come—why? Is it too——"

"Well, they've decided to postpone the operation," went on Phil. "It seems that she's a little better, and there may be a chance. Anyhow, dad thinks if sis and I came down it would only worry mother, and make her think she was getting worse, and that would be bad. So I'll not go to Florida."

"Then it's good news?" asked Sid.

"Yes, much better than I dared to hope. Maybe she'll get well without an operation. I feel fine, now. I'm going over to Fairview and tell my sister. Dad asked me to let her know. I feel ten years younger, fellows!"

"So do we!" cried Tom, and he seized his chum's hand.

"Let's go out and haze a couple of dozen freshmen," proposed Sid eagerly.

"You bloodthirsty old rascal!" commented Phil. "Let the poor freshies alone. They'll get all that's coming to them, all right. Well, I'm off. Hold down the room, you two."

Tom and Sid spent the evening in their apartment, after Phil had received permission to go to Fairview, Tom having entrusted him with a message to Madge Tyler. The two chums had a number of invitations to assist in hazing freshmen, but declined.

"We don't want to do it without Phil," said Tom, and this loyal view was shared by Sid.

Phil came back late that night, or, rather, early the next morning, for it was past midnight when he got to Randall College.

"Your friend Madge sends word that she hopes you'll take her to the opening game of the football season," said Phil to Tom, as he was undressing.

"Did you see her?" inquired Tom eagerly.

"Of course. Ruth sent for her. She's all you said she was, Tom."

"Oh!" spoke Tom in a curious voice, and then he was strangely silent. For Phil was a good-looking chap, and had plenty of money; and Tom remembered what friends Madge and Langridge had been. His sleep was not an untroubled one that night.

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Two or three days more of general excitement ensued before matters were running smoothly at Randall. In that time most of the students had settled in their new rooms, the freshmen found their places, some were properly hazed, and that ordeal for others was postponed until a future date, much to the misery of the fledglings.

"Preliminary football practice to-morrow," announced Phil one afternoon, as he came in from the gymnasium and found Tom and Sid studying. [41]

"That's good!" cried Tom. "Are you going to try, Sid?"

"Not this year. I've got to buckle down to studies, I guess. Baseball is about all I can stand."

"I hear Langridge is out of it, too," said Phil. "His uncle has put a ban on it. He's got to make good in lessons this term."

"Well, I think the team will be better off without him," commented Sid. "Not that he's a poor player, but he won't train properly, and that has a bad effect on the other fellows. It's not fair to them, either. Look what he did in baseball. We'd have lost the championship if it hadn't been for Tom."

"Oh, I don't know about that," modestly spoke the hero of the pitching box.

"Well, turn out in football togs to-morrow," went on Phil. "By the way, I hear that Langridge's new freshman friend—Gerhart—is going to try for quarter-back against me."

"What! that fellow who was with him when we were moving our sofa in?" asked Tom.

"That's the one."

"Humph! Doesn't look as if he was heavy enough for football," commented Sid.

"You can't tell by the looks of a toad how much hay it can eat," quoted Phil.

The following afternoon a crowd of sturdy lads, in their football suits, thronged out on the gridiron, which was the baseball field properly put in shape. The goal posts had been erected, and Coach Lighton and Captain Cross were on hand to greet the candidates. [42]

"Now, fellows," said the coach, "we'll just have a little running, tackling, passing the ball, some simple formations and other exercises to test your wind and legs. I'll pick out four teams, and you can play against each other."

CHAPTER V

 [43]

A CLASH

Ragged work, necessarily, marked the opening of the practice. The ball was dropped, fumbled, fallen upon, lost, regained, tossed and kicked. But it all served a purpose, and the coach and captain, with keen eyes, watched the different candidates. Now and then they gave a word of advice, cautioning some player about wrong movements, or suggesting a different method.

Phil had been put in as quarter-back on one scrub team, and Tom, as left-end, on the same. Phil found his opponent on the opposing eleven to be none other than Langridge's friend, Gerhart. It did not need much of an eye to see that Gerhart did not know the game. He would have done well enough on a small eleven, but he had neither the ability nor the strength to last through a college contest.

Several times, when it was his rival's turn to pass back the ball, Phil saw the inefficient work of Gerhart, but he said nothing. He felt that he was sure of his place on the 'varsity eleven, yet he called to mind how Langridge had used his influence to keep Tom Parsons from pitching in the spring. [44]

There was no denying that Langridge had influence with the sporting crowd, and it was possible that he might exert it in favor of his new chum and against Phil. But there was one comfort: Langridge was not as prominent in sports as he had been during the spring term, when he was manager of the baseball team. He had lost that position because of his failure to train and play properly, and, too, his uncle, who was his guardian, had insisted that he pay more attention to studies.

"After all, I don't believe I have much to fear from him," thought Phil. Then came a scrimmage, and he threw himself into the mass play to prevent the opposing eleven from gaining.

The practice lasted half an hour, and at the close Coach Lighton and Captain Cross walked off the field, talking earnestly.

"I wish I knew what they were saying," spoke Phil, as he and Tom strolled toward the dressing-room.

"Oh, they're saying you're the best ever, Phil."

"Nonsense! They're probably discussing how they can induce you to play."

"Well, how goes it?" called a voice, and they looked back to see Bricktop Molloy. He was perspiring freely from the hard practice he had been through at tackle. [45]

"Fine!" cried Tom. "We were just wondering if we would make the 'varsity."

"Sure you will," answered the genial Irish student, who was nothing if not encouraging. Perhaps it was because he was sure himself of playing on the first team that he was so confident.

"What did you think of Gerhart at quarter?" asked Tom, for the benefit of his chum.

"I didn't notice him much," answered Bricktop, as he ruffled his red hair. "Seemed to me to be a bit sloppy, though; and that won't do."

Phil did not say anything, but he looked relieved.

"Too bad you're not going to play, Sid, old chap," remarked Tom in the room that night, when the three chums were together. "You don't know what you miss."

"Oh, yes, I do," was the answer, and Sid looked up from the depths of the chair, closing his Greek book. "The day has gone by when I want to have twenty-one husky lads trying to shove my backbone through my stomach. I don't mind baseball, but I draw the line at posing as a candidate for a broken neck or a dislocated shoulder. Not any in mine, thank you."

"You're a namby-pamby milksop!" exclaimed Phil with a laugh and a pat on the back, that took all the sting from the words. "Worse than that, you're a——" [46]

"Well, I don't stick girls' pictures, and banners worked in silk by the aforesaid damsels, all over the room," and Sid looked with disapproval on an emblem which Tom had placed on the wall that day. It was a silk flag of Randall colors, which Madge Tyler had given to him.

"You're a misguided, crusty, hard-shelled troglodytic specimen of a misogynist!" exclaimed Tom.

"Thanks, fair sir, for the compliment," and Sid arose to bow elaborately.

Phil and Tom talked football until Sid begged them to cease, as he wanted to study, and, though it was hard work, they managed to do so. Soon they were poring over their books, and all that was heard in the room was the occasional rattle of paper, mingling with the ticking of the clock.

"Well, I'm done for to-night," announced Sid, after an hour's silence. "I'm going to get up early and bone away. Hand me that alarm clock, Tom, and I'll set it for five."

"Don't!" begged Phil.

"Why not?"

"Because if you do it will go off about one o'clock in the morning. Set it at eleven, and by the law of averages it ought to go off at five. Try it and see. I never saw such a clock as that. It's a most perverse specimen."

Phil's prediction proved, on trial, to be correct, so Sid set the clock at eleven, and went to bed, where, a little later, Tom and Phil followed. [47]

There was more football practice the next afternoon, and also the following day. Tom was doing better than he expected, but his speed was not yet equal to the work that would be required of him.

"We need quick ends," said the coach in talking to the candidates during a lull in practice. "You ends must get down the field like lightning on kicks, and we're going to do a good deal of kicking this year."

Tom felt that he would have to spend some extra time running, both on the gymnasium track and across country. His wind needed a little attention, and he was not a lad to favor himself. He wanted to be the best end on the team. He spoke to the coach about it, and was advised to run every chance he got.

"If you do, I can practically promise you a place on the eleven," said Mr. Lighton.

"Who's going to be quarter-back?" Tom could not help asking.

"I don't know," was the frank answer. "A few days ago I would have said Phil Clinton; but Gerhart, the new man, has been doing some excellent work recently. I'll be able to tell in a few days."

Somehow Tom felt a little apprehensive for Phil. He fancied he could see the hand of Langridge at work in favor of his freshman chum. [48]

The matter was unexpectedly settled a few days later. There were two scrub teams lined up, Tom and Phil being on one, and Gerhart playing at quarter on the other. There had been some sharp practice, and a halt was called while the coach gave the men some instructions. As a signal was about to be given Phil went over to the coach, and, in a spirit of the utmost fairness, complained that the opposing center was continually offending in the matter of playing off side. Phil suggested that Mr. Lighton warn him quietly.

The coach nodded comprehendingly, and started to speak a word of caution. As he passed over to the opposing side, he saw Gerhart stooping to receive the ball.

"Gerhart," he said, "I think you would improve if you would hold your arms a little closer to your body. Then the ball will come in contact with your hands and body at the same time, and there is less chance for a fumble. Here, I'll show you."

Now, when Mr. Lighton started he had no idea whatever of speaking to Gerhart. It was the center he had in mind, but he never missed a chance to coach a player. He came quite close to

the quarter-back, and was indicating the position he meant him to assume, when the coach suddenly started back.

"Gerhart, you've been smoking!" he exclaimed, and he sniffed the air suspiciously.

"I have not!" was the indignant answer.

"Don't deny it," was the retort of the coach. "I know the smell of cigarettes too well. You may go to the side lines. Shipman, you come in at quarter," and he motioned to another player.

"Mr. Lighton," began Gerhart, "I promise——"

"It's too late to promise now," was the answer the coach made. "At the beginning of practice I warned you all that if you broke training rules you couldn't play. If you do it now, what will you do later on?"

"I assure you, I—er—I only took a few——"

"Shipman," was all Mr. Lighton said, and then he spoke to the center.

Gerhart withdrew from the practice, and walked slowly from the gridiron. As he left the field he cast a black look at Phil, who, all unconscious of it, was waiting for the play to be resumed. But Tom saw it.

Fifteen minutes more marked the close of work for the day. As Tom and Phil were hurrying to the dressing-rooms, they were met by Langridge and Gerhart. The latter still had his football togs on.

"Clinton, why did you tell Lighton I had been smoking?" asked Gerhart in sharp tones.

"Tell him you had been smoking? Why, I didn't know you had been."

"Yes, you did. I saw you whispering to him, and then he came over and called me down."

"You're mistaken."

"I am not! I saw you!"

Phil recollected that he had whispered to the coach. But he could not, in decency, tell what it was about.

"I never mentioned your name to the coach," he said. "Nor did I speak of smoking."

"I know better!" snapped Gerhart. "I saw you."

"I can only repeat that I did not."

"I say you did! You're a——"

Phil's face reddened. This insult, and from a freshman, was more than he could bear. He sprang at Gerhart with clenched fists, and would have knocked him down, only Tom clasped his friend's arm.

"Not here! Not here!" he pleaded. "You can't fight here, Phil!"

"Somewhere else, then!" exclaimed Phil. "He shan't insult me like that!"

"Of course not," spoke Tom soothingly, for he, too, resented the words and manner of the freshman. "Langridge, I'll see you about this later if you're agreeable," he added significantly, "and will act for your friend."

"Of course," said Tom's former rival easily. "I guess my friend is willing," and then the two cronies strolled off.

CHAPTER VI

PROFESSOR TINES OBJECTS

"Are you going to fight him?" asked Langridge of Gerhart, when they were beyond the hearing of Tom and Phil.

"Of course! I owe him something for being instrumental in getting me put out of the game."

"Are you sure he did?"

"Certainly. Didn't I see him sneak up to Lighton and put him wise to the fact that I'd taken a few whiffs? I only smoked half a cigarette in the dressing-room, but Clinton must have spied on me."

"That's what Parsons did on me, last term, and I got dumped for it. There isn't much to this athletic business, anyway. I don't see why you go in for it."

"Well, I do, but I'm not going to stand for Clinton butting in the way he did. I wish he had come at me. You'd seen the prettiest fight you ever witnessed."

"I don't doubt it," spoke Langridge dryly.

"What do you mean?" asked his crony, struck by some hidden meaning in the words.

"I mean that Clinton would just about have wiped up the field with you."

"I'll lay you ten to one he wouldn't! I've taken boxing lessons from a professional," and Gerhart seemed to swell up.

"Pooh! That's nothing," declared Langridge. "Phil Clinton has boxed with professionals, and beaten them, too. We had a little friendly mill here last term. It was on the quiet, so don't say anything about it. Phil went up against a heavy hitter and knocked him out in four rounds."

"He did?" and Gerhart spoke in a curiously quiet voice.

"Sure thing. I just mention this to show that you won't have a very easy thing of it."

There was silence between the two for several seconds. Then Gerhart asked:

"Do you think he wants me to apologize?"

"Would you?" asked his chum, and he looked sharply at him.

"Well, I'm not a fool. If he's as good as you say he is, there's no use in me having my face smashed just for fun. I think he gave me away, and nothing he can say will change it. Only I don't mind saying to him that I was mistaken."

"I think you're sensible there," was Langridge's comment. "It would be a one-sided fight. Shall I tell him you apologize?" [54]

"Have you got to make it as bald as that? Can't you say I was mistaken?"

"I don't know. I'll try. Clinton is one of those fellows who don't believe in half-measures. You leave it to me. I'll fix it up. I don't want to see you knocked out so early in the term. Besides—well, never mind now."

"What is it?" asked Gerhart quickly.

"Well, I was going to say we'd get square on him some other way."

"That's what we will!" came eagerly from the deposed quarter-back. "I counted on playing football this term, and he's to blame if I can't."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," came from Langridge. "I never knew Clinton to lie. Maybe what he says is true."

"I don't believe it. I think he informed on me, and I always will. Do you think there's a chance for me to get back?"

"No. Lighton is too strict. It's all up with you."

"Then I'll have my revenge on Phil Clinton, that's all."

"And I'll help you," added Langridge eagerly. "I haven't any use for him and his crowd. He pushed me down stairs the other day, and I owe him one for that. We'll work together against him. What do you say?" [55]

"It's a go!" and they shook hands over the mean bargain.

"Then you'll fix it up with him?" asked Gerhart after a pause.

"Yes, leave it to me."

So that is how it was, that, a couple of hours later, Tom and Phil received a call from Langridge. He seemed quite at his ease, in spite of the feeling that existed between himself and the two chums.

"I suppose you know what I've come for," he said easily.

"We can guess," spoke Tom. "Take a seat," and he motioned to the old sofa.

"No, thanks—not on that. It looks as if it would collapse. I don't see why you fellows have such beastly furniture. It's frowsy."

"We value it for the associations," said Phil simply. "If you don't like it——"

"Oh, it's all right, if you care for it. Every one to his notion, as the poet says. But I came on my friend Gerhart's account. He says he was mistaken about you, Clinton."

"Does that mean he apologizes?" asked Phil stiffly.

"Of course, you old fire-eater," said Langridge, lighting a cigarette. "Is it satisfactory?"

"Yes; but tell him to be more careful in the future." [56]

"Oh, I guess he will be. He's heard of your reputation," and Langridge blew a ring of smoke toward the ceiling.

"I'll take him on, if he thinks Phil is too much for him," said Tom with a laugh.

"No, thanks; he's satisfied, but it's hard lines that he can't play," observed the bearer of the apology.

"That's not my fault," said Phil.

"No, I suppose not. Well, I'll be going," and, having filled the room with particularly pungent smoke, Langridge took his departure. If Tom and Phil could have seen him in the hall, a moment later, they would have observed him shaking his fist at the closed door.

"Whew!" cried Tom. "Open a window, Phil. It smells as if the place had been disinfected!"

"Worse! I wonder what sort of dope they put in those cigarettes? I like a good pipe or a cigar,

but I'm blessed if I can go those coffin nails! Ah, that air smells good," and he breathed in deep of the September air at the window.

Thus it was that there came about no fight between Phil and the "sporty freshman," as he began to be called. There was some disappointment, among the students who liked a "mill," but as there were sure to be fights later in the term, they consoled themselves.

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Meanwhile, the football practice went on. Candidates were being weeded out, and many were dropped. Gerhart made an unsuccessful attempt to regain his place at quarter, but the coach was firm; and though Langridge used all his influence, which was not small, it had no effect. Gerhart would not be allowed to play on the 'varsity (which was the goal of every candidate), though he was allowed to line up with the scrub.

"But I'll get even with Clinton for this," he said more than once to his crony, who eagerly assented.

Phil, meanwhile, was clinching his position at quarter, and was fast developing into a "rattling good player," as Holly Cross said. Tom was not quite sure of his place at end, though he was improving, and ran mile after mile to better his wind and speed.

"You're coming on," said Coach Lighton enthusiastically. "I think you'll do, Tom. Keep it up."

There had been particularly hard practice one afternoon, and word went down the line for some kicking. The backs fell to it with vigor, and the pigskin was "booted" all over the field.

"Now for a good try at goal!" called the coach, as the ball was passed to Holly Cross, who was playing at full-back. He drew back his foot, and his shoe made quite a dent in the side of the ball. But, as often occurs, the kick was not a success. The spheroid went to the side, sailing low, and out of bounds.

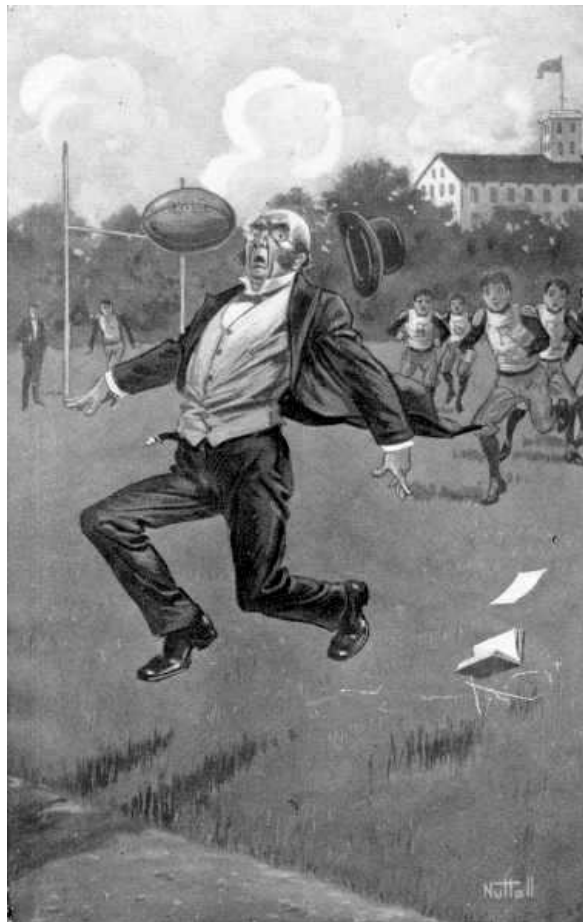
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As it happened, Professor Emerson Tines, who had been dubbed "Pitchfork" the very first time the students heard his name, was crossing the field at that moment. He was looking at a book of Greek, and paying little attention to whither his steps led. The ball was coming with terrific speed directly at his back.

"Look out, professor!" yelled a score of voices.

Mr. Tines did look, but not in the right direction. He merely gazed ahead, and seeing nothing, and being totally oblivious to the football practice, he resumed his reading.

The next moment, with considerable speed, [the pigskin struck him full in the back](#). It caught him just as he had lifted one foot to avoid a stone, and his balance was none too good. Down he went in a heap, his book flying off on a tangent.



["The pigskin struck him full in the back"](#)

"Wow!" exclaimed Holly Cross, who had been the innocent cause of the downfall. "I'll be in for it now."

"Keep mum, everybody, as to who did it," proposed Phil. "The whole crowd will shoulder the blame."

The players started on the run toward the professor, who still reclined in a sprawling attitude on the ground. He was the least liked of all the faculty, yet the lads could do no less than go to his assistance.

"Maybe he's hurt," said Tom.

"He's too tough for that," was the opinion of Bricktop.

Before the crowd of players reached the prostrate teacher he had arisen. His face was first red and then pale by turns, so great was his rage. He looked at the dirt on his clothes, and then at his book, lying face downward some distance away.

"Young gentlemen!" he cried in his sternest voice. "Young gentlemen, I object to this! Most emphatically do I object! You have gone entirely too far! It is disgraceful! You shall hear further of this! You may all report to me in half an hour in my room! I most seriously object! It is disgraceful that such conduct should be allowed at any college! I shall speak to Dr. Churchill and enter a most strenuous objection! The idea!"

He replaced his glasses, which had fallen off, and accepted his book that Tom picked up.

"Don't forget," he added severely. "I shall expect you all to report to me in half an hour."

At that moment Dr. Albertus Churchill, the aged and dignified head of the college, and Mr. Andrew Zane, a proctor, came strolling along.

"Ah! I shall report your disgraceful conduct to Dr. Churchill at once," added Professor Tines, as he walked toward the venerable, white-haired doctor. "I shall enter my strongest objection to the continuance of football here."

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There were blank looks on the faces of the players.

CHAPTER VII

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THE FIRST LINE-UP

Evidently Dr. Churchill surmised that something unusual had occurred, for he changed his slow pace to a faster gait as he approached the football squad, in front of which stood Professor Tines, traces of anger still on his unpleasant face.

"Ah, young gentlemen, at football practice, I see," remarked the doctor, smiling. "I trust there is the prospect of a good team, Mr. Lighton. I was very well pleased with the manner in which the baseball nine acquitted itself, and I trust that at the more strenuous sport the colors of Randall will not be trailed in the dust."

"Not if I can help it, sir; nor the boys, either," replied the coach.

"That's right," added Captain Holly Cross.

"I see you also take an interest in the sport," went on Dr. Churchill to Professor Tines. "I am glad the members of the faculty lend their presence to sports. Nothing is so ennobling—"

"Sir," cried Professor Tines, unable to contain himself any longer, "I have been grossly insulted to-day. I wish to enter a most emphatic protest against the continuance of football at this college. But a moment ago, as I was crossing the field, reading this Greek volume, I was knocked over by the ball. I now formally demand that football be abolished."

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Dr. Churchill looked surprised.

"I want the guilty one punished," went on Professor Tines. "Who kicked that ball at me?"

"Yes, young gentlemen, who did it?" repeated the proctor, for he thought it was time for him to take a hand. "I demand to know!"

"It wasn't any one in particular, sir," answered Coach Lighton, determined to defend his lads. "It was done on a new play we were trying, and it would be hard to say—"

"I think perhaps I had better investigate," said Dr. Churchill. "Young gentlemen, kindly report at my study in half an hour."

"If you please, sir," spoke Phil Clinton, "Professor Tines asked us to call and see him."

"Ah, I did not know that. Then I waive my right—"

"No, I waive mine," interrupted the Latin teacher, and he smoothed out some of the pages in the Greek book.

"Perhaps we had better have them all up to my office," proposed the proctor. "It is larger."

"A good idea," said the president of Randall. "Gentlemen, you may report to the proctor in half an hour. I like to see the students indulge in sports, but when it comes to such rough play that the life of one of my teachers is endangered, it is time to call a halt."

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"His life wasn't in any danger," murmured Tom.

"Hush!" whispered the coach. "Leave it to me, and it will come out all right."

"But if they abolish football!" exclaimed Phil. "That will be too much! We'll revolt!"

"They'll not abolish it. I'll make some explanation."

Dr. Churchill, Professor Tines, and the proctor moved away, leaving a very disconsolate group of football candidates on the gridiron.

"Do you suppose Pitchfork will prevail upon Moses to make us stop the game?" asked Jerry Jackson. "Moses," as has been explained, being the students' designation of Dr. Churchill.

"We'll get up a counter protest to Pitchfork's if they do," added his brother, Joe Jackson.

"Hurrah for the Jersey twins!" exclaimed Tom. The two brothers, who looked so much alike that it was difficult to distinguish them, were from the "Garden State," and thus had gained their nickname.

"Well, that sure was an unlucky kick of mine," came from Holly Cross sorrowfully.

"Nonsense! You're not to blame," said Kindlings Woodhouse. "It might have happened to any of us. We'll all hang together." [64]

"Or else we'll hang separately, as one of the gifted signers of the Fourth of July proclamation put it," added Ed Kerr. "Well, let's go take our medicine like little soldiers."

In somewhat dubious silence they filed up to the proctor's office. It was an unusual sight to see the entire football squad thus in parade, and scores of students came from their rooms to look on.

Dr. Churchill and Professor Tines were on hand to conduct the investigation. The latter stated his case at some length, and reiterated his demand that football be abolished. In support of his contention he quoted statistics to show how dangerous the game was, how many had been killed at it, and how often innocent spectators, like himself, were sometimes hurt, though, he added, he would never willingly be a witness of such a brutal sport.

"Well, young gentlemen, what have you to say for yourselves?" asked Dr. Churchill, and Tom thought he could detect a twinkle in the president's eye.

Then Coach Lighton, who was a wise young man, began a defense. He told what a fine game football was, how it brought out all that was best in a lad, and how sorry the entire squad was that any indignity had been put upon Professor Tines. He was held in high esteem by all the students, Mr. Lighton said, which was true enough, though esteem and regard are very different. [65]

Finally the coach, without having hinted in the least who had kicked the ball that knocked the professor down, offered, on behalf of the team, to present a written apology, signed by every member of the squad.

"I'm sure nothing can be more fair than that," declared Dr. Churchill. "I admit that I should be sorry to see football abolished here, Professor Tines."

Professor Tines had gained his point, however, and was satisfied. He had made himself very important, and had, as he supposed, vindicated his dignity. The apology was then and there drawn up by the proctor, and signed by the students.

"I must ask for one stipulation," said the still indignant instructor. "I must insist that, hereafter, when I, or any other member of the faculty approaches, all indiscriminate knocking or kicking of balls cease until we have passed on. In this way all danger will be avoided."

"We agree to that," said Mr. Lighton quickly, and the incident was considered closed. But Professor Tines, if he had only known it, was the most disliked instructor in college from then on. He had been hated before, but now the venom was bitter against him.

"We're well out of that," remarked Tom to Phil, as they went to their room, having gotten rid of their football togs. "I wonder what fun Pitchfork has in life, anyhow?" [66]

"Reading Latin and Greek, I guess. That reminds me, I must bone away a bit myself to-night. I guess Sid is in," he added, as he heard some one moving about in the room.

They entered to find their chum standing on a chair, reaching up to one of the silken banners Tom had hung with such pride.

"Here, you old anchorite! What are you doing?" cried Phil.

"Why, I'm trying to make this room look decent," said Sid. "You've got it so cluttered up that I can't stand it! Isn't it enough to have pictures stuck all over?"

"Here, you let that banner alone!" cried Tom, and he gave such a jerk to the chair on which Sid was standing that the objector to things artistic toppled to the floor with a resounding crash.

"I'll punch your head!" he cried to Tom, who promptly ensconced himself behind the bed.

"Hurt yourself?" asked Phil innocently. "If you did it's a judgment on you, misogynist that you are."

"You dry up!" growled Sid, as he rubbed his shins.

Then, peace having finally been restored, they all began studying, while waiting for the summons to supper. When the bell rang, Phil and Tom made a mad rush for the dining-room. [67]

"Football practice gives you a fine appetite," observed Phil.

"I didn't know you fellows needed any inducement to make you eat," spoke Sid.

"Neither we do," said Tom. "But come on, Phil, if he gets there first there'll be little left for us, in spite of his gentle words."

"We'll have harder work at practice to-morrow," continued Phil as they sat down at the table. "It will be the first real line-up, and I'm anxious to see how I'll do against Shipman."

"He's got Gerhart's place for good, has he?" asked Tom.

"It looks so. Pass the butter, will you? Do you want it all?"

"Not in the least, bright-eyes. Here; have a prune."

"Say, you fellows make me tired," observed Sid.

"What's the matter with you lately, old chap?" asked Tom. "You're as grumpy as a bear with a sore nose. Has your girl gone back on you?"

"There you go again!" burst out Sid. "Always talking about girls! I declare, since those pictures and things are up in the room, you two have gone daffy! I'll have 'em all down, first thing you know."

"If you do, we'll chuck you in the river," promised Phil.

Thus, amid much good-natured banter, though to an outsider it might not sound so, the supper went on. There was more hazing that night, in which Phil and Tom had a share, but Sid would not come out, saying he had to study.

"Come on, Tom," called Phil the next afternoon, "all out for the first real line-up of the season. I'm going to run the 'varsity against the scrub, and I want to see how I make out."

"Has the 'varsity eleven all been picked out?" asked Tom anxiously.

"Practically so, though, of course, there will be changes."

"I wonder if I—"

"You're to go at left-end. Come on, and we'll get our togs on."

After a little preliminary practice the two teams were told to line-up for a short game of fifteen-minute halves. Coach Lighton named those who were to constitute a provisional 'varsity eleven, and, to his delight, Tom's name was among the first named. Phil went to quarter, naturally, and several of Tom's chums found themselves playing with him.

"Now try for quick, snappy work from the start," was the advice of the coach. "Play as though you meant something, not as if you were going on a fishing trip, and it didn't matter when you got there."

The ball was put into play. The 'varsity had it, and under the guidance of Phil Clinton, who gave his signals rapidly, the scrub was fairly pushed up the field, and a little later the 'varsity had scored a touchdown. Goal was kicked, and then the lads were ready for another tussle.

The scrub, by dint of extraordinary hard work, managed to keep the ball for a considerable time, making the necessary gains by rushes.

"We must hold 'em, fellows!" pleaded Phil, and Captain Holly Cross added his request to that end, in no uncertain words.

Shipman, the scrub quarter, passed the pigskin to his right half-back, and the latter hit the line hard. Phil Clinton, seeing an opening, dove in for a tackle. In some way there was a fumble, and Phil got the ball. The next instant Jerry Jackson, who was on the 'varsity, slipped and fell heavily on Phil's right shoulder. The plucky quarter-back stifled a groan that came to his lips, and then, turning over on his back, stretched out white and still on the ground.

"Phil's hurt!" cried Holly Cross. "Hold on, fellows!"

Tom bent over his chum. He felt of his shoulder.

"It's dislocated," he said. "We'd better get the doctor for him, Holly."

CHAPTER VIII

LANGRIDGE AND GERHART PLOT

"Some of you fellows run for Dr. Marshall!" called Mr. Lighton to the throng that gathered about the prostrate lad.

"I'll go," volunteered Joe Jackson.

"No, let me," said his twin brother. "It was my fault. I slipped and fell on him."

"It wasn't any fellow's fault in particular," declared the captain. "It was likely to happen to any one. But suppose you twins both go, and then we'll be sure to have help. If Dr. Marshall isn't in the college, telephone to Haddonfield for one. Phil's shoulder must be snapped back into place."

As the twins started off Phil opened his eyes.

"Hurt much, old chap?" asked Tom, holding his chum's hand.

"No—not—not much," but Phil gritted his teeth as he said it. His shoulder, with the bunch of padding on it, stood out oddly from the rest of his body.

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"Put some coats under him," ordered the coach. "Shall we carry you inside, Phil?"

"No; don't move me. Is my arm broken?"

"No; only a dislocation, I guess. You'll be all right in a few days."

"Soon enough to play against Boxer Hall, I hope," said Phil with a faint smile.

"Of course," declared the coach heartily. "We'll delay the game if necessary."

"Here comes Dr. Marshall," called Ed Kerr, as the college physician was seen hurrying across the campus, with the Jersey twins trailing along behind.

The doctor, after a brief examination, pronounced it a bad dislocation, but then and there, with the help of the captain and coach, he reduced it, though the pain, as the bone snapped into place, made Phil sick and faint. Then they helped him to his room, where he was soon visited by scores of students, for the quarter-back was a general favorite.

"Now I think I will have to establish a quarantine," declared Dr. Marshall, when about fifty lads had been in to see how the patient was progressing. "I don't want you to get a fever from excitement, Clinton. If you expect to get into the game again inside of two weeks, you must keep quiet."

"Two weeks!" cried Phil. "If I have to stay out as long as that I'll be so out of form that I'll be no good."

"Well, we'll see how the ligaments get along," was all the satisfaction the doctor would give the sufferer.

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Tom and Sid remained with their chum, and, after the physician had left, they made all sorts of insane propositions to Phil with a view of making him more comfortable.

"Shall I read Greek to you?" offered Sid. "Maybe it would take your mind off your trouble."

"Greek nothing," replied Phil with a smile. "Haven't I troubles enough without that?"

"If I had some cheese I would make a Welsh rarebit," Tom said. "I used to be quite handy at it; not the stringy kind, either."

"Get out, you old rounder!" exclaimed Sid. "Welsh rarebit would be a fine thing for an invalid, wouldn't it?"

"Well, maybe fried oysters would be better," admitted Tom dubiously. "I could smuggle some in the room, only the measly things drip so, and Proc. Zane has been unusually active of late in sending his scouts around."

"I'll tell you what you can do, if you want to," spoke Phil.

"What's that?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Send word to my sister, over at Fairview. She may hear something about this, and imagine it's worse than it is. I'd like her to get it straight. I got a letter from dad to-day, too, saying mother was a little better. I'd like sis to read it."

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"I'll go myself, and start right away!" exclaimed Tom enthusiastically. "I can get permission easily enough, for I've been doing good work in class lately. I'll come back on the midnight trolley."

"You're awfully anxious to go, aren't you?" asked Sid.

"Of course," replied Tom. "Why do you speak so?"

"I believe Miss Madge Tyler attends at Fairview," went on Sid to no one in particular, and there was a mocking smile on his face.

"Oh, you just wait!" cried Tom, shaking his fist at his chum, who sank down into the depths of the old easy chair, and held up his feet as fenders to keep the indignant one at a distance. "You'll get yours good and proper some day."

"Well, if you're going, you'd better start," said Phil. "I forgot, though. You've never met my sister. That's a go!"

"Can't you give me a note to her?" asked Tom, who was fertile in expedients where young ladies were concerned.

"I guess so. Lucky it's my left instead of my right shoulder that's out of business. Give me some paper, Sid."

"Tom doesn't need a note," was the opinion of the amateur woman-hater. "He'll see Miss Tyler, and she'll introduce him."

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"That's so," agreed Tom, as if he had just thought of it. "That will do first rate. Never mind the note, Phil," and he hurried off, lest something might occur that would prevent his visit.

He readily obtained permission to go to Fairview Institute, and was soon hurrying along the river road to catch a trolley car. As he crossed a bridge over the stream, he heard voices on the farther end. It was dusk, now, and he could not see who the speakers were. But he heard this conversation:

"Did you hear about Clinton?"

"Yes; he's laid up with a bad shoulder. Well, it may be just the chance we want."

"That's odd," thought Tom. "I wonder who they can be? Evidently college fellows. Yet how can Phil's injury give them the chance they want?"

He kept on, and a moment later came in sight of the speakers. He saw that they were Fred Langridge and Garvey Gerhart.

"Good evening," said Tom civilly enough, for, though he and Langridge were not on the best of terms, they still spoke.

"Off on a lark?" asked the former pitcher with a sneer. "I thought you athletic chaps didn't do any dissipating."

"I'm not going to," said Tom shortly, as he passed on.

"Do you suppose he heard what we said?" asked Gerhart, as the shadows swallowed up Tom.

"No; but it doesn't make much difference. He wouldn't understand. Now, do you think you can do it?"

"Of course. What I want to do is to keep him laid up for several weeks. That will give me an opportunity of getting back on the eleven. He was responsible for me being dropped, and now it's my turn."

"But are you sure it will work?"

"Of course. I know just how to make the stuff. A fellow told me. If we can substitute it for his regular liniment it will do the trick all right."

"That part will be easy enough. I can think up a scheme for that. But will it do him any permanent harm? I shouldn't want to get into trouble."

"No, it won't harm him any. It will make him so he can't use his arm for a while, but that's what we want. The effects will pass away in about a month, just too late to let him get on the eleven."

"All right; if you know what you're doing, I'll help. Now then, where will we get the stuff?"

"I know all about that part. But let's get off this bridge. It's too public. Come to a quieter place, where we can talk."

"I know a good place. There's a quiet little joint in town, where we can get a glass of beer."

"Will it be safe?"

"Sure. Come on," and Langridge and his crony disappeared in the darkness, talking, meanwhile, of a dastardly plot they had evolved to disable Phil Clinton.

Tom kept on his way to the trolley.

"I wonder what Langridge and Gerhart meant?" he thought as he quickened his pace on hearing an approaching car. "Perhaps Gerhart thought he had a chance to get back on the team, because Phil is laid up. But I don't believe he has."

But Tom's interpretation of the words he had heard was far from the truth. Phil Clinton was in grave danger.

CHAPTER IX

SOME GIRLS

Tom thought the fifteen-mile trolley ride to Fairview was an unusually long one, but, as a matter of fact, it was soon accomplished, for he caught an express, and about eight o'clock that night arrived in the town where the co-educational institution was located.

"Now to find Phil's sister," he said half aloud, as he headed for the college. He knew the way well, for he had been there several times before in the previous spring, when his team played baseball.

"Hello, Parsons," a voice greeted him as he was walking up the campus. "Where you bound for?"

The speaker was Frank Sullivan, manager of the Fairview ball team.

"Oh, I just came over to see what sort of a football eleven you were going to stack up against us this fall," answered Tom easily.

"Not very good, I'm afraid," declared Frank. "We're in pretty bad shape. Several of our best men have been hurt in practice."

"We've got a few cripples ourselves," said Tom. "Phil Clinton just got laid up with a bad shoulder."

"Our half-back is a wreck," added Frank.

It is curious, but true, nevertheless, that most football elevens seem to rejoice in the number of cripples they can boast of. The worse the men are "banged up," the better those interested in the team seem to be. It may be that they wish to conceal from other teams their real condition, and so give the enemy a false idea of their strength. However that may be, the fact remains.

"So you came over to see how we were doing, eh?" went on Frank. "Well, not very good, I'm afraid. We expect to be the tailenders this season," which was not at all what Frank expected, however, nor did his friends. But he considered it policy to say so.

"I didn't come over for that alone," said Tom. "I have a message to Phil's sister. Say, how do you get into the female department of this shebang, anyhow? What's the proper method of procedure? Do I have to have the password and a countersign?"

"Pretty nearly. It's like the combination on a safe. The first thing you will have to do is to go and interview Miss Philock."

"Who's she?"

"The preceptress; and a regular ogress into the bargain. If you pass muster with her first inspection, you'll have to answer a lot of categorical questions covering your whole life history. Then, maybe, she'll consent to take a note from you to the fair damsel."

"Can't I see her?" asked Tom in some dismay, for he had counted on meeting Madge Tyler.

"See a girl student of Fairview after dark? Why, the idea is preposterous, my dear sir! Perfectly scandalous!" and Frank gave a fair imitation of an indignant lady teacher.

"Well, I'll have to send word in," decided Tom, "for I didn't bring a note."

"Do you know her personally?" asked Frank.

"Who—Miss Philock or Phil's sister?"

"Phil's sister?"

"No, I don't."

"Worse and more of it. I wish you joy of your job. But I'm off. There's going to be some hazing, and I'm on the committee to provide some extra tortures for the freshies. So long. Miss Philock has her den in that red building on your left," and, whistling a merry air, which was utterly out of keeping with Tom's spirits, Frank Sullivan walked away.

"Well, here goes," said Tom to himself, as he walked up to the residence of the preceptress and rang the bell.

An elderly servant answered his summons, and looked very much surprised at observing a good-looking youth standing on the steps. Tom asked to see Miss Philock, and the servant, after shutting the door, and audibly locking it, walked away.

"They must be terribly afraid of me," thought Tom, but further musings were put to an end by the arrival of the preceptress herself.

"What do you want, young man?" she asked, and her voice sounded like some file rasping and scraping.

"I wish to deliver a message to Miss Ruth Clinton," was Tom's answer.

"Who are you?"

"I am Thomas Parsons, of Randall College."

"Are you any relation to Miss Clinton?"

"No; but I room with her brother, and he was slightly hurt in football practice to-day. He wanted me to tell her that it was nothing serious. He also has a letter from his father, that he wished me to deliver."

Miss Philock fairly glared at Tom.

"That is a very ingenious and plausible answer," said the elderly lady slowly. "I have had many excuses made to me by young gentlemen as reasons for sending messages to young ladies under my care, but this one is the most ingenious I have ever received."

"But it's true!" insisted Tom, who perceived that his story was not believed.

"That's what they all say," was the calm answer of Miss Philock.

Tom was nonplused. He hardly knew what reply to make.

"You are evidently a stranger to our rules," went on Miss Philock. "You must go away at once, or I shall notify the proctor," and she was about to close the door.

"But," cried Tom desperately, "I have a message for Miss Ruth Clinton!"

"Are you a relative of hers?" again asked the preceptress coldly.

"No; not exactly," spoke Tom slowly.

"That's the way they all say it," she went on. "If you are not a relative you can send her no message."

"But can't you tell her what I've told you?" asked the 'varsity pitcher. "She may worry about her brother, and he wants her to have this letter from her father."

"How do I know she has a brother?" asked Miss Philock sternly.

"I am telling you."

"Yes, I know," frigidly. "Other young men have called here to see the young ladies under my charge, and they often pretend to be brothers and cousins, when they were not."

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"I am not pretending."

"I don't know whether you are or not, sir. It has been my experience that you can never trust a young man. I shall have to bid you good evening, though I do you the credit to state that your plan is a very good one. Only, I am too sharp for you, young man. You can send no message to Miss Clinton or any other young lady student under my charge."

[82]

The door was almost shut. Tom was in despair. At that moment he caught sight of a girlish figure in the hall behind the preceptress. It was Madge Tyler.

"Oh, Madge—Miss Tyler!" he cried impulsively, "will you tell Miss Clinton that her brother is not badly hurt. That is, in case she hears any rumors. His shoulder is dislocated, but he's all right."

"Why, Mr. Parsons—Tom!" exclaimed the girl in surprise. "What brings you here?"

"Young man, what do you mean by disobeying my orders in this manner?" demanded Miss Philock, bristling with anger.

"You didn't tell me not to speak to Miss Tyler," said Tom slyly. And he smiled mischievously.

"Miss Tyler—do you know her?"

"I am an old friend of hers," insisted Tom quickly, his confidence coming back.

"Is this true, Miss Tyler?" asked the head instructress.

Madge was a bright girl, and a quick thinker. She at once understood Tom's predicament, and resolved to help him out. Perhaps it was as much on her own account as Ruth's—who knows? At any rate, she said:

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"Why, Miss Philock, Tom Parsons and I have known each other ever since we were children. He is a sort of distant relation of mine. Aren't you, Tom?"

"Ye—yes, Madge," he almost stammered.

"His mother and my mother are second cousins," went on the girl, which was true enough, though Tom had forgotten it. He did not stop to figure out just what degree of kinship he bore to Madge. He was satisfied to have it as it was. Miss Philock turned to Tom.

"If I had known this at first," she said, "I would have allowed you to send a message to Miss Tyler at once. However strongly young gentlemen may insist that they are related to my girls, I never believe them. But if the statement is made by one of my pupils, I never doubt her. In view of the fact that you have come some distance, you may step into the parlor, and speak with Miss Tyler for ten minutes—no longer."

She opened the door wider. It was quite a different reception from what Tom had expected, but he was glad enough to see Madge for even that brief period. He followed her into the parlor, while Miss Philock passed down the corridor.

"Oh, Tom, I'm so glad to see you!" exclaimed the girl, and she extended both hands, which Tom held just as long as he decently could.

[84]

"And I'm glad to see you," he declared. "You're looking fine!"

"What's this about Ruth's brother?" she asked.

"It's true. He was hurt at football practice this afternoon, and he was afraid she'd worry. I told him I'd bring a message to her, and also this letter. It's from her father, about her mother. Will you give it to her?"

"Of course. Isn't it too bad about her poor, dear mother? Ruth is such a sweet girl. Have you ever met her?"

"I haven't had the pleasure."

"I wonder if I'd better introduce you to her," said Madge musingly. "She is very fascinating, and—er—well——" She looked at Tom and laughed.

"Can you doubt me?" asked Tom, also laughing, and he bowed low, with his hand on his heart.

"Oh, no! Men—especially young men—are never faithless!" she exclaimed gaily.

"But how can you present me to her, when the 'ogress,' as I have heard her called, bars the way?"

"Hush! She may hear you," cautioned Madge. "Oh, we have 'ways that are dark and tricks that are vain,' I suppose Miss Philock would say. I'll just send a message by wireless, and Ruth will soon be here. I think it will be safe. Philly, as we call her, will be in her office by this time."

[85]

Madge stepped to the steam pipes in the room, and with her pencil tapped several times in a peculiar way.

"That's a code message to Ruth to come down here," she explained.

"It's a great system," complimented Tom. "How do you work it?"

"Oh, we have a code. Each girl has a number, and we just tap that number on the pipes. You know, you can hear a tap all over the building. Then, after giving the number, we rap out the message, also by numbers. We just *had* to invent it. You boys have ever so many things that we girls can't, you know. Now tell me all about football. I suppose you will play?"

"I hope to."

"And Phil—I mean Mr. Clinton, but I call him Phil, because I hear Ruth speak of him so often—I think he plays half-back, doesn't he?"

"No; quarter," answered Tom.

"I hope to meet him soon," went on Madge. "Ruth has promised— Oh, here she is now," she interrupted herself to say. "Come in, Ruth, dear. Here is a sort of forty-second cousin of mine, with a message about your brother."

Tom looked up, to see a tall, dark, handsome girl entering the room. Behind her came a rather stout, light-haired maiden, with laughing blue eyes. [86]

"A message from my brother!" exclaimed Ruth, and she looked at Tom in a manner that made his heart beat rather faster than usual.

"Yes, Ruth," went on Madge; "but nothing serious. I'm glad you came down, too, Sarah, dear. I want you to meet my cousin."

"I brought Sarah because I was afraid I didn't get your pipe message just right," explained Ruth. "Did you mean you had company you wanted to share with me, or that there was a letter for me? I couldn't find the code book."

"It's both," declared Madge with a laugh. "But first let's get the introductions over with," and she presented Tom to Ruth, and then to Miss Sarah Warden, her roommate, as well as Ruth's.

"Phil has often spoken to me about you, Miss Clinton," said Tom. "In fact, he has your picture in our room. It doesn't look like you—I mean it doesn't do you justice—that is—er—I—I mean—"

"Better stop, Tom," cautioned Madge. "Evidently Ruth has played havoc with you already. You should study more carefully the art of making compliments."

"Miss Clinton needs no compliments other than unspoken ones," said Tom, with an elaborate bow.

"Oh, how prettily said!" exclaimed Miss Warden. "Madge, why didn't you tell us about your cousin before?" [87]

"It's time enough now," was Madge's rejoinder.

"But what about my brother?" asked Ruth anxiously.

Then Tom told her, and gave her the letter with which Phil had entrusted him. The young people talked gaily for some minutes longer, and then Madge, with a look at the clock, said that it was about time Miss Philock would be back to see that Tom had not overstayed.

"What a short ten minutes!" he exclaimed, and he looked full in Ruth Clinton's eyes.

"Wasn't it?" she agreed. "However, I hope you will come again—that is—of course you can't come here, but perhaps we—I—er—that is——" She stopped in confusion.

"You're almost as bad as Tom was!" declared Madge, and there was just a little change from her former genial tones. She glanced critically at Tom.

"I expect to come over again," replied Phil's chum. "And I hope I shall see you then, Miss Clinton—see all of you, of course," he added quickly.

"It depends on Miss Philock," said Miss Warden.

"Will you be at the Fairview-Randall football game?" asked Tom.

"Yes," answered Ruth, for he looked at her. [88]

"I shall see you and Madge, then, I hope, only it's a long way off," and Tom sighed just the least bit.

Madge raised her eyebrows. She might be pardoned for considering that Tom, in a measure, was her personal property, and now, the first time he had met Ruth, to hear him talk thus, was something of a shock.

But she was too proud to show more than a mere hint of her feelings, and Ruth was, for the time being, entirely unaware that her friend was a bit jealous.

"Here comes Philly!" exclaimed Sarah Warden, as steps were heard approaching. "You had better go, Mr. Parsons, if you value your reputation."

"Yes," spoke Madge; "better go, Tom. Sorry you couldn't stay longer."

"So am I," was his answer, and once more he looked straight at Ruth. He had thought Madge very pretty, and, while he did not waver in the least in still thinking her most attractive, he had to admit to himself that Ruth's was of a different style of beauty.

"I'm sure I don't know how to thank you for taking the trouble to bring me this message and letter," said Phil's sister, as she held out her hand to Tom. He took it in a firm clasp.

"It was only a pleasure," he said. "Next time I hope to bring better news." [89]

"Then there is to be a next time?" she asked archly.

"Of course," he replied, and laughed.

"Hurry, Tom, or Miss Philock may order you out," urged Madge. "You've overstayed your leave

as it is, and she may punish us for it. Good-by," and she held out her hand. Tom clasped it, but a careful observer, with a split-second watch, might have noted that he did not hold it quite as long as he had held Ruth's.

A few minutes later Tom was out on the campus, walking toward the trolley that would take him to Haddonfield. His brain was in something of a whirl, and his heart was strangely light.

"My! but she's pretty!" he exclaimed half aloud. "What fine eyes! I—I— Oh, well, what's the use of talking to yourself?" And with that sage reflection Tom pursued his silent way.

Back in the parlor the three girls stood for a moment.

"I like your cousin very much, Madge, dear," said Ruth.

"I shouldn't wonder!" exclaimed Madge shortly, and she turned and hurried from the room.

Ruth looked at her in some surprise.

"Whatever has come over Madge?" asked Sarah Warden.

"I can't imagine," replied Ruth, and then, with a thoughtful look on her face, she went to her room. [90]

"Humph! I guess I know," murmured Miss Warden, as she followed.

CHAPTER X

 [91]

A BOTTLE OF LINIMENT

Tom thought of many things as he walked up the silent campus at Randall, and prepared to go to his room. He went over again every happening from the time Miss Philock had grudgingly admitted him at Fairview, until he had bidden Ruth Clinton good-by. Tom had a very distinct mental picture of two girls' faces now, whereas, up to that evening, he had had but one. They were the faces of Ruth and Madge.

"Hang it all!" he burst out, as he was on the steps of the west dormitory. "I must be falling in love! This will never do, with the football season about to open. Better cut it out, Tom Parsons!"

His musing was suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a figure coming quickly from the teachers' residence, which was directly in front of the dormitory building. The figure exclaimed:

"Wait a minute, please."

"Proctor Zane!" whispered Tom to himself. "He thinks he's caught me. Probably he doesn't know I've got a permit. I'll have some fun with him." [92]

A moment later the proctor stood beside Tom.

"Are you aware of the hour?" asked Mr. Zane, in what he meant to be a sarcastic tone.

"I—I believe it's nearly two o'clock," replied Tom. "I will tell you exactly in a moment, as soon as I look at my watch," and with a flourish he drew his timepiece from his pocket. "It lacks just eight minutes of two," he added.

"I didn't ask you the time!" exclaimed the proctor.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I thought you did," spoke Tom.

"Aren't you getting in rather late?" asked the official, as he drew out his book and prepared to enter Tom's name.

"Well, it might be called late," admitted Tom, as if there was some doubt about it. "That is, unless you choose to look at it from another standpoint, and call it early morning. On the whole, I think I prefer the latter method. It is more comforting, Mr. Zane."

"None of your impertinence, Parsons!" exclaimed the proctor. "You are out after hours, and you will report to my office directly after chapel. This matter of students staying out must be broken up."

"I agree with you," went on Tom easily, "but I'm afraid I can't report to you after chapel tomorrow, or, rather, to-day, Mr. Zane." [93]

"You can't? What do you mean, Parsons?"

"Why, you see, I have to attend a lecture by Moses—I beg your pardon—Dr. Churchill—at that hour."

The proctor, as Tom could see in the light of the hall lamp, as the rays streamed from the glass door of the dormitory, looked pained at the appellation of "Moses" to the venerable head of the college. The boys all called Dr. Churchill that among themselves, though they meant no disrespect. They had evolved the title from his name; from the fact that, as one of the first students put it, the original Moses went up on a hill to establish the first church—hence Church—Hill; and thus "Moses."

"I am sure Dr. Churchill will excuse you when he knows the circumstances, Parsons," went on the proctor with a malicious smile. "You will report to me for being out after hours without

permission.”

“Oh, but I have permission,” spoke Tom, as he drew out a note which the president had given him. “I beg your pardon for not mentioning it before. Very stupid of me, I’m sure,” and this time it was Tom’s turn to grin.

The proctor looked at the permit, saw that it was in regular form, and knew that he was beaten. Without a word he turned and went back to his apartments, but the look he gave Tom augured no good to the talented pitcher. Tom went to his room, chuckling to himself. [94]

“Well?” asked Phil, who was not asleep when Tom entered. “Did you see Ruth?”

“Yes, old chap. It’s all right,” and Tom told something of his visit—that is, as much as he thought Phil would care to know. “Your sister and Miss Tyler are both sorry you were laid up,” he went on.

“I guess I’ll be out inside of a week,” said Phil. “The doc was here a while ago, and left some new liniment that he said would soften up the strained muscles and ligaments. I tried some, and I feel better already. Say, put that blamed alarm clock out in the hall, will you? I can’t sleep with the ticking of it.”

Tom did so, and then undressed. He turned the light down low, and, as he put on his pajamas, he knew, by the regular breathing of Phil, that the injured lad had fallen into a slumber. Sid, too, was sound asleep. Tom sat down on the old sofa, sinking far down into the depths of the weak springs. It creaked like an old man uttering his protest against rheumatic joints, and, in spite of the new leg Phil had put on and the strengthening boards, it threatened to collapse. Tom sat there in the half darkness dreaming—reflecting of his visit to Fairview. He imagined he could see, in the gloom of a distant corner, a fair face—which one was it? [95]

“Oh, I’ve got to cut this out,” he remarked, and then he extinguished the light and got into bed.

The next day was Saturday, and as several of the football squad were a little lame, Coach Lighton only put them through light practice. Thus the absence of Phil was not felt. He was much better, the new liniment working like a charm.

One afternoon, a few days later, Tom and Sid went for a walk, Tom as a matter of training, and Sid because he wanted to get some specimens for use in his biology class. They strolled toward the town of Haddonfield, and shortly after crossing the bridge over Sunny River, saw on the road ahead of them two figures.

“There are Langridge and Gerhart,” remarked Tom.

“Yes,” spoke Sid. “They’re quite chummy for a freshman and a sophomore. Langridge tried to save Gerhart from being hazed, but the fellows wouldn’t stand for it.”

“I should say not. He ought to take his medicine the same as the rest of us had to. But look, they don’t seem to want to meet us.”

As Tom spoke, Langridge and his crony suddenly left the road and took to the woods which lined the highway on either side.

“I wonder what they did that for?” went on Tom. [96]

“Oh, I guess they don’t like our style,” was Sid’s opinion. “We’re not sporty enough for them.”

But it was not for this reason that Langridge and Gerhart did not want to meet their two schoolmates.

“Lucky we saw them in time,” observed Gerhart to the other, as he and Langridge sneaked along. “They might have asked us why we had gone to town.”

“We shouldn’t have told them. I guess they won’t pay much attention to us. Are you going to work the trick to-day?”

“To-night, if I have a chance. There’s going to be a meeting of the glee club, and Tom and Sid both will go. That will leave Phil alone in the room, and I can get in and make the change.”

“Be careful you’re not caught. It’s a risky thing to do.”

“I know it, but it’s worth the risk if I can get back on the team. Besides, it won’t hurt Clinton much.”

“Well, it’s your funeral, not mine. You’ve got to stand for it all. I did my share helping plan it. You’ll have to take the blame.”

“I will. Don’t worry.”

“But what puzzles me is how Clinton can help knowing it when you change the liniment. As soon as he uses it he’ll see that something is wrong, and he’ll recall that you were in the room.” [97]

“Oh, no, he won’t. You see, the two liquids are so nearly alike that it’s hard to tell the difference. Then, the beauty of it is that the one I’m going to put in place of his regular liniment doesn’t take effect for twelve hours. So he’ll never connect me with his trouble.”

“All right. It’s up to you. But come on, let’s get out on the road again. I don’t fancy tramping through the woods.”

They emerged at a point some distance back of Tom and Sid, who continued their walk.

“Did I tell you I met Langridge and Gerhart the night I went to see Phil’s sister?” asked Tom after a pause.

"No. What were they doing?"

Tom related the conversation he had heard, and gave his speculations as to what Gerhart could have meant.

"I guess he's counting on Phil being laid up so long that he can have his place at quarter-back," was Sid's opinion, and Tom agreed.

The specimens of unfortunate frogs, to be used in biology, were stowed away in a box Sid carried, and then he and Tom turned back to college. That night they went to a rehearsal of the glee club.

"Do you mind staying alone, old chap?" asked Tom of Phil as they prepared to depart.

"Not a bit. Glad to get rid of you. I can move about the room, doc says, and it isn't so bad as it might be. I'll be glad to be alone, so I can think."

"All right. So long, then."

It was quiet in the room after Tom and Sid had departed. Phil tried to read, but he was too nervous, and took no interest in the book. It was out of the question to study, and, as his shoulder ached, he went back to bed again. He was in a half doze, when the door opened and Gerhart entered the room.

"Hope I didn't disturb you, old chap," he began with easy familiarity—entirely too easy, for a freshman, Phil thought with a scowl. "Parsons and Henderson out?" asked Gerhart, as if he did not know it.

"Yes, at the meeting of the glee club," answered Phil shortly.

"That's so. I'd forgotten. Well, here's a note for Parsons. Will you see that he gets it?" And Gerhart walked over to the table and laid an envelope down. There was a miscellaneous collection on the table. Among other things was a bottle of liniment which the doctor had left for Phil. "I'll just leave the note here," went on Gerhart. "That's a swell picture over your bed," he said quickly, pointing to a sporting print that hung over Phil's cot.

Naturally, the injured lad turned to see where Gerhart pointed.

"Oh, it will do very well," he answered. He rather resented this familiarity on the part of a freshman. Still, as Gerhart had called to leave a note for Tom, Phil could not order him out, as he felt like doing. When Phil turned his head back toward the middle of the room the visitor was standing near the door.

"I guess I'll be going," he said. "Hope you'll be out soon. I'm going to make another try with Lighton, and see if he won't let me play."

"Um!" spoke Phil, as he turned over to doze.

Gerhart, with an ugly smile on his face, hurried to his room in the east dormitory. Langridge was waiting for him there.

"Well?" asked the former pitcher.

"It's done!" exulted Gerhart, producing from beneath his coat a bottle that had contained liniment. "I threw the stuff out, and now I'll get rid of the bottle. I guess Phil Clinton won't play football any more this season!" He put the bottle far back on a closet shelf.

"Why don't you throw that away?" asked Langridge.

"I may need it," answered Gerhart. "I'll save it for a while."

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH SOME ONE BECOMES A VICTIM

When Sid and Tom, after glee club practice that night, were ascending the stairs to their floor, Sid stumbled, about half way up the flight. To save himself from a fall he put out his left hand, and came down heavily on it. As he did so he uttered an exclamation of pain.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

"Gave my thumb a fierce wrench! It hurts like blazes! Why didn't you tell me I was going to fall, and I'd have stayed in to-night?" he asked half humorously.

"I'm not a prophet," replied Tom. "But come on to the room, and we'll put some arnica on it. I've got some."

Holding his injured thumb tightly in his other hand, Sid finished climbing the stairs, declaiming, meanwhile, against his bad luck.

"Oh, you're a regular old woman!" exclaimed Tom. "Pretty soon it'll be so bad that if you see a black cat cross your path you won't go to lectures."

"I wish I had a black cat to use when I'm due in Latin class," spoke Sid. "Positively I get more and more rotten at that blamed stuff every day! I need a black cat, or something. Wow! How my thumb hurts!"

"Get out!" cried Tom. "Many a time on first base I've seen you stop a hot ball, and never say a word."

"That's different," declared his chum. "Hurry up and get out your arnica."

"Say, you fellows make noise enough," grumbled Phil at the entrance of his roommates. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, Sid tried to go upstairs on his hands, and he didn't make out very well," replied Tom. "I've got two patients on my list now. How are you, Phil?"

"Oh, so-so. Gerhart was here a while ago."

"He was? What did he want?"

"Left a note for you. It's on the table."

"Humph! Invitation to a little spread he's going to give. Didn't you fellows get any?" spoke Tom as he read it.

"No; and I don't want one," from Phil.

"And I'm not going," declared Tom. "Gerhart is too much of a cad for me."

"Insufferably so!" added Phil. "The little puppy gave himself such airs in here that I wanted to kick him out. But I wasn't going to say anything, for I thought you might be getting chummy with him, Tom, seeing that he left the note for you." [102]

"No, indeed. I don't know what his object is, nor why he should invite me. He and Langridge are a pair, and they can stick together," and Tom wadded up the invitation and threw it into the waste basket.

"Say, if you're going to get the arnica, I wish you'd get a move on," implored Sid, who was stretched out on the sofa. "This hurts me worse than not knowing my Virgil when I'm called on in Pitchfork's class."

"Then it can't hurt very much," said Phil. "Let's see it."

Sid held out a hand, the thumb of which was beginning to swell.

"Why don't you use some of my liniment instead of arnica for it?" proposed Phil. "It's just the stuff for a sprain. Here, pour some on your hand," and Phil, whose left arm was in a sling, handed Sid the bottle from the table. Sid poured a generous quantity on his thumb.

"Look out for the rug!" exclaimed Tom. "Do you want to spoil it?" for the liniment was dripping from Sid's hand.

"Spoil it? Spoil this tattered and torn specimen of a fake oriental?" queried Sid with a laugh. "Say, if we spread molasses on it the thing couldn't look much worse than it does. I've a good notion to strike for a new one." [103]

"Don't," begged Phil. "We don't have to clean our feet when we come in now, and if we had a new rug we'd feel obliged to."

"All right, have it your own way," remarked Tom. "But you've got enough liniment on there for two thumbs. Here, give me the bottle, and rub what's on your hand in where the swelling is."

Sid extended the bottle to Tom. Phil, who was holding the cork, endeavored to insert it during the transfer. The result was a fumble, the phial slipped from Sid's grasp, Tom made a grab for it, but missed, and Phil, with only one good hand, could do nothing. The bottle crashed to the floor and broke, the liniment running about in little rivulets from a sort of central lake.

"Now you have done it!" exclaimed Tom.

"Who?" demanded Sid.

"You and Phil. Why didn't you let me do the doctoring? You two dopes aren't able to look after yourselves! Look at the rug now!"

"It was as much your fault as ours," declared Sid. "Why didn't you grab the bottle?"

"Why didn't you hand it to me? I like your nerve!"

"That's a nice spot on a rug," said Phil in disgust.

"It adds to the beauty," declared Sid. "It just matches the big grease spot on the other side, which was left as a souvenir by the former occupants of this study. They must have made a practice of dropping bread and butter on the floor about eight nights a week. But say, if you want to do something, Tom, rub this stuff into my thumb, will you?" [104]

"Sure; wait until I pick up this broken glass. I don't want to cut my feet on it, in case I should take to walking in my sleep."

He was soon vigorously massaging Sid's injured hand, using a piece of flannel as directed by Phil, and was given a vote of thanks for the professional manner in which he did it.

"I'm sorry about your liniment, Phil," said Tom. "It's all gone. The only thing I see for you to do is to cut out that piece of the rug where it has soaked in, and bind it on your shoulder."

"Oh, it doesn't matter. I won't need any more to-night, and to-morrow I'll get some more from the doctor."

Sid was the first to awaken the next morning. A peculiar sensation about his injured hand

called his attention to it. He pulled it from under the covers and glanced at it. Then he tried to bend the fingers. They were as stiff as pieces of wood. So was the thumb. It was as if it had been encased in a plaster cast.

"I say, you fellows!" called Sid in some alarm.

"What's the matter?" inquired Tom. "Don't you know it's Sunday, and we can sleep as long as we like?"

"Look at my hand! Look at it!" exclaimed Sid tragically. "I can't use it!"

Something in his tones made Tom get up. He strode over to the bed.

"Say, that is mighty queer," he remarked, as he tried to bend Sid's fingers, and could not. "You must have given yourself a fearful knock."

"Or else that liniment wasn't the right thing for it," added Phil, sitting up. "Better call the doc."

[105]

CHAPTER XII

[106]

THE FIRST GAME

The three chums looked at each other. Phil felt of Sid's curiously stiffened hand.

"I don't see how it could be the liniment," he said. "I've used it right along. It's the same thing doc gave me. You must have hurt your hand worse than you thought."

"I guess I did," admitted Sid. So skilfully had Gerhart carried out his dastardly plot that even his unusual visit to the room of the trio attached no suspicion to him. The breaking of the bottle of liniment destroyed one link in the chain against him, and it would be difficult to trace anything to Gerhart now.

Dr. Marshall looked grave when he saw Sid's hand.

"That is very unusual," he said. "It must have been something you put on it. The muscles and tendons have been stiffened. There is a drug which will do that, but it is comparatively rare. It is sometimes used, in connection with other things, to keep down swelling, but never to soften a strain. Are you sure you used only the liniment I left for Clinton?"

[107]

"That's all," declared Tom.

"Let me see the bottle," said the physician, as he twirled his glasses by their cord and looked puzzled.

"We can't; it's all gone," explained Phil, and he told of the accident.

"Humph! Very strange," mused Dr. Marshall. "I'm afraid you'll not be able to use your hand for a month, Henderson. You have every indication of having used the peculiar drug I speak of, yet you say you did not, and I don't see how you could have, unless it got in the liniment by mistake. And that it did not is proved by the fact that Clinton used the same liniment without any ill effects. Only that Parsons used a rag to rub with, his hand would be out of commission, too. It is very strange. I wish there was some of the liquid left. I will see the druggist who put it up. Possibly he can explain it."

"Well, I'm glad I didn't put any on my shoulder," said Phil. "It would have been all up with me and football, then."

"It certainly would," admitted Dr. Marshall. "Let me look at your dislocation."

"When can I get into the game again?" asked Phil anxiously, after the inspection.

"Humph! Well, I think by the middle of the week. It is getting along better than I expected. Yes, if you pad it well you may go into light practice to-morrow, and play in a game the end of the week."

[108]

"Good!" cried Phil. "Then's when we tackle Fairview Institute for the first game of the season!"

The next day a notice was posted on the bulletin board in the gymnasium, stating that the 'varsity eleven would line up against the scrub that afternoon in secret practice. Then followed a list of names of those selected to play on the first team. It was as follows:

<i>Left-end</i>	TOM PARSONS
<i>Left-tackle</i>	ED KERR
<i>Left-guard</i>	BOB MOLLOY
<i>Center</i>	SAM LOOPER
<i>Right-guard</i>	PETE BACKUS
<i>Right-tackle</i>	BILLY HOUSENLAGER
<i>Right-end</i>	JOE JACKSON
<i>Quarter-back</i>	PHIL CLINTON
<i>Right half-back</i>	DAN WOODHOUSE
<i>Left half-back</i>	JERRY JACKSON
<i>Full-back</i>	HOLLY CROSS

"Hurrah, Tom! You're at left-end!" cried Phil, who, with his chum, was reading the bulletin.

"I'm glad of it. Are you all right for practice?"

[109]

"Sure. Come on; let's get into our togs."

On the outer fringe of football players stood Langridge and Gerhart. There was surprise on their faces at the sight of Phil getting ready to play.

"Something went wrong," whispered Langridge to his crony. "Your scheme didn't work."

"I see it didn't," admitted Gerhart with a scowl. "I wonder where the slip was?"

But when he heard of the peculiar ailment from which Sid Henderson suffered, Gerhart knew.

"I lost that chance," he said to Langridge, "but I may see another to get square with Clinton, and, when I do, I'll not fail. It's too late, maybe, for me to get in the game now, but I'll put him out of it, and don't you forget it!"

Phil was a little stiff in practice, but he soon warmed up, and the 'varsity eleven played the scrub "all over the field."

"That's what I like to see," complimented the coach. "Now, boys, play that way against Fairview on Saturday, and you'll open the season with a victory. I want you to win. Then we'll have a better chance for the championship. The schedule is different from the baseball one, you know. We don't play so many games with Boxer Hall and Fairview as we did in the spring, consequently each one counts more. Now I'm going to give you some individual instruction."

[110]

Which the coach did very thoroughly, getting at the weak spots in each man's playing, and commenting wisely on it, at the same time showing him how he ought to play his position. There was practice in passing the ball, falling on it, kicking and tackling.

"We want to do considerable work in the forward pass and the on-side kick this season," the coach went on. "I think you are doing very well. Parsons, don't forget to put all the speed you can into your runs, when getting down on kicks.

"You Jersey twins don't want to be watching each other so. I know you are fond of one another, but try to forget that you are brothers, and be more lively in the game."

Jerry and Joe Jackson joined in the laugh that followed.

"As for you, Snail Looper," continued Coach Lighton, giving the center the name he had earned from his habit of prowling about nights and moving at slow speed, "you are doing fairly well, but be a little quicker. Try to forget that you're a relative of the *Helix Mollusca*. You backs, get into plays on the jump, and take advantage of the momentum. That's the way to smash through the line. Now then, we'll try signals again. Clinton, keep a cool head. Nothing is worse than getting your signals mixed, and you fellows, if you don't understand exactly what the play is, call for the signal to be repeated. That will save costly fumbles. Now line up again."

[111]

They went through the remainder of the practice with a snap and vim that did the heart of the coach and the captain good. The scrub team was pretty well worn out when a halt was called.

"Do you think you will beat Fairview?" asked Ford Fenton of Tom a little later, when the left-end and Phil were on their way to supper, after a refreshing shower bath.

"I hope so, Ford. But you never can tell. Football is pretty much a gamble."

"Yes, I suppose so. But my uncle says——"

"Say, are you going to keep that up this term?" demanded Phil wearily. "If you are, I'm going to apply to the courts for an injunction against you and your uncle."

"Well," continued Fenton with an injured air, "he was football coach here for some time, and my uncle says——"

"There he goes again!" cried Tom. "Step on him, Phil!"

But Ford, with a reproachful look, turned aside.

"I don't see why there's such a prejudice against my uncle," he murmured to himself. But there wasn't. It was against the manner in which the nephew ceaselessly harped on what his relative said, though Ford was never allowed to tell what it was.

[112]

The Randall eleven was fairly on edge when they indulged in light practice Saturday morning, preparatory to leaving for Fairview, where the first game of the season was to take place.

"Feel fit, Tom?" asked Sid, who had to carry his left hand in a sling. Dr. Marshall had been unable to learn anything from the druggist that put up the liniment, and the cause for the queer stiffness remained undiscovered.

"As fit as a fiddle," replied the lad. "How about you, Phil?"

"I'm all to the Swiss cheese, as the poet had it. Is it about time to start?"

"Nearly. We're going in a special trolley. Does your shoulder pain you any?"

"Not a bit."

"I suppose—er—that is—er—your sister will be at the game?" ventured Tom.

"Of course. She's as daffy about it as I am. If she had been a boy she'd have played. Miss Tyler will be there, of course?" Phil questioned in turn.

"I don't know—I suppose so," answered Tom. "Oh, of course. She and your sister will probably go together."

"Yes, they're great chums. I wonder why I didn't get a letter from dad to-day? He promised to write every night. I ought to have received one. I'd like to know how my mother is."

[113]

"Well, no news is good news," quoted Tom. "Let's start. I get nervous when I have to sit around."

There was a large crowd on the grandstand at the Fairview gridiron when the Randall team arrived. The seats were rapidly filling up, and when, a little later, the visiting eleven trotted out for practice, they were received with a burst of cheers.

"What's the matter with Randall?" demanded Bean Perkins, who had been christened "Shouter" from the foghorn quality of his tones. He generally led the college cheering and singing. Back came the usual reply that nothing whatever ailed Randall.

"There's a good bunch out," observed Tom to Phil as they passed the ball back and forth. "Look at the girls! My, what a lot of them!"

"And all pretty, too," added Phil. "At least, I know one who is."

"Who?"

"Miss Tyler."

"I know another," spoke the left-end.

"Who's that?"

"Your sister. She's prettier than the photograph."

"You'd better tell her so."

"I did."

"Whew! It doesn't take you long to get down to business. But come on. They're going to line up for practice," and the two ran over to join their teammates.

[114]

What a mass of color the grandstands and bleachers presented! Mingled with the youths and men were girls and women in bright dresses, waving brighter-hued flags. There were pretty girls with long horns, tied with streamers of one college or the other. There were more pretty girls with long canes, from which flew ribbons of yellow and maroon—Randall's colors. There were grave men who wore tiny footballs on their coat lapels, a knot of ribbon denoting with which college they sided.

Massed in one stand were the cheering students of Randall, bent on making themselves heard above the songs and yells of their rivals. Nor were the girls of Fairview at all backward in giving vent to their enthusiasm. They had songs and yells of their own, and, under the leadership of Madge Tyler, were making themselves heard.

Tom, in catching a long kick, ran close to the stand where the Fairview girls were massed. Madge was down in front, getting ready to lead them in a song.

"Hello!" cried Tom to her, as he booted the pigskin back to Ed Kerr.

"Sorry I can't cheer for you this time!" called Madge brightly.

"Well, I'm sorry we will have to push the Fairview boys off the field," retorted Tom.

[115]

"Oh, are you going to do that?" asked a girl behind Madge, and Tom, who had been vainly looking for her, saw Ruth Clinton.

"Sorry, but we have to," he replied. "Aren't you ashamed to cheer against your own brother?"

"Oh, I guess Phil is able to look after himself," said Ruth. "Is his shoulder all right, Mr. Parsons?"

"Doing nicely."

Just then the referee's whistle blew to summon the players from practice.

"I'll see you after the game," called Tom, and as he glanced from Ruth to Madge, he saw the latter regarding him rather curiously from her brown eyes. With a queer feeling about the region where he imagined his heart to be, he ran across the field.

"Remember—fast, snappy play!" was the last advice from Coach Lighton. "You're going to win, boys. Don't forget that!"

From the stand where the Randall supporters were gathered came that enthusing song—the song they always sang at a big game—"*Aut vincere aut mori*"—"Either we conquer or we die!"

"Keep cool and smash through 'em," spoke Captain Cross to his players, as the referee and other officials took their places.

It was Fairview's kick-off, and a moment later the ball came sailing through the air. Holly Cross caught it, and, well protected by interference, began to rush it back. But the Fairview players, by amazing good play, managed to get through, and Holly was downed after a run back of twenty yards.

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"Now, boys, all together!" called Phil, as he eagerly got into place behind big Snail Looper, who was bending over the ball. Then the quarter-back rattled off a string of signals for Jerry Jackson,

the left half-back, to take the ball through the opposing left tackle and end.

Back came the ball, accurately snapped by the center. Jerry Jackson was on the alert and took it from Phil as he passed him on the run. Kindlings Woodhouse smashed in to make a hole for his brother back, who closely followed. Captain Cross, on the jump, took care of the opposing left-end, and with a crash that was heard on the grandstand, one of the Jersey twins hit the line. The game was fairly begun.

CHAPTER XIII

[117]

SMASHING THE LINE

"First down!" came the encouraging cry, when the mass of players had become disentangled, and Jerry Jackson was seen to still have possession of the ball. He had made a great gain.

"Now, once more, fellows!" called Phil. "Smash the line to pieces!"

Again there came a play, this time with Holly Cross endeavoring to go between center and guard. But, unexpectedly, he felt as if he had hit a stone wall. Fairview had developed unusual strength. There was no gain there. But Phil thought he knew the weakness of the opposing team, and he decided for another try at line bucking. There would still be time for kicking on the third down, and he wanted his team to have the ball as long as possible early in the game.

This time he signaled for Dutch Housenlager, who was at right tackle, to go through left tackle. The play was well executed, but Dutch was a little slow at hitting the line, and after a slight advance he was held, and only five yards were gained. Randall must kick, and the yells of delight that had greeted her first advance were silenced, while the supporters of the co-educational academy prepared to encourage their players by vocal efforts.

[118]

Holly Cross booted the ball well up into the enemy's territory. Tom, and Joe Jackson, the ends, were down like tigers, but they could not break through the well-organized interference that surrounded Roger Barnes, the Fairview full-back. On he rushed until Phil, pluckily breaking through, tackled him fiercely.

"Now see how we can hold 'em!" called Holly Cross to his men, and they all braced, ready for the smash they knew would come. Nor was it long delayed. Right at the center of the line came Lem Sellig, the Fairview left half-back. But he met Snail Looper's solid flesh, supported by Phil and the three other backs. Yet, in spite of this, Lem managed to advance.

"Hold! hold!" pleaded Holly, and, with gritting teeth and tense muscles, his men did hold. But ten yards had been gained. Fairview was not as easy as had been hoped.

Once more the line-smashing occurred, but this time not for such a gain, and on the next try Fairview was forced to kick.

"Right down the line, now!" called Phil, and, as if the cheering contingent understood, Bean Perkins, with his foghorn voice, started the song: "Take it to the Goal Posts, Boys!"

[119]

It had been decided, before the game, that Randall would attempt only straight football, at least during the first half. Coach Lighton wisely advised against trick plays so early in the season, as there were a number of comparatively new men on the eleven. So Phil, when his side had the ball again, called for more line-smashing, and his men responded nobly.

They advanced the ball to the twenty-five yard line, and, though tempted to give the signal for a goal from the field, Phil refrained, as there was a quartering wind blowing. He did signal for a fake kick play, however, feeling that he was justified in it, and to his horror there was a fumble. Fairview broke through and captured the ball.

Dejected and almost humiliated, Randall lined up to receive a smashing attack, but instead Fairview kicked, for her captain was nervous, and feared the holding powers of his opponent's line.

"Now we've got 'em!" yelled Phil, as Holly Cross began running back with the pigskin. The Fairview ends were right on hand, however, and broke through the interference, so that Holly was downed ere he had covered ten yards. But it gave Randall the ball, and then, with a grim determination to smash or be smashed, the lads went at the Fairview line hammer and tongs. They rushed the ball to the ten-yard line this time, and then came a rapid succession of sequence plays, no signals being given. Indeed, had Phil yelled the numbers and letters through a megaphone, they could hardly have been heard, so tumultuous was the cheering of the Randall supporters.

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Against such whirlwind playing as this the Fairview line crumpled and went to pieces. Slam-bang at it came first Holly Cross, then Kindlings, and then Jerry Jackson. The latter, by a great effort, managed to wiggle along the last few inches, and placed the ball over the final white mark.

"Touch-down!" yelled Tom Parsons, and a touch-down it was. How the cheers broke forth then! What a riot of color from the grandstands! How the flags, ribbons and banners waved! How the gay youths and grave men yelled themselves hoarse! How the girls' shrill voices sounded over the field!

The goal was missed on account of the strong wind, and once more the play started in. There was more line-smashing and some kicking, yet the half ended with the score five to nothing in favor of Randall.

There was much talk in the dressing-room of the Randall players during the intermission. Some of the players pleaded for the trial of trick plays which they had practiced, but Coach Lighton insisted on line-smashing.

"I know it is more tiresome," he said, "but it will be better practice for you now. You need straight football early in the season. Clinton, how is your shoulder holding out?" [121]

"Fine. It doesn't hurt me at all."

As only minor hurts had resulted from the play of the first half, no change was made in the line-up. Once more, when the whistle blew, did the whirlwind work begin. There was a noticeable difference in the style of Fairview. They had put in some new men, and were playing a kicking game. They were holding better in the line, too.

The result was that after several minutes of play, during which the ball had changed hands several times, the Randall players were tiring. It was what the wily captain of the Fairview team had counted on. Then he sent his men smashing the line, and to the grief of Holly Cross he saw his men being pushed back. In vain did he appeal to them—even reviled them—for not holding their ground. But it was impossible, and, following a sensational run around right end, Joe Jackson missing an easy tackle of Lem Sellig, the latter player made a touch-down. This time it was the chance for the Fairview supporters to cheer and yell, and they did it, the singing contingent rendering with much effect: "We Have Old Randall's Scalp Now."

The score was tied, as Fairview failed to kick goal, and at it they went again, smash and hammer, hammer and smash. Phil called for a trick play, and it worked well, but the gain was small, and a little later the ball went to Fairview on a penalty. Then came the surprise of the day. On a forward pass the pigskin was taken well toward Randall's goal line, and after the down Ted Puder, the husky left-tackle, was shoved over for another touch-down. [122]

The stands fairly trembled under the cheers, yells and excited stamping of the co-educational. The girls sang a song of victory, and the Randall players, with woe-begone faces, gathered behind their goal posts. There was a futile attempt to block the kick, but the spheroid sailed over the bar. The score was eleven to five against Randall.

CHAPTER XIV

"GIRLS ARE QUEER"

 [123]

"Now, fellows, we can win, or at least tie the score yet," remarked Captain Cross, as his players were sent back to the middle of the field for another kick-off. "Smash through 'em! Phil, try our forward pass and on-side kick."

"There are only five minutes more of play," said Tom, who heard that from the timekeeper.

"Never mind, we can do it. Tie the score, anyhow!"

But it was not to be. Smash through the line though her players did, for there seemed no stopping them, successful as the forward pass was, and with the gain netted by an on-side kick, Randall could do no better than to carry the ball to the Fairview ten-yard line.

There might have been a try for a field goal, but Phil decided there was no chance for it, whereas bucking the line was almost a sure thing. His men were doing magnificent work, for they had carried the ball continuously from the middle of the field without loss. Two minutes more of play would have given them a touch-down, but the fatal whistle blew, and with a groan the Randall players knew their last hope was gone. [124]

There came the usual cheers and college yells for the vanquished from the victors, and the return of the compliment. Then the downcast Randall lads filed slowly across the gridiron. They were sad at heart, and Coach Lighton noticed it.

"Fellows, you did magnificent work!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "You really did!"

"All except winning," said Tom gloomily.

"I think we played rotten!" burst out Phil, who seemed to take it much to heart.

"And I let Sellig get around me, and missed tackling him," said Joe Jackson, fairly groaning. "That cost us the game."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Captain Cross, who knew the danger of despondency. "You did all right, Joe; and the other Jersey twin shone like a star on a dark night. We're all right."

"Yes, except for what ails us," added Dutch Housenlager, making a playful attempt to trip up Tom.

"Here! Quit that!" exclaimed the left-end in no gentle voice.

Coach Lighton noticed it. Tom, as well as the others, was "on edge." It would not need much more to demoralize the team. He must stop the growing feeling.

"Fellows," he exclaimed, "you're all right! I know what I'm talking about. I've coached teams before, and I say that for the first game of the season you did all that could be expected. I'm proud of you. I——"

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"A thing like this happened once before," said a voice at the elbow of the coach. "My uncle says ——"

But Ford Fenton got no further, for Dutch Housenlager, putting out his foot, neatly tripped the offending one, and the rest of his sentence was mumbled to the grass.

"Serves him right!" exclaimed Tom, and in the laugh that followed the nervous, disappointed feeling of the team, in a measure, passed off.

"Fairview has a good team," went on Coach Lighton. "I give them credit for that. But we have a better one, and now that we know their style of play and their weakness we can beat them next game. We'll have another chance at them."

"And we'll wipe up the gridiron with 'em!" cried Holly Cross. "Forget it, fellows! Let's sing 'Marching to the Goal Posts,'" which they did with such a vim that the spirits of all were raised many degrees.

"Well, Phil," remarked Tom, as he was getting off his football togs, "we were sort of up against it, eh?"

"Oh, it might have been worse. But the way the fellows rushed the ball up the field the last five minutes was a caution. It was like a machine."

[126]

"Yes; we ought to have done that first."

"That's right. By the way, I'm going to see my sister. Want to come along?"

"Sure!" exclaimed Tom with such eagerness that Phil remarked dryly:

"I don't know that she'll be with Madge Tyler."

"Oh—er—that is—that's all right," said Tom hastily, and he swallowed quickly. "I'll go along."

"All right," said Phil.

They finished dressing, and went across the field to where a crowd of spectators was still congregated.

"Think you can find her in this bunch?" asked Tom, but he was taking no chances, for he himself was keeping a sharp lookout for a certain fair face.

"Oh, I guess so. If I don't spot her she'll glimpse me. Girls are great for finding people in a crowd. Sis always seems to do it."

"Oh, Phil!" called a voice a moment later, and Ruth Clinton hurried up to her brother, gaily waving a Fairview flag. She was followed by Madge Tyler, who also had her college colors with her. "How's your shoulder?" asked Ruth anxiously. "I was so nervous that I couldn't bear to look at the plays."

"Yes, you've got a lot of ruffians on your team," retorted her brother. "They don't know how to play like gentlemen."

[127]

"But they know how to win!" exclaimed Madge, as she greeted her chum's brother.

"That's right," admitted Phil, making a rueful face.

"I'm sorry I had to cheer against you and Mr. Parsons to-day," went on Madge, as she looked at Phil. "I really—well, of course I can't say I really wanted to you to win against Fairview, but I wish the score had been even."

"There's no satisfaction in that," retorted Tom. "We lost, and they won, fairly and squarely."

"Oh, I'm glad you admit that," spoke Ruth with a laugh, and she waved her flag in Tom's face. He made a grab for it, and caught the end of the cane. For an instant he stood thus, looking into the laughing, mischievous eyes of Ruth Clinton.

"Do you want it?" she asked daringly.

"Yes," said Tom, "even though it is the color of the enemy."

"What will you give me for it?" she asked.

"My colors," said Tom, taking a small knot of yellow and maroon from his coat lapel. "We'll exchange until the victory goes the other way about."

"All right," she agreed laughingly. "Don't forget, now. Mr. Parsons."

"I'll not," he assured her, and he turned to see Madge regarding him curiously. Her eyes shifted away quickly as they met his.

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"Heard from dad?" asked Phil, who had been an amused witness to the little scene.

"Yes, I have a letter with me," answered his sister. "Here it is," and she handed it to Phil. "Mother is some better."

"That's good. Do you have to get right back to college, or have you girls time to go down the street and have some soda?" asked Phil.

"Oh, we'll make time to go with *you!*" exclaimed Madge, and she accented the last word. Tom

looked at her keenly.

"Come on, then," invited Phil, and, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, he swung alongside of Madge, leaving Tom to walk with Ruth. Nor was Tom at all slow to take advantage of this arrangement, though for a brief instant he hardly knew whether or not he ought to go with her, considering how friendly Madge had been with him since she gave up going with Langridge.

"How does it feel to lose?" asked Ruth, as she walked with Tom.

"Not very good," he answered, as he listened to Madge's gay laugh at something Phil said. He was reflecting how well she got along with the handsome quarter-back. But Tom was not unaware of the charms of the pretty girl at his side. They talked on many subjects during the walk to town, and Tom felt like a chap who has had offered to him the choice of two most delightful companions, and cannot tell which one he likes best. Ruth was certainly an attractive girl, and her jolly laugh—but just then he heard the rippling tones of Madge's voice.

"Oh, hang it all!" he thought to himself. "What am I up against?"

They spent a jolly afternoon before it was time for Tom and Phil to start back to Randall.

"I hope you'll come over again—soon," said Ruth to her brother as they were about to part.

"I will, if Miss Tyler will second your invitation," replied Phil.

"Of course I will," said Madge heartily.

"Can't I come, too?" asked Tom.

"Of course," answered Ruth promptly. "I shall expect you to report to me on the condition of my colors."

"Oh, of course," was Tom's remark. Then he waited for Madge to say something to him, but she turned away without a word. Yet Tom could not forget that she had added her invitation to that of Ruth in regard to Phil.

Whereat, wondering over some matters on the way home, Tom said to his chum:

"Girls are queer, aren't they?"

"Are you just finding that out?" asked the quarter-back.

"I guess so," was what Tom said.

CHAPTER XV

PHIL SAVES WALLOPS

They were talking the game over in their room—Phil, Sid and Tom. Sid, from the effects of the strong liquid which Gerhart had substituted for the liniment, still had to carry his hand in a sling, but the fingers were slowly losing their stiffness.

"Where you fellows made a mistake," Sid was saying, as he moved about on the creaking old sofa to get into a more comfortable position, "where you fellows made a mistake was in not doing more kicking early in the game."

"Oh, I suppose you could have run things better than Phil did?" suggested Tom, not altogether pleasantly.

"Not better, but different. You should have tired them out, and then smashed their line all to pieces."

"It wasn't altogether such easy smashing as you would suppose, sitting and watching the game from the grandstand, was it, Tom?" came from Phil.

"Not exactly," responded the left-end, as he rubbed his shoulder, which he had bruised making a hard tackle. "They were as tough as nails. I suppose we did fairly well, considering everything."

"All but winning," spoke Sid drowsily. "You didn't do that, you know. Now be fair; did you?"

"Oh, cut it out, you old would-be philosopher!" cried Phil, twisting around in the easy chair to reach something to throw at his chum. All he could find was a newspaper, and he doubled that up. It missed Sid, and hitting an ink bottle on the mantle, broke the phial, the black fluid flowing down over the wall and on the carpet.

"That's a nice thing to do!" cried Tom. "Say, what do you want to make a rough house for? Isn't this den bad enough as it is, without you doing that?"

"I didn't mean to," answered Phil contritely.

"Look at the rug!" went on Tom, as the ink formed a black pool. "Pretty, isn't it?"

"We'll get the pattern changed if we keep on," murmured Sid, without opening his eyes. "There's the liniment spot, now the ink spot, and the grease spots left by the former occupants. Maybe we ought to get a new rug, fellows."

"Not this term," said Tom emphatically. "I've run over my money as it is, and I don't like to ask dad for more."

"I notice you had some to spend for flowers to-night," remarked Phil.

On the way home from the game Tom had stopped in a florist's in Fairview and given an order, while Phil remained outside. [133]

"You don't mean to say that Tom has been sending flowers to some girl?" demanded Sid, sitting up.

"Well, you can draw your own conclusions," replied Phil. "He didn't bring 'em home to decorate *our* room, that's sure."

"Worse and some more, too," murmured Sid. "What are you coming to, Tom?" He looked reproachfully at his chum. Then he shook his head. "This girl business!" he spluttered. Then, as his eyes gazed about the room, he caught sight of the little flag of Fairview colors which Ruth Clinton had given Tom. The latter had placed it partly behind a picture of a football game. "Where did that come from?" demanded Sid, getting up from the couch with an effort and striding over to the offending emblem.

"It's mine!" declared Tom. "Ruth—I mean Phil's sister—gave it to me."

For an instant Sid looked at his chum. Then his gaze traveled to the picture of the girl—the two girls—for that of Madge was beside the likeness of Ruth—and the former first-baseman sighed.

"Well," he said, "I s'pose there's no hope for it, but I wish I'd gone in with some fellows who weren't crazy on the girl question. First thing I know you fellows will have this a regular boudoir; and then where will I be? I expect any day now you'll be wanting to get rid of this old couch and chair, and get some mission furniture, so that you can have a five o'clock tea here, and invite some girls and chaperons." [134]

"Suppose we do?" asked Phil, who for some reason sided with Tom.

"Well, all I've got to say is that I give up," and Sid, with a helpless look, flung himself down on the sofa and turned his back on his chums. "Next you know you'll be playing tennis or croquet instead of football. You make me sick! I tell you what it is, if you put any more of those tomfool decorations, like flags and photographs, in this room, I'm going to quit!" and Sid spoke earnestly.

"Aw, forget it, you old misanthropic specimen of a misogynist!" exclaimed Phil with a laugh. "You'll be there yourself some day, and then you'll see how it is."

"Say, you talk as if you had a girl, too!" cried Sid, sitting up again and looking fixedly at Phil.

"Maybe I have," was the noncommittal answer.

"Then you've gone back on me, too," was what Sid said, as he pretended to go to sleep.

It was quiet in the room for a while, each lad busy with his thoughts. Who shall say what they were? One thing is certain—that the gazes of Tom and Phil often traveled to the wall on which were the photographs of two girls—Madge and Ruth. Tom looked at both; but Phil—well, did you ever know a fellow, no matter how nice a sister he had, to care to steal surreptitious glances at her picture? Did you? Well, that's all I'm going to say now. [135]

The fussy little alarm clock ticked monotonously on, as if anxious to get its work done. Still neither of the three chums spoke. Occasionally Sid would shift his position, but he did not open his eyes. Tom sometimes looked at the liniment stain in the carpet, and then at the ink spot.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't get a blotter and sop up some of that writing fluid," suggested Phil to Tom at last.

"Why don't you do it yourself?" was the retort. "You knocked it over."

"I'm too comfortable," murmured Phil from the depths of the chair.

"Humph!" grunted Tom. Then there was silence once more.

"How's your hand, Sid?" asked Tom, when the clock had ticked off what seemed to the lads about a million strokes.

"A little better. That's the worst thing I ever had happen to me," and Sid looked at his stiffened fingers. "I don't know what you fellows are going to do, but I'm going to bed!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I'm sleepy." [136]

"Come on out and take a walk," proposed Tom to Phil. "I'm stiff and lame. Maybe I can walk it off. Then we'll take a hot bath in the gym and turn in."

"That sounds good," agreed Phil. "I'll go you."

They left Sid undressing and went out, it not being a proscribed hour. After a brisk walk around the campus they started for the gymnasium. As they neared it they heard voices coming from the direction of Biology Hall, a small building situated to the right of their dormitory.

"Now, then, hold him, Gerhart, while I clip him two or three good ones!" they heard some one say, and immediately after that came in pleading tones:

"Oh, please don't hit me again, Mr. Langridge. I did the best I could for you."

"The best, you little rat! You didn't get the stuff I sent you for!" exclaimed Langridge angrily.

"Because they wouldn't sell me the whisky," was the answer. "Oh, Mr. Langridge, please don't hit me!"

"It's Wallops!" exclaimed Phil. "Wallops, the little messenger. What's that brute Langridge up

to now?"

"Seems as if he sent Wallops after liquor, and he didn't get it," said Tom. "I hear he's been up to that trick."

"The dirty cad!" whispered Phil.

A moment later there was the sound of a blow, and it was followed by a cry of pain.

"Come on!" cried Phil to Tom, and the two strode around the corner of the building. They saw Gerhart holding Wallops, who was a lad small for his age, while Langridge was punching him in the face, accompanying each blow with the remark:

"That will teach you to play the sneak trick on me. You drank that stuff yourself!"

"Indeed I didn't!" cried the messenger. "They wouldn't let me have it. There was a new man behind the bar."

"That's a likely story. Hold him tight, Gerhart; I'm going to paste him another."

"You hound!" cried Phil, his voice shrill with rage, and an instant later he had fairly leaped beside the bully. With one hand he thrust Langridge aside, and then, with a straight left on the jaw, he sent him to the ground with a thud.

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CHAPTER XVI

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PHIL IS NERVOUS

Langridge struggled to his feet, anger rendering him almost speechless. He started toward Phil, who stood in the attitude of a trained boxer, awaiting the attack. The light from a new moon faintly illuminated the scene, and the figures stood out with considerable distinctness against the background of the dark building.

Wallops, the messenger, was shrinking away, anxious to escape unobserved, though he cast a look of gratitude at Phil. Tom was surprised at his chum's sudden attack, but he stood ready to aid him, in case Gerhart should make an effort to take sides. As for Phil and Langridge, they faced each other, one eager with righteous anger to continue the chastisement, the other mad with the lust of shame and unreasoning.

"What—what did you do that for?" asked Langridge thickly, and his hand went to his jaw where Phil's fist had landed. His head was singing yet from the powerful blow.

"You know why," replied Phil calmly. "Because you're a coward."

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"Hold on!" cried the bully, taking a step forward. "I've stood about all I'm going to from you."

He looked around at Gerhart. The freshman stood passive, and Langridge showed some surprise.

"Aren't you going to stand by me?" asked the sophomore of his ally.

"Of course," muttered Gerhart, but there was no heart in his tones. He remembered what his crony had said regarding Phil's prowess.

"Certainly," put in Tom with gentle voice. "We'll make a quartet of it, if you like."

"What are you interfering with my affairs for?" went on Langridge, taking no notice of Tom.

"Because it's the affair of any decent college man to interfere when he catches a dirty coward beating a fellow smaller than he is!" and Phil fairly bit off the words.

"Take care!" cried Langridge. "You're going too far. I'll make a class matter of it if you call me a coward again!"

"I wish you would!" burst out Phil. "I'd like to make a charge against you before the whole college! Beating Wallops because he's smaller than you are!"

"That wasn't it. He didn't do as I told him, and was insolent."

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"Who gave you the right to assume a mastery over him? Besides, from what I heard, you had evidently ordered him to do something against the rules."

"Ah! So you were sneaking around to listen, were you?" sneered Langridge.

"You know better than that, or I'd answer you in the same way I did at first," replied Phil. "If you send Wallops for liquor again I shall inform Dr. Churchill."

"I always thought you were a tattling cad!" burst out Langridge. "Now I know it!"

Hardly were the words out of his mouth ere Phil was beside him. The quarter-back was fairly trembling, and his voice shook as he shot out the words:

"Take that back! Take it back, I say, or—or I'll——"

He paused, emotion overcoming him, but from the manner in which he drew back his powerful left arm Langridge stepped aside apprehensively.

"Well, you haven't any right to interfere in my affairs," he whined.

"Do you take back what you said?" demanded Phil fiercely, and he laid a trembling hand on the shoulder of the bully.

"Take your hand from me!" exclaimed Langridge. "Yes—I suppose I've got to—I can't fight a professional pugilist," he added with an uneasy laugh. [141]

"Thanks for the compliment," spoke Phil grimly. "I guess this can end where it is. As for you, Gerhart, if I thought you had any other part in this than being a tool of this coward, I'd give you the soundest thrashing you ever had."

The freshman did not answer, and when Langridge turned aside Gerhart followed him into the shadows. Poor Wallops waited until they were out of sight, then the messenger trailed after Phil and Tom. On the way he haltingly told the chums that Langridge had been in the habit of sending him to town to purchase stimulants for him. It had come to the point where that night where the bartender had refused to sell any more liquor, warning having been given that sales to minors were becoming too frequent. It was the failure of Wallops to return with the whisky that angered Langridge.

"Don't say anything about this, Wallops," advised Phil. "Langridge won't bother you again. If he does, let me know."

"Yes, sir, and thank you, Mr. Clinton. I'll not tell."

"I guess Langridge and Gerhart won't, either," commented Tom. "They'll be glad to let it drop."

"What cads those fellows are," remarked Phil a little later, when he and Tom, having had a refreshing shower bath, were preparing for bed in their room. [142]

"Well, you took some of it out of Langridge, at all events," said the pitcher.

"Maybe, but it will come back. I suppose I'll have to be on the lookout now, or he may do me a dirty turn."

"Shouldn't wonder. I had my troubles with him last term. But I thought he was going to do better this season."

"He can't seem to, evidently."

"Say," exclaimed Sid, poking his head from beneath the sheet, "I wish you fellows would let a chap sleep. What are you chinning about?"

They told him, and, wide awake, he sat up and listened to the whole story.

"I wish I'd seen it," he said. "It would have been as good as a football game. By the way, who does the team play this week, Phil?"

"Oh, we've got a little game with the Haddonfield Prep. School. Doesn't amount to much. Some of the subs will play, I fancy."

"I hope Holly doesn't make the mistake of despising an enemy," went on Sid. "Do you know, Phil, it seems to me that our fellows haven't struck their gait yet."

"Well, it's early in the season," said Tom.

"I know that," went on Sid, "but they ought to have more vim. There's a curious lack of ginger noticed. *You* didn't play with your usual snap, Phil." [143]

"I know it," was the almost unexpected answer from the quarter-back. "I wondered if any one noticed it."

"I did," added Tom, "but I wasn't going to say anything. I thought it was because it was the first game."

"No," said Phil slowly, "it wasn't that. I'm all unstrung—nervous—that's what's the matter."

"You nervous!" exclaimed Sid. "I wouldn't have believed that. What's the matter?"

"It's my mother," said Phil quietly, and there was a strange tone in his voice.

"She—she's not worse—is she?" asked Tom, and the room became curiously quiet.

"No," answered Phil; "but I can't tell what moment she may be. Fellows, I'm living in constant fear of receiving a message that—that she—that she's dead!"

CHAPTER XVII

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THE SOPHOMORES LOSE

There are several occasions when a young man can find no words in which to express himself. One is when he meets a pretty girl for the first time, and another is when his best chum has a great sorrow. There are other occasions, but these are the chief ones. Thus it was with Tom and Sid. For a few seconds after Phil's announcement they sat staring at the floor. Their eyes took in the pattern of the faded rug, though little of the original figure was to be seen because of the many spots. Then Tom looked about the apartment, viewing the photographs of the two pretty girls, the sporting implements massed in a corner, the table, with its artistic confusion of books and papers. From these his gaze traveled back to Phil.

As for Sid, he breathed heavily. If he had been a girl I would have said that he sighed. Then, being a youth who did not shirk any duty, no matter how hard, Sid asked:

"Is—is she any worse, Phil? Have you had bad news? Can't we—can't you go down where she is?"

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Phil shook his head.

"There's no specially bad news," he said, "but it's this way: She has a malady which, sooner or later, unless it is conquered, will—will take her away from me—and sis. Dad thinks an operation is the only hope, but they keep putting it off from time to time, on a slim chance that she may recover without it. For the operation is a desperate expedient at best. And that's why I'm not myself. That's why I can't go into the games with all my might. I expect any moment to be summoned to the sidelines to get a telegram saying—saying——"

He choked up, and could not finish.

"Is it—is it as bad as that?" asked Tom huskily, and he put his arm over Phil's shoulder, as his chum sat in the old easy chair.

"It's pretty bad," said Phil softly. Then, with a sudden change of manner, he exclaimed: "But say, I didn't mean to tell you fellows that. I don't believe in relating my troubles to every one," and he smiled, though it was not like his usual cheery face that looked at his two chums.

"Oh, come now!" cried Sid. "As if we didn't want to hear! And as if you shouldn't tell us your troubles! Why, I expect to tell you fellows mine, and I want to hear yours in return, eh, Tom."

"Of course," said the pitcher heartily.

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"Well, that's mighty white of you chaps," went on Phil, swallowing a lump in his throat. "But I'm not going to bother you any more, just now. Only that's the reason I'm—well, that I can't play as I want to play. But I'm going to try to forget it. I'm going into the next game, and help rip their line to pieces. I'm going to pilot our fellows to a big score or dislocate my other shoulder."

"Good!" cried Sid. "Now let's get to bed. It's almost morning."

The little talk among the three chums was productive of good. There was a closer bond of union among them than there had ever been before. They felt more like brothers, and Tom and Sid watched Phil for the next few days as if he was a little chap, over whom they had been given charge.

"Oh, say!" the quarter-back exclaimed at length one afternoon, when they had followed him to football practice, and walked home with him. "I'm not so bad as all that, you know."

"Did you hear any news to-day?" asked Tom, ignoring the mild rebuke.

"Yes. Got a telegram from dad. Things look a little brighter, and yet——" He paused. "Well," he continued, "I don't want to think too much about it. We play Haddonfield to-morrow. I want to wipe up the gridiron with them."

Which Phil and his chums pretty nearly did. Haddonfield Preparatory School had the best eleven in years, but, even with a number of scrub players on Randall, the score was forty-six to nothing. There was a different air about the college team as the lads went singing from the field that afternoon. There was confidence in their eyes.

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It was a beautiful afternoon in October. Lectures were over and a throng of students had strolled over the campus and down to the banks of Sunny River. The stream flowed lazily along toward Lake Tonoka, winding in and out, as though it had all the time it desired in which to make the journey, and meant to take the full allowance. There was nothing rapid or fussy about Sunny River. It was not one of those hurrying, bubbling, frothy streams that make a great ado about going somewhere, and never arrive. There was something soothing in walking along the banks that bracing, fall day. There was just enough snap in the air to prevent one from feeling enervated, yet there was hardly a hint of winter.

"Doesn't it make you feel as if you could stretch out on your back and look up into the sky?" asked Phil of Tom as the three chums walked along. Tom and the quarter-back had been to football practice, and still had their togs on.

"Now hold on!" exclaimed Sid, before Tom could answer. "Is this going to lead anywhere?"

"What do you mean?" asked Phil.

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"I mean that poetical start on a talk-fest. Are you going to ring in beautiful scenery, calm, peaceful atmosphere, a sense of loneliness, and then switch off on to girls? Is that what you're driving at? Because if it is I want to know, and I'm going back and read some psychology."

"You're up the wrong tree," declared Tom. "I don't know what Phil means, but my answer to his question would be that to stretch out on the ground for any length of time at this season would mean stiff muscles, not to mention rheumatism."

"You fellows have no poetry in your nature," complained Phil. "Just look there, where the river curves, how the trees lean over to be kissed by the limpid water. Can't you fancy some one floating, floating down it in a boat, with heart attuned——"

"It's too late for boating!" exclaimed a voice behind the trio. "My uncle says——"

Phil turned quickly and tried to grab Ford Fenton. The youth with the uncle jumped back.

"Why—what—what's the matter?" stammered Fenton.

"Matter!" cried Phil. "Why, you little shrimp, I've a good notion to chuck you into the river!"

"Yes, the river—the beautiful, meandering, poetical river," added Tom. "Quit it, Phil; you're getting on my nerves. I'm glad Fenton interrupted you with a recollection of his uncle. What were you going to say about your respected relative?" he asked. [149]

But Fenton was going to take no chances with Phil, and, turning about, he retraced his steps.

"What were you saying, Phil?" inquired Sid politely, if sarcastically.

"None of your business," replied the quarter-back a little stiffly. "I'm going to write a poem about it," he added more genially.

"And send it to some girl, I suppose," went on Sid. "Oh, you make me sick!"

What further ramification the conversation might have taken is problematical, but it was interrupted just then by the arrival of Ed Kerr, who seemed in much of a hurry.

"I've been looking all over for you fellows," he panted.

"Why hastenest thou thus so hastily?" asked Tom. "Is the college on fire? Has Pitchfork been taken with a fit, or has Moses sent to say we need study no more?"

"Quit your gassin'!" ordered Ed. "Say, we're going to have the walk rush to-night. The freshies have just had a meeting and decided on it. Tried to pull it off quietly, but Snail Looper heard, and kindly tipped us off. Dutch Housenlager is getting the soph crowd together. You fellows want to be in it, don't you?"

"Of course," answered Tom. "We have not forgotten that we were once freshmen, and that we had many clashes with the second-years. Now we will play the latter rôle. Lead on, Macduff, and he be hanged who first cries: 'Hold! Enough!' We'll make the freshies wish they had never seen Randall College." [150]

"Maybe—maybe not," spoke Phil. "They're a husky lot—the first-year lads. But we can never let them have the privilege of the walk without a fight."

The "walk rush," as it was termed, was one of those matters about which college tradition had centered. It was a contest between the freshman and sophomore classes, that took place every fall, usually early in October. It got its name from the walk which circled Booker Memorial Chapel. This chapel was the gift of a mother whose son had died while attending Randall, and the beautiful stained glass windows in it were well worth looking at—in fact, many an artist came to Randall expressly for that purpose.

Around the chapel was a broad walk, shaded with stately oaks, and the path was the frequenting place of the college lads. From time immemorial the walk had been barred to freshmen unless, in the annual rush, they succeeded in defeating the sophomores, and, as this seldom occurred, few freshmen used the walk, save on Sundays, when all hostilities were suspended, in honor of the day. The rush always took place on a small knoll, or hill, back of the gymnasium, and it was the object of the freshmen to take possession of this point of vantage, and maintain it for half an hour against the rush of the sophomores. If they succeeded they were entitled to use the chapel walk. If they did not, they were reviled, and any freshman caught on the forbidden ground was liable to summary punishment. [151]

Dark figures stole silently here and there. Commands and instructions were whispered hoarsely. There was an air of mystery about, for it was the night of the walk rush, and freshmen and sophomores were each determined to win.

Garvey Gerhart, by virtue of the "boosting" which Langridge had given him, had secured command of the first-year forces. As soon as it was dark he had assembled them on "gym hill," as the knoll was called. There was a large crowd of freshmen, almost too large, it seemed, for the sophomores were outnumbered two to one. But Tom, Sid, Phil, Dutch Housenlager, Ed Kerr and others of the second-year class were strong in the belief of their power to oust their rivals from the hilltop. They had a moral force back of them—the conscious superiority of being "veterans," which counted for much.

"We're going to have our work cut out for us," commented Tom, as, with his chums advancing slowly to the fray, he surveyed the throng of freshmen. "My, but there's a bunch of 'em! And we've got to clean every mother's son of them off the hill." [152]

"We'll do it!" cried Phil gaily. "It will be good training for us."

"Of course!" exclaimed Dutch, as he put out his foot slyly to trip Sid. Tom saw the act, he executed a quick movement that sent Housenlager sprawling on the ground.

"That's the time you got some of your own medicine!" exclaimed Phil with a laugh, as Dutch, muttering dire vengeance, picked himself up.

The preliminaries for the rush were soon arranged, timekeepers and umpires selected, and, with the bright moon shining down on the scene, the battle began. It was wild, rough and seemingly without order, yet there was a plan about it. The freshmen were massed together on top, and about the center bunch were circles of their fellows who were to thrust back the rushing sophomores. Not until the last freshman had been swept from the hill could the second-year youths claim victory.

"All ready!" yelled Ed Kerr, and at the freshmen went their rivals.

There was the thud of body striking body. Breaths came quick and fast. There were smothered [153]

exclamations, the sound of blows good-naturedly taken and given. There were cries, shouts, commands, entreaties. There was a swaying of the mass, this way and that. A knot of lads would go down, with a struggling pile on top of them, and the conglomeration would writhe about until it disentangled.

Tom, Phil and Sid (whose hand was now almost entirely better) tore their way toward the center. Time and again they were hurled back, only to renew the rush.

"Clean 'em off!" was the rallying cry of the sophomores.

"Fight 'em back!" was the retort of the freshmen.

At it they went, fiercely and earnestly. The entire mass appeared to be revolving about the hill now, with the little group of freshmen on the top as a pivot.

Gradually Tom, Phil and their particular chums worked their way up to the crest. Then they found that the freshmen had adopted strange tactics. Under the advice of Gerhart they stretched out prone, and, with arms and legs twined together, made a regular layer of bodies, covering the summit. It was almost impossible to separate the lads one from the other, in order to hurl them out of the way. They were literally "sticking together."

"Tear 'em apart!" pleaded Tom.

"Rip 'em up!" shouted Phil.

"Hold tight!" sung out Gerhart.

And hang tightly they did. Tom succeeded in breaking the hold of one lad, and Phil that of another. But, in turn, the two big sophomores were borne down and overwhelmed by the weight of freshmen on their backs.

The referee blew a warning whistle. But two minutes of time were left. The sophomores redoubled their efforts, but the ruse of the freshmen was a good one. It was like trying to tear apart a living doormat.

The sophomores could not do it. Though they labored like Trojans, it was not to be. Once more the whistle blew, indicating that the rush was ended.

The sophomores had lost, and for the remainder of the term the freshmen could strut proudly about the walk of Booker Memorial Chapel.

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CHAPTER XVIII

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A FIRE ALARM

"Well," remarked Phil ruefully, as he and Tom, rather sore and bruised, went to their room. There was an air of quietness about the sophomores. They did not cheer and sing, but back on the knoll the victorious freshmen made the night hideous with their college cries.

"Is that all?" inquired Tom, for Phil had uttered only the one word.

"That's all, son, as Bricktop Molloy would say. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' We were dumped good and proper."

"With plenty of gravy on the side," added Sid.

"I was afraid of it," spoke Tom solemnly. "I said they were too many for us."

"Listen to old 'I told you so,'" mocked Phil. "Next he'll be telling us that he predicted we'd lose the football championship. You make me tired!"

"I'm tired already," retorted Tom good naturedly. "Some one gave me an extra good poke in the ribs the last minute."

"It was Gerhart," declared Sid. "I saw him. I had a good notion to punch him for you."

"I'd just as well you didn't," went on Tom. "There's no love lost between us and his crony, Langridge, now. No use making matters worse. But he certainly managed the freshies well. That was a good trick, lying down and making a mat of themselves."

"Yes; hereafter I suppose it will be the regular practice for future classes," said Phil. "We'll have to think up a new plan to break up that kind of interference. My, but I'm lame!"

"Better not let Lighton hear you say that."

"Why?"

"He'd lay you off from football. There are three candidates for every position on the 'varsity this term, and we fellows who have made the eleven will have to take care of ourselves."

"That's so," admitted Tom. "Well, a hot bath will fix me up, and then for some good sleep."

"I wish I could snooze," spoke Phil.

"Why can't you?" asked Sid.

"I've got to bone away on Greek. Got turned back in class to-day, and Pitchfork, who's a regular

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fiend at it, as well at Latin, warned me that I'd be conditioned if I didn't look out."

"You want to be careful, son," cautioned Sid. "Remember how I nearly slumped in Latin before the big ball game last year, and only just got through by the skin of my teeth in time to play? Don't let that happen to you. It isn't good for the constitution; not a little bit."

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The three chums went to the gymnasium and had a warm shower, followed by a brisk rub-down, after which they all felt better. Then, in their room, they talked the walk rush all over again, until Phil threw books at Sid and Tom to make them keep quiet so that he might study.

The week that followed was marked by some hard practice on the gridiron, for there was in prospect a game with the Orswell Military Academy, the eleven of which was seldom defeated. Therefore, Coach Lighton and Captain Cross worked their men well.

Phil, in particular, received some very special instructions about running the team. Some new plays were practiced, and a different sequence was planned.

"I want three corking good plays to be worked in sequence when we get to within reaching distance of the twenty-five-yard line," said the coach. "Maybe we can try for a field goal, but the chances are against it if the wind blows. A good sequence will do wonders."

Then the coach explained the sequence plays. They were to be three, in which the right-half, the full-back and the left-tackle would successively take the ball, without a word being spoken after the first signal for the play had been given. The plays were to be executed in quick succession, and the coach depended on that to demoralize the cadet eleven.

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"There'll probably be such cheering when we get to within twenty-five yards of their goal that it will be hard to hear signals, anyhow," Mr. Lighton went on. "So memorize these plays carefully, and we'll try to work them. When Clinton remarks: 'We have twenty-five yards to go, fellows; walk up together, now,' that will be the signal for the sequence plays."

They tried them against the scrub, and did remarkably well. Then came a day of hard work, followed by some light practice, and a rest on the afternoon preceding the game with the cadets.

There was a big attendance at the grounds, which adjoined the military academy, about twenty miles from Randall College. In their first half the home eleven, by dint of trick plays and much kicking, so wore out the Randallites that they could not score, while Orswell made two touch-downs. But it was different in the second half, and after a touch-down gained by a brilliant run on Tom's part, there came a second one, which resulted from the sequence plays. Right through the line in turn went Kindlings Woodhouse, Holly Cross and Ed Kerr. The twenty-five yards were made in three minutes of play, and the score tied. Then, by a skilful forward pass and some line bucking, another touch-down was made, and then, as if to cap the climax, Holly Cross kicked a beautiful field goal.

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"Wow! Hold me from flying!" cried Phil, as he tried to hug the entire team after the referee's whistle blew. His fellows had responded nobly to the calls he made on them, and he had run the team with a level head.

"Boys, I'm proud of you," said the coach. "It's the biggest score against the Orswell cadets in many a year."

And there was much rejoicing in Randall College that night, so that Professor Tines felt called upon to remonstrate to Dr. Churchill about the noise the lads were making.

"Why, I'm not aware of any unusual noise; not from here," spoke the venerable president, in his comfortable study, with a book of Sanskrit on his knee.

"You could hear it if you went outside," said the Latin teacher.

"Ah, yes, doubtless; but, you see, my dear professor, I'm not going outside," and Dr. Churchill smiled benevolently.

"Humph!" exclaimed Mr. Tines, as he went back to his apartments. "If I had my way, football and all sports would be abolished. They are a relic of barbarism!"

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It was late when Phil and Tom got to their room that night. They narrowly escaped being caught by Mr. Snell, one of the proctor's scouts, and dashed into their "den" at full speed.

"Can't you make less row?" demanded Sid, who was studying. "You've put all the thoughts I had on my essay out of my head."

"Serves you right for being a greasy dig!" exclaimed Tom. "Why don't you be a sport? You're getting to be a regular hermit."

"I want my degree," explained Sid, who was studying as he had not thought of doing his first term.

It was after midnight when Tom, who did not sleep well on account of the excitement following the football game, awoke with a start. Through the glass transom over the door of the room he saw a red glare.

"Fire!" he exclaimed, as he jumped out of bed and landed heavily in the middle of the apartment.

"What's that?" cried Phil, sitting up. "Is there a telegram for me? Is there—is there——"

He was at Tom's side, hardly awake.

"It's no telegram," answered Tom quickly "Looks like a fire."

He threw open the door. The corridor was filled with clouds of lurid smoke which rolled in great masses here and there.

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"The whole place is ablaze!" cried Tom. "Get up, Sid!" and he pulled the bedclothes from his still sleeping chum.

CHAPTER XIX

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THE FRESHMEN DANCE

"Here, quit!" cried Sid, making an effort to pull back the coverings on which Tom was yanking. "Let a fellow alone, can't you? Quit fooling! This is no freshman's room!"

"Get out, you old duffer!" yelled Phil. "The place is on fire!"

"Who's on the wire?" asked Sid, thinking some one had called him on the telephone. "I don't care who it is. I'm not going to answer this time of night. I want to sleep. Tell 'em to call up again."

"Fire! Fire! Not wire!" shouted Tom in his ear, and this time Sid heard and was fully awake. He caught a glimpse of the clouds of lurid smoke pouring in from the corridor.

"Jumping Johnnie cake! I should say it was a fire!" he cried. "Come on, fellows, let's get some of our stuff out! I want my football pictures," and with that Sid rushed to the wall and yanked down the only bit of ornamentation he cared for—a lithograph of a Rugby scrimmage. "Come on!" he yelled, grabbing up a pile of his clothes from a chair. "This is all I want. Let the books and other stuff go!"

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"But the sofa! The chair!" cried Tom, who had peered out into the hall, only to jump back again, gasping and choking. "We can chuck them out of the window."

"That's right. Can't hurt 'em much," added Phil, who was getting into his trousers.

"Grab hold, then. But wait until I button my vest," ordered Tom, who was fumbling with the garment, the only one he had grabbed up. He had switched on the electric light, and the gleam shone through a cloud of the reddish smoke. "What's the matter with this blamed thing, anyhow?" he cried, as he fumbled in vain for the buttons.

"You've got it on backwards!" cried Sid, who had tossed his clothes out of the window, following them with the picture, and was now ready to help his chums.

"Great Jehosophat!" cried Tom. "So I have!"

He yanked off the garment and tossed it into a corner. Then, clad only in his pajamas, he started to carry the old armchair to the window. It was almost too much for him, and Sid came to his aid.

"Let that go, and get the sofa out first!" cried Phil. "The chair can fall on that. Say, listen to the row!"

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Out in the corridor could be heard confused shouts, and the sound of students running to and fro. Every now and then some one would cry "Fire!" and the rush would be renewed.

"The whole place must be going!" cried Sid. "Hurry up, Tom, shove it out! Maybe we can save some other things."

"Better save ourselves first!" exclaimed Phil. "The stairs and halls are all ablaze!" He came back from a look into the corridor choking and gasping. "We've got to jump for it! Shove that chair out, then the sofa, and pile the bedding on top. That will make a place to land on."

"Here she goes!" shouted Tom, and he and Sid shoved their precious old chair from the window. It fell with a great crash to the ground, two stories below.

"Broken to bits!" said Tom with a groan. "Now for the sofa. There'll be nothing left of it."

They had raised it to the window sill, after much effort, and were balancing it there while recovering their breaths. Their room was filled with the heavy fumes of smoke, and the noise in the corridor was increasing.

"Let her go!" cried Phil. "Lively, now, if we want to get out alive!"

But just as the three chums were about to release their hold on the sofa, Mr. Snell, one of the under-janitors of the college, and a sort of scout or spy of the proctor's, ran into the room.

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"There's no fire! There's no danger!" he called. "Don't throw anything out."

"No fire?" questioned Tom.

"No. Some of the students burned red fire in the halls, that's all," went on Mr. Snell. "There's no danger. The proctor sent me around to explain. It's only some illuminating red fire."

Tom, Sid and Phil looked at each other, as they stood at the window, holding their precious sofa. The clouds of smoke were rolling away, and the noise was lessening. Tom looked out of the casement, and, in the semi-darkness below, saw the chair they had thrown out. Just then, from below, a crowd of freshmen, who had perpetrated the trick, began singing "Scotland's Burning."

Tom glanced at his chums. Then he uttered one word:

“Stung!”

“Good and proper!” added Phil.

“By a nest of fresh hornets!” commented Sid wrathfully.

The scout withdrew. Phil looked at his trousers, and then he began slowly to take them off. Tom took one more look out of the window.

“They’re jumping all over our chair,” he said.

“They are? The young imps!” cried Sid. “Come on to the rescue! Get into some togs and capture a few freshmen.” Then, as he realized that he had tossed his clothes out of the window, he groaned. “You fellows will have to go,” he said. “I haven’t any duds.” [166]

“They’re parading around with your best go-to-meeting suit,” observed Phil. Sid groaned again.

“Hurry, fellows, if you love me,” he said.

“There’s a crowd of sophs after ’em now,” added Tom, and so it proved. The freshmen beat a retreat, and some of our friends’ classmates formed a guard around the things on the ground.

The three chums were not the only ones who had tossed articles out of their windows in the moments of excitement. Many possessions of the sophomores were on the ground below, and, now that the scare was over, they began collecting them. Tom and Phil managed, with the help of some of their classmates, to get Sid’s garments and the chair back to their room. The chair was in sad shape, though, and Sid groaned in anguish as he viewed it.

“Oh, quit!” begged Phil, as he tossed Sid’s clothes on the bed. “We can fix it up again.”

“It’ll never be the same,” wailed Sid as he tried it. “There was a place that just fit my back, and now—”

He leaped up with a howl, and held his hand to the fleshy part of his leg. [167]

“What’s the matter?” asked Tom.

“A broken spring stuck me,” explained Sid, who was too lightly clad to indulge in indiscriminate sitting about. “Oh, those freshies! What can we do to get square with them?”

“That’s more like it,” said Tom. “We’ve got to pay them back in some way, and the sooner the better.”

It was an hour or more before matters had quieted down in the west dormitory. From various sophomores who came into their room to exchange notes, Tom, Phil and Sid learned that the freshmen had executed a well-organized fire scare by the simple process of burning in each corridor some of the powder extensively used on Fourth of July, or in political parades.

“Well, there’s no use talking about what they did to us,” said Ed Kerr. “The question is, what can we do to them? They certainly put it all over us.”

“Dutch, you ought to be able to suggest something,” said Tom. “You’re always up to some trick. Give us one to play on the freshies.”

“Sure,” agreed Dutch. “Let me think.”

Sid arose and turned out the light.

“What’s that for?” asked Dutch.

“So you can think better. I can, in the dark. Go ahead, now. Let’s have something good.” [168]

Dutch was silent for a few minutes, and then he proposed a plan which was received with exclamations of delight.

“The very thing!” cried Tom. “I wonder we didn’t think of it before. We’ll be just in time. Now, maybe we can make them laugh on the other side of their heads.”

The next morning there were triumphant looks on the faces of the freshmen. They had played a good joke on their traditional enemies, the sophomores, and felt elated over it. But, in accordance with a plan they had adopted the night after Dutch revealed his plan, the sophomores made no retort to the taunts of their enemies. And there was no lack of railery. Gathered on the walk about Booker Memorial Chapel, whence for many terms freshmen had, by traditional college custom, been barred, the first-year lads made all sorts of jokes concerning the scrabble that had ensued among the sophomores when the cry of fire was raised.

“And we have to stand it!” exclaimed Tom, gritting his teeth.

“For a couple of days,” added Sid. “But it strikes me, old chap, that last term you played the rôle of the aforesaid freshies to perfection.”

“Oh, that was different. But let them wait. We’ll put the kibosh on their fun in a few days. Has Dutch got the stuff?” [169]

“Hush!” exclaimed Phil. “The least hint will spoil the scheme of revenge! Revenge! Revenge!” he hissed, after the manner of a stage villain. “We will have our re-venge-e-e-e-e!”

It was the night of the freshman dance, an annual affair that loomed large in the annals of the first-year students and their girl friends. It was to be held in a hall in Haddonfield, and many were the precautions taken by the committee to prevent any of the hated sophomores from

attending, or getting to the place beforehand, lest they might, by some untoward act, "put it on the blink," as Holly Cross used to say.

The hall was tastefully arranged with flowers and a bank of palms, behind which the orchestra was to be hidden. About the balcony were draped the college colors, with the class hues of the freshmen intermingled.

Early on the evening of the dance, Garvey Gerhart, who was chairman of the committee on arrangements, left the college on his way to town to see that all was in readiness.

"Doesn't he look pretty!" exclaimed Phil, who, with a group of sophomores, stood near Booker Chapel.

"I wonder if he has his dress suit on?" asked Tom.

"We ought to see if his hair is parted," put in Sid. "Freshmen don't know how to look after themselves. Have you a clean pocket handkerchief, Algernon?" and he spoke the last in a mocking tone. [170]

"Look out; there may be another fire," retorted Gerhart with a grin, and the sophomores could only grit their teeth. They knew the freshmen still had the laugh on them.

"But not for long?" muttered Phil. "Is Dutch all ready?"

"All ready," answered that worthy for himself. "We'll slip off to town as soon as it's dusk."

"Think you'll have any trouble in getting in?" asked Ed Kerr.

"Not a bit. I bribed one of the doorkeepers. Be on hand outside to listen to the fun."

A little before the first arrivals at the freshman dance had reached the hall, a figure might have been seen moving quickly about the ballroom in the dim illumination from the half-turned-down lights. The figure went about in circles, with curious motions of the hands, and then, after a survey of the place and a silent laugh, withdrew.

The music began a dreamy waltz, following the opening march. Freshmen led their fair partners out on the floor, and began whirling them about. The lights twinkled, there was the sweet smell of flowers, fair faces of the girls looked up into the proud, flushed ones of the youths. Chaperons looked on approvingly. The music became a trifle faster. The dance was in full swing. [171]

Suddenly a girl gave a frightened little cry.

"What's the matter?" asked her partner.

"My shoes! They—they seem to be sticking to the floor. I—I can't dance!"

From all over the room arose similar cries of dismay from the girls and exclamations of disgust from the boys. The dancers went slower and slower. It was an effort to glide about, and some could scarcely lift their feet. The floor seemed to hold them as a magnet does a bit of iron. Garvey Gerhart, releasing his pretty partner, leaned over and touched the floor.

"It's as sticky as molasses!" he cried in dismay.

CHAPTER XX

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PHIL GETS A TELEGRAM

The music stopped with a discord. A strange spell seemed thrown over the dancers. Some, who had come to a stop, now tried to move, and found that their feet were fast to the floor. It was an effort to lift them. The surface that had seemed well waxed was now as sticky as if glue had been poured over it. To walk was almost impossible; to dance, out of the question.

"Maybe it's only in a few places, and we can scrape it off," suggested Will Foster, a chum of Gerhart. "Let's try."

He endeavored, with his knife, to remove some of the sticky stuff, but he might as well have tried to dig up a board in the floor.

"What is it?" asked Gerhart's partner.

"I don't know," he answered ruefully. "Something very sticky has gotten on the floor."

"Maybe some of the waiters spilled ice cream or coffee, or some candy got there," she suggested.

"This is stickier than any of those things," spoke Gerhart. "I—I guess some one has played a trick on us." [173]

"A trick?"

"Yes; the sophomores. I should have been more on the lookout, but I didn't think they could get in. I told the men at the door not to let any one in who didn't have a freshman pin. But—well, we'll wait a bit and see if it dries up," he concluded.

But the stuff on the floor didn't dry up. Instead, it became more sticky. The ballroom was like one big sheet of adhesive flypaper, and the dancers, walking about, felt their shoes pull up with

queer little noises every time they took a step. They tried to dance once more, but it was a miserable failure. One might as well have tried to waltz or two-step on the sands of the seashore.

Then from a window there sounded the old song: "[Clarence McFadden, He Wanted to Waltz.](#)" The chagrined dancers turned to the casement, to behold a circle of mocking faces. Gerhart looked, too.



["Clarence McFadden, He Wanted to Waltz"](#)

"The sops!" he cried, as he caught sight of Tom, Phil, Sid, Dutch Housenlager and several others.

"At your service!" cried Phil. "Guess you'll have to dance to slow music to-night!" And then, to show that it was in revenge for the fire scare, the sophomores sang: "Scotland's Burning."

"It worked to perfection, Dutch. However did you manage it?" asked Tom, as the sophomores, having satisfied themselves that the freshman dance had been spoiled, walked back to college. [174]

"Easy," answered the fun-loving student. "I mixed up a sticky preparation of glue, varnish, gum and so on, made it into a powder, and put it in alcohol. Then I sneaked in past the doorkeeper I had bribed, and sprinkled the stuff all over the floor. There was no color to it, and they didn't notice it. The alcohol kept it from sticking until after the march, and then, when the alcohol evaporated, it left the gum ready to do its work."

"And it did it," commented Sid.

It certainly did, for the disconcerted freshman and the pretty girls soon left the hall. It was impossible to dance on the floor until the sticky stuff had been scraped off.

"It was rather a brutal trick, after all," said Tom to Phil a little later, when the three were in their room. "It would have been all right on the freshies alone, but the girls—they had to suffer, too."

"Of course," said Sid. "Why not? *Secundum naturam*, you know, according to the course of nature it had to be. The good with the bad. The freshies brought it on themselves, eh, Phil?"

"Oh, I suppose so," replied the quarter-back, who was busy with paper and pencil. "Still, it was a bit rough on the lassies. There were some pretty ones——" [175]

"Oh, you fellows and the girls!" exclaimed Sid in disgust. "You make me sick!"

"That's all right," went on Tom easily. "You'll get yours some day, and then we'll see——"

"Hello, where'd that picture come from?" asked Sid, pointing to another photograph on the wall beside those of Ruth and Madge. Tom blushed a bit, and did not answer. Phil looked up and exclaimed:

"Why, it's another picture of my sister! She must have had some new ones taken. Where did it come from?"

"She gave it to me," explained Tom, and his shoelace seemed suddenly to have come

unfastened, so it was necessary to stoop over to tie it.

"Hum!" murmured Phil, with a queer look at his chum's red face. "She didn't say anything to me about it. But if you're going to add to our collection, Tom, I guess it's up to me to get another one, too."

"Whose will you get now?" asked Sid. "Haven't you got enough girls' faces stuck up around here? Do you want another?"

"Not another," spoke Phil slowly, "but another of the same one. Miss Tyler promised me one of her new photographs."

"She did?" cried Tom, and he turned quickly.

"Yes; have you any objections?" and Phil gazed straight at Tom.

"No—oh, no. Of course not," he added hastily, "only I didn't know— What are you doing?" he asked rather suddenly, changing the subject, as he saw Phil's paper and pencil.

"I'm working on a new football play," replied Phil, and he, too, seemed glad that the subject was changed.

"That's more like it," commented Sid. "Now you're talking sense. Let's hear it."

"It's this way," explained Phil, as he showed his chums what he had drawn. "It's a fake tackle run, and a pass to the right half-back. Nothing particularly new about it, as it's often used, but my plan is to work it immediately after we run off a play of left-tackle through right-tackle and right-end. After that play has been pulled off, it will look as if we were trying to repeat it, and we'll catch the other fellows off their guard. In this play, the left-tackle, after the signal, turns back and takes the ball from me. He passes the ball to the right-half, who turns to the left for a run around our left-end. Our full-back charges on the opposing left-tackle, crossing in front of our right-half to better conceal the ball. The left half-back helps the left-tackle to make his quick turn, and then blocks off the opposing right-end, while I help make interference for the right-half, who's got the ball."

"That sounds good," commented Tom. "Go over it again."

Which Phil did, and his two chums both declared it ought to work well. They tried it in practice against the scrub next day, after Coach Lighton and Captain Holly Cross had given their approval to it. The play operated like a charm, and was good for a touch-down. It completely fooled the second eleven.

"It remains to be seen whether it will do the same thing against another team," said the coach. "But we'll try it Saturday against the Dodville Prep School. Now, boys, line up, and we'll run through it again? Also the forward pass and the on-side kick."

The players were in the midst of a scrimmage, and Joe Jackson had just made a fine run, when Wallops was seen coming across the gridiron. The messenger had an envelope in his hand, and at the sight of him Phil Clinton turned pale.

"Get back, Wallops!" cried the coach. "You're in the way."

"I have a telegram for Mr. Clinton," said the messenger.

"Oh, all right. Come on."

Phil's hand were trembling so he could hardly open the message. He read it at a glance. Tom went close to him, and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Is it—is it——" he began.

"Dad says to hold myself in readiness to come at any time," said Phil slowly.

There was silence among the players, all of whom knew of the serious illness of Phil's mother. Coach Lighton went up to the quarter-back and said:

"Well, we won't practice any more to-day. It's too bad, Clinton."

Phil swallowed two or three times. He forced back a mistiness that was gathering like a film over his eyes. He thrust the telegram into his jacket.

"Let's go on with the practice," he said sturdily. "We aren't perfect in that fake tackle run yet, and I want to use it against Dodville."

It was a plucky answer, and many a hardy player on the Randall eleven felt a new liking for the quarter-back as he went to his place behind Snail Looper, who stooped to receive the ball.

CHAPTER XXI

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

The practice was over. Phil stuck to it until he had, with the assistance of the coach and the captain, drilled the 'varsity into an almost perfect running of the trick play. Of course, how it would work against fierce opponents was another matter. But, in spite of the shock engendered by the receipt of the telegram, Phil would not give up until the men fairly "snapped" into place,

after he had given the signal for the fake tackle run and pass to the half-back. Now he and Tom were on their way to their room.

"What are you going to do, Phil?" asked Tom.

"I don't know," was the despondent answer. "I—of course, I'll have to go when I get word."

"Do you think she's worse?"

"I'm afraid so; or else they're going to operate. But don't let's talk about it. It breaks me all up."

"I should think it would. I don't see how you could stay in practice after you got the message."

"I felt as if I had to, Tom. Of course, I know I'm only a small factor in the eleven——"

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"I think you're a pretty big one," interrupted the left-end enthusiastically.

"Well, thank you for that; but I mean relatively. I'm only one of eleven players, and my place could be filled. Still, I do flatter myself that I've got the team into some kind of machine-like precision, which is very needful in a game. I don't mean that I've done it all alone, for I haven't. Every man has done more than his share, and with a coach like Mr. Lighton, and a captain like Holly Cross, a fellow can do a lot. But I'm a cog in the wheels of the machine, and you know how it is when you put a new wheel in a bit of apparatus. It may be just as good, or better than the old one, but it's got to take time to work off the rough spots and fit in smoothly.

"That's the way I feel. I want to stay in the game and at practice as long as I can, for when I drop out, and a new quarter-back comes in, it's bound to throw the playing off the least bit, and I'm not patting myself on the back when I say that, I hope."

"Indeed, you're not! But it must be nervous work running a team when you know—well, er——" and Tom stopped in some confusion.

"I know," said Phil simply. "But you can do lots of things when you try hard. I'm going to do this. I'll hold myself in readiness to jump down to Palm Beach when I get the word, but until then I'm going to stick by the team."

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There was a look on Phil's face that Tom had never seen there before. It was as if some inner power was urging him along the difficult path that lay before him. He seemed to be drawing on a hidden reserve supply of grit and pluck, and, as he passed up the stairs, with an easy, swaying motion of his athletic body, Tom could not help but admiring his good-looking, well-formed chum.

"I—I hope nothing happens to take him away before we play our last game," whispered the 'varsity pitcher. "He's the best quarter Randall ever had, if what the old-timers say is true. If we don't win the championship I'll miss my guess."

He kept on up the stairs after Phil. In the corridor stood Ford Fenton. Phil nodded at him, but did not feel like speaking. His fingers were clasped around the telegram in his pocket.

"Hello!" cried Fenton. "I saw you at practice. That's a dandy trick you worked, Phil. My uncle says that——"

"Ford," began Tom gravely, "have you ever had smallpox?"

"Smallpox? My good gracious, no! You don't mean to say that there's a case of it here?"

"We haven't been exposed to smallpox," went on Tom, "but we are both suffering from a severe attack of Uncleitis, so if you don't want to catch it you'd better keep away from us."

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"Hu! I guess you think that's a joke!" exclaimed Ford as he turned and walked away. Then Tom and Phil entered their room.

Something in the look of their faces attracted the attention of Sid.

"What's the matter?" he asked, despite Tom's frantic gestures behind Phil's back, which motions were made with a view to keeping Sid quiet.

"I'm afraid I'll have to go—go where my mother is, any minute," said Phil brokenly. "I—I guess I'll pack up so—so's to be ready."

Then the tension broke, and the nervous force that had girt him about when he was on the gridiron gave way, and he sobbed brokenly. Tom instantly began rearranging the books on the table, where they were piled in artistic confusion, and raised such a dust that Sid sneezed. The latter was in the old armchair, which had been mended, after a fashion, following the throwing of it from the window in the fire scare. As Sid tried to get up from the depths of it, there came a crash, and the antique piece of furniture settled heavily on one side, like a ship with a bad list to port.

"There you go!" cried Tom, glad to have a chance to speak sharply. "What are you trying to do—smash it all to pieces? Can't you get out of a chair without busting it?"

"I—I didn't mean to," spoke Sid so gently, and in such a contrast to Tom's fiery words, that Phil could not restrain an exclamatory chuckle. It was just the thing needed to change the current that was setting too strongly toward sadness, and a moment later the three were carefully examining the chair.

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"It's only a leg broken," said Phil at length, and during the inspection he kept his face in the shadow. "I can fix it to-morrow," he went on, and when he arose he was himself again.

"Better put an iron brace on, if Sid is going to do double back somersaults in it," went on Tom

with simulated indignity. "This isn't a barn, Sid. It's a gentlemen's room."

"Oh, you shut up!" cried Sid, and then the chums were more natural.

Phil arranged that night to leave college at once, in case further bad news was received, and he also communicated with Ruth, planning to take her with him. But there was no need, for in the morning another message was received, saying that Mrs. Clinton had somewhat recovered from the relapse that threatened.

Phil said little, but there was a different air about him all that day, and when he went into practice he actually seemed to carry the team along on his shoulders, so that they crumbled the scrub opposition into nothingness, and made five touch-downs in the two short halves they played. [184]

Since the episode of the freshman dance the first-year students had "sung small" whenever the sophomores were about. It was the most humiliating trick that had been "pulled off in so many years that the memory of man runneth not to the contrary," as Holly Cross put it in one of his favorite quotations. Gerhart was much downcast at first, for, as he was in charge of the affair, it was considered a sort of reflection on his ability. And he laid it all to Tom, Sid, Phil and Dutch Housenlager.

"You wait; I'll get even with you some day," he had said to Tom.

"We're perfectly willing," answered Tom good-naturedly. "If you think you can put anything over our home plate, why go ahead, and more power to ye, as Bricktop Molloy would say."

"You just wait," was all Gerhart answered.

It was the night before the game with Dodville Preparatory School, which institution had an eleven not to be despised. They had met Randall on the diamond and were anxious to come to conclusions with them on the gridiron. Following some light practice, during which the fake tackle run and pass to half-back was worked to perfection, Sid, Tom and Phil went for a stroll along Sunny River. The placid stream had an attraction in the early evening that was absent at other times, and the three chums felt its influence as they walked along the banks. [185]

"Do you feel nervous about to-morrow's game?" asked Tom of Phil.

"Not as much so as if it was against Boxer Hall," replied the quarter-back. "Of course I—I shall be worrying a bit for fear I'll get a message from Florida, but I'm going to try to forget it. I want to roll up a big score against Dodville."

"And against Boxer Hall, too," added Sid.

"Of course. But that's some time off, and we'll improve in the meanwhile. I fancy the game to-morrow will develop some weak spots that will need strengthening."

They walked and talked for about an hour, and it was dark when they returned to their room.

"No study to-night," remarked Phil, as he began to disrobe. "Me for pounding the pillow at once, if not sooner."

"Same here," came from Tom, and he began taking off his things. "Last fellow to undress puts the light out," he added, and then there was a race. Tom and Phil leaped into bed almost at once, and Sid, leaving the light turned on, was scarcely a second behind them. There was a protesting howl from Phil and Tom at their chum's perfidy, but the next instant Tom uttered a yell.

"Wow! Ouch! Something's in my bed!" he cried as he leaped out.

"And in mine, too!" came from Sid. "It's a snake!" and reaching down between the sheets, he pulled out a long reptile. [186]

"Cæsar's Haywagon!" cried Phil. "I've drawn something, too!" and with that he held up a mudturtle.

"Ten thousand thistles!" yelled Tom as he began pulling off his pajamas. "I'm full of needles!"

CHAPTER XXII

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A CHANGE IN SIGNALS

The scene in the room was one of confusion. Tom was dancing about, rubbing first here and then there on his anatomy. The snake which Sid held was wiggling as if in protest at being suspended by the tail, and was tying itself into all sorts of complicated knots and geometrical figures.

"Look out, it may bite you!" cried Phil, who was holding the mudturtle by the tail, the feet of the animal working back and forth in a vain effort to get a grip on the air.

"It isn't a poisonous snake," declared Sid, who was something of a naturalist. "But I wonder who played this trick on us? What ails you, Tom?"

"Yes; what are you wiggling around in that fashion for, son?" inquired Phil, who began to laugh, now that the extent of the scare was evident.

"Wiggle! I guess you would, too, if some one had filled your bed with needles that came right through your pajamas," replied Tom.

"Needles?" from Sid.

"Needles?" reiterated Phil.

"Yes, needles; ten million of them, by the way I feel!"

Phil placed the mudturtle in the wash basin, where it vainly tried to climb up the slippery porcelain sides. Then he went over to Tom's bed.

"There are no needles here," he said.

"No? What are they, then?" demanded Tom, continuing to rub himself.

"Chestnut burrs," replied his chum, after a more careful inspection. "Some one has taken the stickers off a lot of chestnut burrs and scattered them in your bed. No wonder they went through your pajamas. I'd rather have the mudturtle than them."

"Or a snake," added Sid. "I wonder who did it?"

Phil pulled back the covers from Tom's bed. At the foot, between the sheets, was a piece of paper. The quarter-back made a grab for it and read:

"Compliments of the freshmen. Maybe you won't be so smart next time."

"The freshmen!" cried Tom. "We'll make them smart for this!"

"They've made you smart already," commented Sid, as he put his snake in a pasteboard box, and carefully closed it with a weight on top. "I guess they got ahead of us this time."

"This is Gerhart's writing," went on Phil, looking closely at the note. "He originated the scheme. Let's see if any other fellows have suffered."

They partly dressed, and stole silently to the rooms of some of their classmates. No one else had felt the vengeance of the freshmen, and our friends concluded that the performance had been arranged for their special benefit, on account of the friction they had had with Gerhart.

"How am I going to sleep in that bed to-night?" asked Tom ruefully, when they had returned to their room. "It's like being in a beehive."

"I'll show you," said Phil, and he carefully took off the sheets, folding them up so that the chestnut stickers would not be scattered. "You can do without sheets to-night, I guess."

"I guess I'll have to," went on Tom. "But I'm going to get another pair of pajamas. Those feel too much like a new flannel shirt," and he went to his trunk, which he began ransacking.

"What can we do to get square?" asked Sid, as he again prepared to get into bed. "We've got to teach Gerhart a lesson."

"That's what," agreed Tom. "We'll discuss it in the morning."

But it was not so easy as they had supposed to think up a joke to play on the inventive freshman, that would be commensurate with the trick he had perpetrated on them. Besides, Gerhart kept pretty well with his own crowd of classmates, and, as there was safety in numbers, and as our three friends did not want a general class fight, they were, to a certain extent, handicapped. By Gerhart's grins they knew that he was aware of their discomfiture of the night previous. Tom was sorely tempted to come to fistic conclusions with the freshman, but Sid and Phil dissuaded him, promising to unite with him on some scheme of vengeance. The mudturtle and snake were retained by Sid, who had a small collection of live things.

"We must keep this to ourselves," suggested Phil that morning, as they started for chapel. "Only our own fellows must hear of it."

"Sure," agreed Tom and Sid, but they soon found, from the greetings of the juniors, seniors and freshmen, that the story was all over the school. In fact, to this day the yarn is handed down in the annals of Randall College as an example of how a freshman, single-handed, played a joke on three sophomores; for it developed that Gerhart had done the trick alone.

It was a day or two after this, when Tom and Phil were walking along the river after football practice, that, down near the bridge, they saw Gerhart just ahead of them.

"There's a chance to take a fall out of him," suggested Tom, whose appetite for vengeance was still unappeased.

"That's so," agreed Phil. "Let's catch up to him and toss him into the river."

They quickened their steps, but a moment later they saw a young man come from the bushes at one end of the bridge and join Gerhart. The two walked briskly on, and, as Tom and Phil could see, they were engaged in earnest conversation.

"We can't do anything now," spoke Tom. "That's a stranger. He's not of Randall College. Look at his cap."

"He's from some college," declared Phil. "That cap seems familiar. I wonder who he is."

"Give it up," spoke Tom. "We might as well go back now."

They were about to turn when suddenly the lad with Gerhart swung about and made a violent gesture of dissent. Then Tom and Phil heard him say:

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"I'll have nothing to do with such a dirty trick, and you ought to be ashamed to make the offer!"

"Oh, is that so?" asked Gerhart, and he did not seem nonplussed. "Well, maybe some other fellow will be glad to get what I have to offer."

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed the other. "I'm done with you, and that settles it," and he crashed into the bushes and disappeared, leaving Gerhart alone on the road.

"Did you see who that was?" asked Tom, looking at Phil.

"No; I couldn't make out his face."

"It was George Stoddard, captain of the Boxer Hall eleven."

"That's right," agreed Phil. "I knew I'd seen him before. But he didn't look as he used to in a baseball uniform. I wonder what he and Gerhart had on the carpet."

"Oh, probably Gerhart wanted him to go to some sporty gambling affair. I hear he plays quite a high game at cards."

"Who?"

"Gerhart. Lots of the freshmen of our college have found his pace too fast for them. He and Langridge are thicker than ever. Probably Gerhart wanted some new easy-marks to win from, and is trying to take up with the Boxer Hall boys."

"Shouldn't wonder. But Stoddard turned him down cold."

"Yes; didn't make any bones about it. Well, I s'pose we could catch up to Gerhart now. But what's the use?"

"That's right. Hello! There's Langridge joining him now, Phil," and as Tom spoke they saw the sophomore come from a side path and walk along with the freshman. The two began talking earnestly, and from the manner of Gerhart it seemed that something had gone wrong, and that he was endeavoring to explain.

Tom and Phil forgot the little scene of the afternoon when they got down to studying that night, and as lessons were getting to be pretty "stiff," to quote Sid, it was necessary to put in considerable time over books. The three "boned" away until midnight, and after an inspection of their beds, to make sure that no contraband articles were between the sheets, they turned out the light and were soon slumbering.

The next day Phil was turned back in Greek, and had to write out a difficult exercise.

"Tell Mr. Lighton I'll be ready for practice in half an hour," he said to Tom, as the latter hurried off to get into his football togs. "I'll come as soon as Pitchfork lets me off."

"All right," answered his chum.

When Tom got to the gridiron he found most of the 'varsity eleven there. Coach Lighton was in earnest conversation with Captain Holly Cross.

"Where's Phil?" asked the coach as Tom came up. The left-end explained.

"Come into the gym, fellows," went on the coach. "I have something important to tell you. Phil will be along soon."

Vainly wondering what was in the wind, and whether, by any chance, it concerned Phil, Tom followed the sturdy lads across the field. Phil joined the throng before the gymnasium was reached.

"What's up?" he panted. "Aren't we going to practice?"

"Yes," replied the coach; "but first we've got to arrange for a new set of signals."

"New signals?" cried half a dozen.

"Yes. I have just learned, in an anonymous communication, that an offer was made to a rival college to sell our signals. The offer, I am glad to say, was indignantly refused; but if some one is in possession of our system, we must get a new one. Now, if you will come in here I will change the signals, and we will then go to practice."

Tom and Phil instinctively looked at each other. The memory of the scene between Gerhart and Stoddard, and Langridge's later presence with the freshman, came to them both at once.

CHAPTER XXIII

BATTERING BOXER HALL

There was a little buzz of talk, following the announcement of the coach. Each player looked at his neighbor, as if to learn whether or not he was the guilty one. But Mr. Lighton at once called a halt to this.

"I will say," he continued, "that no member of the 'varsity team, nor has any substitute, been guilty of this mean, sneaking piece of business. I don't even know who it was. I don't want to know. I don't know to whom the offer was made. I don't want to know. But we are going to

protect ourselves, and change the signals."

It was a comparatively simple matter, the way the signals had been devised, to so change them so that another team, even with a copy of the originals, would have found it impossible to know in advance what the plays were to be.

Half an hour was spent in going over the new combinations while the team was in the gymnasium, and then they went out on the field to play against the scrub. It was a little awkward at first for Phil to run the eleven under the new system, and he made one or two blunders. But the scrub was beaten by a good score. [196]

"You'll do better to-morrow," commented the coach. "It is a little troublesome, I know, to use the new letters and figures, but we'll practice on them constantly until we meet Boxer Hall on Saturday."

This was to be the first game of the season with Boxer Hall, the college, which, with Fairview Institute and Randall, formed the Tonoka Lake League. The Randallites were on edge for it, and they had need to be, for Boxer had a fine eleven, better than in many years.

"We'll have all we want to do to beat them," said Phil to a crowd of his chums after practice one day. "They're in better shape than Fairview was."

"So are we," declared Tom. "We're going to win."

"I hope you do," remarked Ford Fenton. "They have a peculiar way of playing the game in the first half. My uncle says——"

"Wow!" It was a simultaneous howl from the crowd of lads. They sometimes did this when Ford's reminiscences got on their nerves. The lad with the uncle turned away.

"I was going to put you on to some of their tricks," he continued in injured tones. "Now I won't." [197]

"Write it out and hand it to Holly Cross," suggested Phil.

"Well, Phil," remarked Tom to his chum on Saturday, about an hour before the big game, when the team was dressing in the Randall gymnasium, "do you feel as if we were going to win?"

"I certainly do," spoke the quarter-back as he laced his canvas jacket. "I never felt in better shape. Only for one thing——" He paused suddenly, but Tom knew what he meant. It was the fear that, in the midst of the game, he might get bad news about his mother. Since receiving the telegram advising him to be ready to leave for Florida on short notice, Phil and his sister had had word that their mother had rallied somewhat, but that no permanent hope was held out for her recovery.

"Try not to think about it, old man," advised Tom.

"I—I do try," responded Phil. "But it—it's hard work," and he bent over to tie his shoe.

Out on the gridiron trotted the Randall players. They were received with a burst of cheers, led by Bean Perkins, whose voice was more than ever like a foghorn.

"Give 'em the 'Conquer or Die' song," he called.

"No; wait until they need it," suggested Sid Henderson, who was in the grandstand. "Let's sing 'We're Going to Make a Touch-down Now!' That'll be better." [198]

The verses and chorus welled out from several hundred lusty throats, and the Randall team, which was at quick practice, looked up in appreciation.

"I wonder if any of the Fairview girls will be here," said Tom as he and Phil were passing the ball back and forth.

"I don't know about all of 'em," replied the quarter-back, "but Ruth and Madge are coming."

"Since when have you been calling her 'Madge'?" asked Tom, with a sharp look at his chum.

"Since she gave me permission," was the answer, and Phil booted the pigskin well down the field.

"And how long is that?"

"What difference does it make to you?" and there was a shade of annoyance in Phil's voice.

"Nothing, only I—er—well—— There they come!" cried Tom suddenly, but it was not to the girls that he referred. The Boxer Hall team had just trotted out, to be received with a round of cheers from their partisans.

"Husky-looking lot," observed Ed Kerr, as he and the other Randall players gazed critically at their opponents.

"They are that," conceded Bricktop Molloy, one of the biggest guards who ever supported a center. [199]

"I'm afraid they'll do us," came from Snail Looper, who was not of a very hopeful turn of mind.

"Nonsense! Don't talk that way, me lad!" objected Bricktop, lapsing into brogue, as he always did when very much in earnest. "Just because they're a lot of big brutes doesn't argue that we can't smash through them. *Omnis sequitur*, you know."

"Oh, you and your Latin!" exclaimed Tom. "Don't we get enough of that in class."

"It's a fine language," went on Molloy, who was a good classical scholar. "But suppose we line up and run a bit."

The practice was over, the preliminaries had all been arranged, the new ball was brought out and handed to Boxer Hall, for Captain Stoddard had won the toss, and elected to kick off. The yellow spheroid was placed on the center line, on top of a little mound of earth.

"Are you all ready?" asked the referee, and Captain Holly Cross cast a quick eye on his team, which, spread out on their field, was like an aggregation of eager foxhounds, waiting for the start.

"Ready," answered Holly.

"Ready," responded Stoddard.

The whistle sounded shrilly, and a moment later Pinkey Davenport's good right toe had met the pigskin with a resounding "thump," and the ball was sailing toward the Randall goal. [200]

Jerry Jackson caught it and began scuttling back toward the center of the field. Tom, with Ed Kerr and Bricktop Molloy, formed interference for him, and with their efficient aid Jerry rushed the leather back for thirty yards, or to within five yards of the middle of the gridiron. There he was downed with a vicious tackle by Dave Ogden, who had managed to get through between Tom and Bricktop, though they flung themselves at him. Jerry lay still for a moment after falling, with the ball tightly clasped in his arms. Captain Cross ran to him.

"Hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"No. Only—only a little wind knocked out of me," answered the plucky left half-back. "I'm all right now."

"Line up, fellows!" cried Holly, and Phil began rattling off a string of numbers and letters.

It was a signal for Kindlings to take the ball through tackle, and, as he got it, the right half-back leaped for the hole that was opened for him. Right through he plunged, staggering along, half pulled, half shoved, until it was impossible to gain another inch, and Kindlings was buried out of sight under an avalanche of players. But the required gain had been made, and Phil signaled for another try at the Boxer Hall line. Captain Stoddard was vainly calling on his men to brace and hold their opponents, while from the grandstand came wild cheers at the first sign of prowess on the part of Randall. [201]

This time Holly Cross went through guard and tackle for a fine gain, and next he was sent between right-tackle and end. So far there had not been a halt in the progress of bucking the line, but when, on the next play, Ed Kerr was called on to go through between left-end and tackle, he felt as if he had hit a number of bags of sand. There was not a foot of gain, and Ed barely saved the ball, which bounced from his arms; but he fell on it like a flash.

"Don't try there again," whispered Kerr to Phil, as he took his position once more. Phil, however, had seen that the Boxer Hall line was weak, and he determined for another try at it, but in a different place. This time Jerry Jackson was called on for a run around right-end, and so successful was it that he went to the twenty-five-yard line before he was heavily thrown. The tackling of the Boxer Hall lads was severe when they got a chance at it.

Phil, in a flash, determined for a field goal trial. The chances were in favor of it, for there was no wind, and the position was right. Besides, if it was successful it would add immensely to the spirit of his team, and give them a rest from the hard line bucking. [202]

Quickly he gave the signal, and Holly Cross ran to the thirty-yard line for a drop kick. The ball came back and was cleanly caught. The Randall line held, and Holly booted the pigskin in fine shape, but with a groan almost of anguish the players and supporters of the college by the river saw the ball strike the cross-bar and bounce back. The attempt had failed.

The leather was brought out to the twenty-five-yard line, and Boxer Hall prepared for her turn at it. On the first try they gained fifteen yards through a hole that was ripped between Grasshopper Backus and Dutch Housenlager. They then gathered in ten more by a run around Tom's end, though he made a desperate effort to stop the man with the ball.

"Right through 'em, now, fellows!" called Captain Stoddard to his players. "Rip 'em up!"

"Hold 'em! Hold 'em!" besought Holly Cross.

And hold the Randallites did. The wave of attack fell back in a sort of froth of players as Pinkey Davenport tried in vain to gain through center. Snail Looper was like a great rock. Once more there was a try at the line, Dave Ogden being sent in with a rush. But he only gained three yards, and it was inevitable that Boxer would punt. The backs of the Randall team ran toward their goal, but Boxer worked a pretty trick, and on a double pass made fifteen yards before the man was stopped. [203]

"That's the stuff!" cried the Boxer coach, and he ran on the field to whisper to Captain Stoddard.

But the thoughtless action of the coach brought its punishment, for Boxer was penalized ten yards on account of their trainer coming on the field without permission. There was much kicking at this, but the officials insisted, and it stood. Then, with a net gain of less than was needed, and on the last down, Boxer had to kick. Holly Cross got the ball and rushed it well back before he was downed.

So far the playing had been pretty even. Though Boxer was a bit weak on defense, they played

a snappy game, and seemed to be able to outgeneral their opponents. Now Randall had another chance to show what they could do.

"Give 'em the 'Conquer or Die' song now!" cried Bean Perkins, and the strains of "*Aut vincere aut mori*" welled out over the gridiron. It seemed to give just the stimulus needed, and when Kindlings had been sent crashing into the line for a twelve-yard gain, Phil quickly resolved on the fake tackle and pass to half-back play. First, however, he called for Ed Kerr to make a try through right-tackle, and when this had been accomplished, with a smashing force that temporarily demoralized the Boxer Hall players, Kindlings was once more requested to oblige. He took the ball from Ed, who had received it from Phil, and around right-end he went, with beautiful interference. It completely fooled the other team, and when the Boxer full-back finally managed to stop Kindlings it was on the ten-yard line.

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"Touch-down! Touch-down!" yelled the Randall supporters.

"Touch-down it shall be!" exclaimed Phil.

Smash and hammer, hammer and smash, batter and push it was for the next three minutes! Boxer was desperate, and with tears in their eyes her players sought to stem the tide rushing against them. But Randall was not to be denied. Again and again her men went battering against the wall of flesh and blood, until, with what seemed a superhuman effort, Holly Cross was shoved over the line for a touch-down.

Oh, what yelling and cheering there was then! Even the voice of Bean Perkins, strident as it was, could not be heard above the others. The grandstands were trembling with the swaying, yelling, stamping mass of enthusiasts congregated on them.

Holly Cross kicked a beautiful goal, and with the score six to nothing against them, Boxer Hall prepared to continue the game. There was no let up to the play. It was fast and furious. For a time it seemed that Boxer would score, as, after getting possession of the ball by means of a forward pass, they ripped off twenty yards, and followed that up by gathering in ten more by a smashing play through center. Snail Looper was knocked out, and had to go to the side lines, Rod Everet replacing him. This, to a certain extent, weakened the team, and Randall could not seem to hold. The ball was rushed along until it was within three yards of the maroon and yellow goal. Then, responding nobly to the entreaties which Holly Cross, made, his players held stiffly, and Randall got the ball on downs. No time was lost in booting the pigskin out of danger, and before another formation could be made the whistle blew, and the first half was over.

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"Fellows," remarked Coach Lighton in the dressing-room during the rest, "I needn't tell you that you've got to play for all you're worth to win this game. We're going to have trouble this half. With Looper gone, though I expect Everet will do nearly as well at center, it means a certain loss of team work. But do your best. Their line isn't as strong as I feared, but they play much fiercer in the attack than I expected. However, I think you can rip 'em up. Get another touch-down—two if you can—and prevent them from scoring. They may try for a field goal. If they do, get through and block the kick. Now rest all you can."

The second half started in fiercely. Randall kicked off, and succeeded in nailing the Boxer Hall man with the ball before he had run ten yards. But when the line-bucking began something seemed to be the matter with the Randall players. They were shoved back very easily, it appeared, and, with constant gains, the ball was carried toward their territory. So eager did the Randallites get at one stage that they played off-side, and were penalized ten yards. Again there was holding in the line, and ten yards more were given to Boxer Hall for this. The opponents of Randall were now within thirty yards of the goal. By a smash through center they ripped off five more. Then Pinkey Davenport dropped back for a trial for a field goal, and made it. The score was now six to five in favor of Randall.

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When Randall got the ball again there was a change at once noticed. More confidence was felt, and so fiercely did her players assail the line that they carried the pigskin, in three rushes, well toward the middle of the field.

Phil gave the signal for a forward pass, and it was well executed. Then came a fake kick, and this was followed by an on-side one. Both netted good gains, and once more Randall was jubilant.

"Right through the line!" cried Phil. "Eat 'em up, fellows!"

His players responded to his call. Through tackle, guard and center, then around the end, the plays being repeated, the ball was carried. The men were tiring, but Phil would not chance a kick. They had no sure thing of a field goal now, as a little wind had sprung up. Up and up the field the spheroid, yellow no longer, but dirty and grass-stained, was carried. On the Randallites took it, until they were on the twenty-five-yard line. There was a form of madness among the college supporters now. Once more came the fierce cries for a touch-down, and once more Phil called to his teammates to respond. The signal for some sequence plays was given. It was well these had been practiced, for Phil's voice could scarcely be heard. One after another four plays were reeled off. They were all effective, and though Boxer Hall tried to stem the rush, it was impossible. Over the line went the Randall lads, to the inspiring chorus of: "Tear 'Em Apart and Toss 'Em Aside!"

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"Touch-down! Touch-down! Touch-down!" came the frantic cries, the players mingling their voices with those of the spectators on the grandstand. The goal was missed, but the score was now eleven to five in favor Randall.

Again came the line-up after the kick off. By a fumble Boxer lost the ball, and Tom Parsons fell on it. Then began another fierce attack on the Boxer eleven. But the terrific line-smashing was telling on both teams, though more so on Randall. There was less power in her attack.

Boxer held for downs, and the kick was a weak one, the ball going only a short distance. Then Boxer Hall began to rush it back, and by a trick play got it so far down the gridiron that another field goal was kicked. It began to look dubious for Randall, but there was no give-up in her playing. Securing the ball, Phil kept his players on the rush. Down the field they went, a forward pass netting a good gain and wonderfully saving the wind of the now almost exhausted team. An on-side kick was also used, and then, seeing a weak place in the adversary's line, Phil in turn sent Kindlings, Jerry Jackson and Holly Cross at it. In vain did Boxer Hall try to stop up the gap, but their left-tackle and guard were about all in. In two minutes more Bricktop Molloy was shoved over the line for a third touch-down, and, as goal was kicked, the score was seventeen to ten.

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"One more touch-down!" cried Holly Cross, but there was no time for it. Two minutes more of play and the whistle blew. Randall had won one of the fiercest games she had ever played.

"A cheer for Boxer Hall!" cried Holly Cross, and the despondent players, grieving over their defeat, sent back an answer. Then came cheer upon cheer from the grandstand, where waved the yellow and maroon of Randall, and Bean Perkins led in the song: "We Have Come and We Have Conquered!"

"Great, old man!" cried Tom to Phil, who was limping slightly. "Are you hurt?"

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"I shouldn't care if I was in pieces after the way we walloped them! Come on over here. I see my sister and Madge!"

Tom followed, his head singing from a severe knock he had received.

CHAPTER XXIV

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GERHART HAS AN IDEA

Phil's sister hurried down from the grandstand to greet him.

"Oh, Phil!" she cried. "Did you get hurt?" for she saw him limping, and she held out her hands to him.

"Just a little twist," he explained. "Not worth mentioning. How are you, Madge?" he went on, after patting his sister on the shoulder, and he held his hands eagerly out to Miss Tyler.

"Fine!" she exclaimed. "Oh, wasn't it a great game?"

"For us," put in Tom, who had greeted Ruth, and now turned to the other girl.

"Good afternoon, Tom," spoke Madge, and Tom fancied there was just a tinge of coldness in her voice. She continued talking to Phil.

"Did you think you would win?" asked Phil's sister of Tom as she looked eagerly up into his face.

"Well, not all the while," replied the left-end. "Once or twice I began to think we'd lose. But you can't down Randall."

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"No; it takes Fairview to do that, not Boxer Hall," put in Madge quickly.

"Now, be nice—be nice!" pleaded Phil with a laugh. "I thought you were a friend of mine, Madge."

"So I am," she replied gaily; "but I can't help saying that."

"We'll beat you next time," went on Phil, and he dodged back to escape a little blow which Madge aimed at him with her small flag. Then the two laughed. Tom, who was chatting with Ruth, heard them, and he half turned to see what was going on. He was just in time to see Phil grasp both Madge's hands, and his face turned red. Ruth noticed it, and she said:

"Phil and Madge seem to get on well together."

"Almost too well," was Tom's thought, but he said nothing and changed the subject.

"Well, Tom," said Phil at length, "I suppose we'd better go dress like respectable citizens. You've got a spot of mud on your nose."

"And you have one on your ear," added Ruth. "I think Tom—I mean Mr. Parsons—looks quite artistic with that beauty spot."

"We can dispense with the 'Mister,' if you like, Ruth," said Tom boldly.

"Oh!" laughed Ruth. "I don't know what my brother will say. Eh, Phil?"

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"Oh, I guess it's safe to call 'Dominie' Parsons by his front handle," said Phil. "He's warranted not to bite. Go ahead, sis."

"All right," she agreed with a laugh. "There—Tom"—and she hesitated prettily at the name—"better run along and wash up."

"Will you wait here for us?" asked Tom. "We'll take you over to Fairview, then, eh, Phil?"

"Surest thing you know!" exclaimed the quarter-back. "That is, if Madge is agreeable."

He looked at her. She blushed just a trifle, and, with a little gesture, answered:

"If Ruth insists on having her brother, why——"

"But I don't want my brother!" cried Ruth gaily. "Whoever heard of a sister walking with her own brother? I'm going to let you have him, and I—er—I——" She paused, blushing.

"I'll fill in!" cried Tom quickly.

Madge looked at him, but said nothing.

A little later on Tom, beside Ruth, and Phil, walking with Madge, started for the trolley to Fairview. As they were crossing the campus, which was thronged with players, visitors and some of the Boxer Hall team and its supporters, Wallops, the messenger, came along with a telegram in his hand.

"Is that for me?" asked Phil eagerly, and his face was pale, while his voice trembled. His sister looked quickly at him. Evidently she feared the same thing he did. [213]

"No; it's for Professor Tines," replied the messenger, and Phil breathed a sigh of relief as Wallops passed on.

Garvey Gerhart, who, with Langridge, was standing near Phil at the time, started. Then a curious look came over his face.

"Langridge," he asked the sophomore, "have you anything to do?"

"Nothing special. Why?"

"Well, if you haven't, come along with me. I've just thought of an idea."

"They're mighty scarce," retorted the former pitcher. "Don't let it get away."

"Take a walk over by the chapel, and I'll tell you," went on Gerhart. "There isn't such a crowd there."

Phil and Tom, with the two girls, were soon on the way to the co-educational college. The trip was enlivened by laughter and jokes. Madge and Phil seemed very good friends, and, as for Tom, though he wondered at the sudden companionship that had sprung up between the quarter-back and the pretty girl he had once been so anxious to get away from Langridge, he could not help but congratulate himself on knowing Ruth. Still, he could not altogether understand Madge. He had been fond of her—he was still—and he knew that she had liked him. The slender tie of relationship between them was no bar to an affection that differed in degree from cousinly. Yet Madge plainly showed her liking for Phil. Could it be, Tom thought, that she was jealous of him, and took this method of showing it? He did not think Madge would do such a thing, yet he felt that part of her gaiety and good spirits, when in company with the handsome quarter-back, were assumed for some purpose. [214]

"If it wasn't that Ruth is such a nice girl, and that Phil and I are such friends, I'd almost think that he and I were—well—rivals," thought Tom. "Oh, hang it all! What's the use of getting sentimental? They're both nice girls—very nice—the—the only trouble is I don't know which I think the nicer."

The two chums left the girls at the Fairview College campus, for it was getting late. Tom shook hands with Ruth, and then walked over to Madge to say good-by. She had just finished speaking to Phil.

"Well, when can your 'cousin' come over to see you again, Madge?" asked Tom with a smile.

He held out his hand, but Madge affected not to see it. Tom felt uncomfortable, and then, as if she realized it, she said to him:

"Well, 'Cousin' Tom, I don't know that you'll *care* to come over to see me again," and with that she turned and walked away. [215]

Tom remained staring after her for a moment. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he wheeled and joined Phil, who had been a silent witness to the little scene.

"Say, aren't girls odd?" asked Tom.

"Very," agreed his chum. "But you said that once before, you know."

"No; did I?" asked Tom, and he was rather silent on the way back to Randall.

Meanwhile, Langridge and Gerhart had spent much time strolling about the chapel walk. It was getting dusk, and the fading light of the perfect fall day was shining through the wonderful, stained-glass windows of the little church. The long casements, with representations of biblical scenes, were a soft glow of delicate hues. But the two lads had no eyes for these beauties.

"I think that will put a crimp in his playing!" Gerhart remarked, as he paused to light an oriental cigarette, or, rather, something that passed for one.

"But it's risky," expostulated Langridge. "If it's found out, and it's sure to be, you'll have to leave college."

"I don't care. I'd be willing to, if I could have my revenge on him for keeping me off the team. I don't like it here, anyhow. The other game I put up on him didn't work, but this one will." [216]

"And when will you try it?"

"At the last and deciding game. The way I figure it is that the final tussle will come between Randall and Boxer Hall. I'll be ready with it then. It will certainly knock him out."

"But it may lose us the game and the championship."

"What do I care! I'll be square with Clinton, and that's what I want. I got the idea when I saw how frightened he was when Wallops had that telegram. Don't you think it will work?"

"Sure it will work. It's a great idea, but—but—" and Langridge hesitated. "It's a brutal trick, just the same."

"Oh, you're too chicken-hearted. Come on and I'll buy you a drink. That will put some life in you."

"All right," said Langridge weakly, and he went.

CHAPTER XXV

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PHIL GIVES UP

Out on the athletic ground Grasshopper Backus was practicing the standing broad jump. It was one of the things he was always at, whence his nickname. But, as Holly Cross used to say, "Grasshopper had about as much chance of making the track team as he had of making a perfect score at tennis," a game which the big lad abhorred. For, though Grasshopper was very fond of jumping and practiced it every time he got a chance, there was something wrong with his method, and he never could get beyond the preliminaries in a contest. Still, he kept at it.

"Why don't you give up?" asked Phil, who, with Tom and Sid, strolled down where the lone student was leaping away as if the championship of the college depended on it.

"Say, you let me alone," objected Grasshopper, as he prepared for a jump. "I beat my own record a while ago."

"By how much?" asked Phil.

"Well, not much; a quarter of an inch, but that shows I'm improving."

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"Yes; at that rate you'll be through college, and a post graduate like Bricktop before you make enough gain to count," declared Tom.

"Oh, you let me alone!" exclaimed the exasperated one. With that he jumped, and then, with a measuring tape, he carefully noted the distance he had covered.

"Any gain?" asked Sid.

"No; I went back an inch then," was the reply.

"Like the frog in the well," went on Phil. "He jumped up three feet every day, and fell back four feet every night."

"Aw, quit!" begged Grasshopper, who was sensitive, in spite of his enormous bulk.

"You go high enough, but you don't go far enough," commented Sid. "Now, if they allow hurdling in football, you'd be right in it for jumping over the line to make a touch-down."

"Maybe they'll change the rules so as to allow it," spoke Grasshopper hopefully.

"Get out, you old Stoic!" cried Phil. "Come and take a walk with us. Tom is going to blow us to ginger ale."

"No; I'm going to keep at it until I beat my best mark," and the jumper again got on the line.

"Curious chap," commented Phil, as the three chums walked on.

"But as good as they make 'em," added Tom.

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"That's what!" spoke Sid fervently.

Snail Looper soon recovered from the effects of the hard Boxer Hall game, and practice was resumed with the 'varsity bucking against the scrub. There was a big improvement shown in the first team, for the players had demonstrated that they could meet with an eleven counted among the best, and win from it.

"Well, fellows, are you all ready for the trip Saturday?" asked the Coach at the conclusion of the practice. "None of you are falling behind in studies, I hope?"

Captain Cross assured Mr. Lighton that every man on the team was A1 when it came to scholarship.

"Now, a word of advice," went on the coach. "Don't get nervous over this out-of-town trip. We're going up against a hard team, and on strange grounds, but just think of it as if you were going to play Fairview, or Boxer Hall, or Dodville Prep right here. The worst feature of out-of-town games is that they throw the men off their stride. Don't let that happen to you."

They all promised that it should not, and then the players separated. The coach had arranged for a game with a distant college—Wescott University—which boasted of a superb eleven. It meant a long trip on the train, two days spent away from Randall, and a day to come back in.

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The journey to Wescott University was much enjoyed by the eleven and the substitutes. They reached the city at dusk, and were at once taken to the hotel, where quarters had been secured

for them. A big crowd of students had planned to come from Randall to see the game, a special excursion train having been arranged for.

"Now, fellows, early to bed to-night," stipulated the coach after supper was over. "No skylarking, and don't go to eating a lot of trash. I want you all to be on edge. We'll devote tomorrow to practice, and the next day to wiping up the gridiron with Wescott."

Tom and Phil roomed together, and at midnight Tom, who had just fallen into a doze, after envying the sound slumber of his chum, was awakened by the latter.

"I'm sick, Tom," said Phil faintly.

"What's the matter, old man?" asked the left-end anxiously, and he jumped out of bed, turning on the electric light.

"I don't know, but I'm dizzy, and I feel—well, rotten, to put it mildly."

"That's too bad. Can I get you anything?"

"Better call Mr. Lighton. I don't want to take a lot of dope unless he says so."

Tom quickly dressed and called the coach, who was on the same floor where all the football players had their rooms. He came in quickly, and after one glance at Phil insisted on calling the hotel physician. The doctor went through the usual procedure, and left some medicine for Phil.

"What is it?" asked the coach of the physician.

"Nothing, only his stomach is a little upset. Change of diet and water will sometimes do it. He'll be all right in the morning."

Phil was better the next day, but when he went out to practice with the lads, there was a lassitude in his movements, and a lack of snap in his manner of running the team, that made several open their eyes. Mr. Lighton said nothing, but Tom whispered to his chum to "brace up." Phil tried to, and managed to get through the practice with some return of his former vim. He went to bed early that night, and slept soundly—too heavily, Tom thought, as it might indicate fever.

The day of the game, however, Phil seemed all right. His face was paler than usual, and there was a grimness about his lips that Tom seldom saw. The Randall boys had light practice in the morning, running through the signals, and then took a rest until it was time to go on the field.

There was a big attendance, and the cheers of the small contingent of Randall supporters could hardly be heard. The preliminary practice seemed to go all right, and when the whistle blew there was a confident eleven that lined up against Wescott. The play was hard and snappy, with much kicking and open work. The rivals of Randall had a couple of backs who were excellent punters, and the visitors were kept busy chasing the ball. But there came a change, and when Randall had the pigskin Phil rushed his men up the field to such good advantage that they scored the first touch-down, to the no small dismay of the Wescott team.

"Now, Phil, some more work like that," said Holly Cross, but the quarter-back did not answer.

Wescott got possession of the ball toward the close of the first half, and with surprising power rushed it up the field. In less time than had been thought possible they had a touch-down. Randall lost the pigskin on fumbles, and when Wescott got it again they kicked a field goal. This ended the half.

Phil staggered as he walked to the dressing-room for the rest period.

"What's the matter?" asked the coach quickly.

"Nothing—I'm—I'm all right," answered the quarter-back, and he gritted his teeth hard.

Wescott kicked off in the second half, and Holly Cross managed to run the ball well back.

"Rip out another touch-down!" the captain cried as he got in place for the first scrimmage. Phil began on the signal. He hesitated. The players looked at him quickly. He was swaying back and forth on the ground. Once more he tried to give the combination of letters and figures. But the words would not come. He put his hands out to steady himself, and a moment later, with a groan, toppled over.

"He's hurt!" cried Tom as he sprang to the side of his chum. "But I never knew Phil to give up."

Holly Cross was bending over him, while the other Randallites crowded up, and the Wescott lads stretched out on the field. A doctor ran in from the side lines on a signal from the coach. He felt of Phil's pulse.

"Why, the chap has a high fever!" he exclaimed. "He has collapsed from it. He can't play any more! Take him off the field!"

A groan went up from the Randall players.

CHAPTER XXVI

SID IS BOGGED

Phil Clinton opened his eyes. His face, that had been pale, was now flushed. The reaction had set in, and he tried to struggle to his feet.

"Signal!" he cried. "Eighteen A B X—two twenty-seven Z M!"

He tried to get in position to take the ball from Snail Looper, who was standing up, regarding him curiously.

"What's the matter?" cried Phil. "Why don't you get down to snap it back, Snail? Isn't it our ball? Have we lost it on a fumble? Are they beating us?"

"You—you can't play," spoke Holly Cross brokenly.

"Can't play! Nonsense! Of course I can play! I'm all right! I was just knocked out for a minute. Get down there, Snail. Signal——" But Phil fell back into the arms of Tom and the doctor, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

"Carry him off the field," said the medical man softly. "He's got lots of grit, but a horse couldn't play with the fever he has." [225]

Sorrowfully they carried the stricken quarter-back from the gridiron. It was a hard blow to the Randall team, for it meant that a new man would have to go in and play what was probably the most exacting position on the team.

"Jerry Jackson, go to quarter," called Holly Cross. "I'll put Hayden at left half-back," and the substitute was summoned from the side lines. The play went on, but, as might have been expected, Randall was at a disadvantage. When they had the ball they managed to gain considerable ground, and as much punting as possible was done. But Wescott tore through for another touch-down, while the solitary one gained in the first half was the limit of the scoring the visitors could do. There did come a brace on the part of Randall toward the close of the game, and when the whistle blew they had the ball on the ten-yard line of their opponents. They had put up a plucky fight against big odds, and the Wescott players realized it, for they cheered lustily for their enemies. There was lack of heartiness, not alone from the sense of defeat, in the cheer and college yell with which Randall responded. Then they filed sorrowfully off the field, while Tom, Holly Cross and the coach, as soon as possible, went to the hotel where Phil had been taken in an automobile.

They imagined all sorts of things, and were not a little relieved when the doctor told them that, at worst, Phil only had a bad attack of bilious fever. The change of diet, necessitated by the trip, had brought it on. With rest and quiet he would be all right in a week, the medical man said. [226]

"And when can he play football?" asked Holly Cross anxiously.

"Not for two weeks," was the reply, and the coach and captain groaned. They had a game with Fairview in prospect, and must needs win it if they were to have a chance for the championship.

"I wonder if we can't postpone it?" asked Holly dubiously.

"Impossible," answered the coach. "We'll have to play Jackson at quarter. I'll take him in hand at once. We only have a week, but in that time the Jersey twin will do better than Moseby, who's been playing quarter on the scrub. It's the best we can do."

Phil was too sick to accompany the team home, and Tom volunteered to stay with him for a couple of days, the coach and captain agreeing to explain matters at college. So the despondent players returned to Haddonfield, while Tom remained with Phil at the hotel. Three days later, thanks to the skill of the doctor, Phil was able to travel, though he was quite weak. He was broken-hearted at the way he had collapsed in the critical part of the game, but Tom would not listen to any of his chum's self-reproaches. [227]

"I'll make up for it when we play Fairview!" declared Phil. He was in a bad state when told that he could not play that game, but there was no help for it.

Ruth called to see her brother, accompanied by Madge Tyler. He was sitting in the dilapidated easy chair when the girls came in, and apologized for it.

"Oh, we're glad to see you even in that state, Phil, as long as it's no worse, aren't we, Madge?" spoke Ruth.

"Of course," answered Madge brightly. "I wish you were better, so you could play Saturday against our college."

"We'd be sure to win, if he did," interposed Tom. "As it is, your fellows have a better chance."

"I—I don't care if we do lose!" exclaimed Madge, and she blushed prettily. "That is——" and she paused in some confusion.

"Why, Madge Tyler!" exclaimed Ruth. "That's treason!"

"I don't care," was the answer, with a toss of the head. "Don't you want your brother to get well?"

"Of course, but——"

"Well," was all Madge said, and Tom wondered what she meant. [228]

But Randall did not lose to Fairview in the second game. It was a hard one, but the Jersey twin did good work at quarter, and Hayden proved a "star" end, making a brilliant run and a touch-down. The score was seventeen to five, a solitary field goal being all that Fairview was able to accomplish.

"Well, now we'll have a chance at the championship, when we meet Boxer Hall next," said Phil, who had watched the contest from the grandstand, though he was as nervous as a colt all the while.

The 'varsity quarter-back was allowed to begin practice the following week, and was soon playing with his old-time form. In fact, the little rest seemed to have benefited him, and this, added to the fact that encouraging news had been received concerning his mother, made him less apprehensive when he was on the gridiron. There were two more rather unimportant games in prospect before the final contest with Boxer Hall, and all the energies of the Randall eleven were now turned to the deciding contest.

"I say, you fellows," remarked Sid one sunny November afternoon, when all three chums were in the room after lectures, "don't you want to take a walk with me? I've got to do some observation work in my biology course, and I'm going to take my camera along and make some pictures."

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"Where you going?" asked Tom.

"Oh, along the river. Then I'll strike across country, and fetch up somewhere. We'll not be gone over three hours, and we'll get back by dark. Come along; it will do you good."

"Shall we go with the old gazabo, Phil?" asked Tom.

"If he guarantees not to get us lost in the woods, so we'll have to stay out all night," replied the quarter-back.

"Oh, I'll get you home safe," declared Sid. "We'll have a nice walk. I'll be ready in a jiffy," and he proceeded to load his camera with films. It was a large one, and he often used it to make pictures which had a bearing on his class work in biology and evolution. The three chums were soon strolling along the banks of the river, Sid on the lookout for late-staying birds or some animal or reptile which he might add to his photographic collection.

"You must be fond of this sort of thing, to lug that heavy camera around with you," commented Phil.

"I am," said Sid. "It's very interesting to study the habits of birds and animals. You'd ought to have taken that course."

"I wish I had, instead of mathematics," put in Tom. "I'm dead sick of them, but I guess I'll have to stick at 'em."

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For a mile or more Sid saw nothing on which to focus his camera. He suggested that they leave the vicinity of the river and strike across country, and, as his chums left the matter entirely to him, this plan was followed. Suddenly, as they were going through a clump of trees about a mile from the stream, Sid uttered an exclamation.

"Hold on, fellows!" he cried. "I can get a beautiful snapshot here," and he motioned them to stand still, while he got his automatic hand camera into position.

"What is it?" whispered Phil.

"A *vulpes pennsylvanicus argentatus!*" answered Sid as he turned the focusing screw.

"What's that, for the love of Mike?" spoke Tom.

"Blessed if I know," retorted Phil. "I don't see anything. Maybe it's a snake."

"It's a fox, you chumps!" came from Sid. "Keep still, can't you? I've got him just right. He can't see me, and the wind is blowing from him to me. I'll have his picture in a minute!"

But, as bad luck would have it, just as Sid was about to press the lever, releasing the shutter, Phil leaned too heavily on one foot. A stick broke under him with a snap, there was a sudden rustling in the bushes, and Sid uttered a cry of dismay.

"There he goes!" cried the naturalist. "What's the matter with you fellows, anyhow? Can't you keep still? Now it will take me an hour to trail him, and the chances are I can't do it."

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"It wasn't my fault," explained Tom. "Phil did it."

"I couldn't help it," came from the guilty one. "What do you want to photograph such scary things as foxes for, anyhow?"

"Humph!" was Sid's exclamation. "Well, there's no help for it. Come on."

"Where?" inquired Tom.

"After the fox, of course," and Sid started resolutely forward. Tom and Phil followed for a short distance, then Phil called out:

"Say, it's getting swampy here."

"What of it?" asked Sid, whose enthusiasm would not let him notice such small matters.

"Lots of it," came from Tom. "We're getting our feet wet."

"Ah, don't be babies!" retorted Sid, plunging into a deep, muddy hole. "Come on."

"I'm going to find a dryer path," said Phil, and Tom agreed with him. They turned aside, but Sid kept on. Soon he was lost to sight in the woods. Phil and Tom looked in vain for a better route, and, finding none, decided to turn back.

"We'll wait for you out on the main road," Phil called to his unseen chum. An indistinguishable

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answer came back. The two picked their way to higher ground, and edged off toward the road which skirted the woods.

"Photographing in a swamp is too rich for my blood," commented Phil.

"Same here," agreed Tom. "But Sid doesn't seem to mind it. Smoked mackerel, look at my shoes!" and he glanced at his muddy feet.

"I'm in as bad," added Phil. "Let's walk through the grass and——"

Just then they heard Sid calling from afar.

"What's he saying?" asked Tom.

"Listen," advised Phil.

Again the cry was heard.

"Sounds as if he was calling for us to come to him," ventured Tom.

"That's it, but I'm not going. I'm just as well satisfied to look at the photograph after he's developed it. I'm going to stay here," came from Phil.

"Sure," added Tom.

The cries continued, and then ceased. Tom and Phil waited nearly an hour for Sid to reappear, and when he did not come they started back for college, thinking he had gone another way. But poor Sid was in dire straits, as we shall soon see.

CHAPTER XXVII

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WOES OF A NATURALIST

Sid Henderson was of a very hopeful disposition, otherwise he never would have undertaken to get a picture of that fox after it had once been alarmed. But he fancied he could trail it to its burrow, and he wanted very much to get a photograph of the animal in its home surroundings.

So, unmindful of the desertion of his chums, he plunged on into the swamp. The footing became more and more treacherous as he advanced, and he had to go slowly, looking here and there for grass hummocks to support him. His camera, too, was a handicap.

"But I'm going to get that fox!" he exclaimed. "I just need a picture like that. Besides, I may find in this swamp some material I can use in my biological experiments."

On he went, leaping from hummock to hummock. Once he nearly slipped and barely saved himself from falling into a slough of black water.

"I wonder how deep that is?" he remarked, and taking a dead branch he thrust it straight down. He found that the hole was deeper than he had anticipated.

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Keeping a sharp lookout for the animal he was after, he was at length rewarded by a sight of it slinking along through the bushes. He started forward eagerly, so eagerly, in fact, that he did not pick his steps. A moment later he slipped from a grass hummock and went into the muddy bog, up to his waist.

"Wow! Whoop! Help! Here, fellows! Come here and help me! Bring a fence rail!" he called, for he felt himself sinking down deeper and deeper.

Tom and Phil heard his cries, but thought he was only calling to them to come and see some natural curiosity or view the fox, so they did not respond. Sid called again and again, but got no answer. Then he tried to scramble from the bog, and found it hard work, for he had to hold his camera high up that it might not get wet.

At last he managed to free his legs from the sticky mud and reached a comparatively firm place. But what a plight he was in! Plastered with swamp-ooze to his waist, he looked like some sewer laborer. Though he did not know it, his face was spotted with globules of mud, splashed up in his struggles to get from the bog.

"Well, I certainly am in bad," he remarked to himself. "Lucky I put on old clothes. I can't get much worse, that's one satisfaction. I might as well keep on. Maybe I can get that fox now."

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So he continued through the swamp. His speed was better, for he no longer paused to pick his steps, but splashed on, careless of the mud and water. The fever of the chase was in his veins, and another glimpse of the fox convinced him that the animal was heading for its burrow. At last, after a tramp of a mile, Sid was successful, and, in the fast fading light of the fall day, he snapped the creature, just as it was entering the hole, when it turned for a final look at its tireless pursuer.

"Well, it was worth it all," sighed the naturalist as he closed up his camera and started for home. "Now I wonder where Phil and Tom are."

Remembering that they had called to him that they would wait out on the road, he took that highway back to college. On the way he found several specimens which he needed in his evolution work, and in thinking about them, and his success in photographing the fox, he forgot

about the plight he was in. He did not meet his chums, of course, and it was dusk when he got back to college. The mud had dried somewhat on his trousers and shoes, and, incidentally, on his face and hands, for he had, unconsciously, run his hands over his countenance once or twice, so that the mud globules had increased in surface area.

It was a very strange and somewhat disreputable figure that entered the west dormitory a little later and started up the stairs, but Sid did not know that, having no looking glass at hand. [236]

Now it so happened that Professor Tines was just leaving the dormitory. He had called to see one of his pupils who was ill—a “greasy dig” student—to use the college vernacular to designate a lad who burned midnight oil over his studies. The professor having finished his call came upon Sid in the corridor. The instructor saw before him a young man, mud covered, carrying a square, black box, and the countenance, spotted with specimens of swamp muck, was unfamiliar to him. Professor Tines at once suspected a student trick.

“Here! Where are you going?” he cried, blocking the way of Sid.

“To my room,” answered the luckless naturalist, who, of course, not appreciating that he was most effectually disguised, thought that the Latin teacher had recognized him.

“Your room! What do you mean by such nonsense? What student put you up to this joke? Tell me, and I will have him punished at once. How dare you come in here?”

“Why, I—I belong here, Professor Tines,” said Sid.

“Belong here? You work on the coal trestle! Don’t tell me! You are covered with coal dust now! What have you there? Are you going to play some trick at the instigation of the freshmen? I demand an answer!” [237]

“I’m Henderson,” went on Sid desperately. “I room here—with Phil Clinton and Tom Parsons.”

“How dare you trifle with me in this fashion?” demanded the irate Latin instructor. “I shall call the proctor and have you arrested!” and he was so much in earnest that Sid, beginning to appreciate the state he was in, determined to prove absolutely that he was himself.

“Professor Tines,” he said, “you can knock on that door there, and ask Clinton and Parsons if I’m not Henderson. I’ve been out after a fox, and I fell in the bog.”

“Ha!” cried the professor. “I see it now. You are trying to play a joke on me, with the aid of Clinton and Parsons. But you shall all three suffer for it! I *will* knock on that door. I *will* confront your fellow conspirators with the evidence of their silly act. Come here,” and he placed his hand on Phil’s shoulder and led him toward the room of the three chums. “You shall not trifle with me!” he added fiercely.

Holding Sid firmly by the shoulder with one hand, Professor Tines with the other knocked loudly at the portal. Phil and Tom were within, and the latter quickly opened the door, for the summons was imperative. The two chums in the room started back at the sight of the instructor having in custody the mud-covered figure. [238]

“Young gentlemen,” began the professor sternly, “this—this person asserts that he is Henderson, and that he rooms here. I caught him in the corridor, and at once detected the joke he was about to play. He appealed to me to bring him here for identification. Have you three conspired to play a trick on me? Is this Henderson or is it not?”

Tom and Phil stared at the disreputable figure. They knew at once that it was their chum, but the spirit of mischief entered into Tom. He nudged Phil, and then answered promptly:

“Certainly not, Professor Tines. We don’t know the person!”

Then he shut the door, while, with a cry of rage at the desertion of his friends, Sid tried to break away from the Latin teacher.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TOM IS JEALOUS

“Ha! I knew you were up to some trick!” cried Professor Tines. “You are no student of Randall College at all! I’ll take you to Proctor Zane, and he’ll give you in charge of an officer! Perhaps you are a thief, and have stolen that camera!” [239]

“It’s mine!” exclaimed Sid, unable to understand the action of Tom and Phil. “I tell you I am Henderson, professor!”

“Indeed! Then how do you account for Parsons and Clinton failing to identify you?”

“That’s a—a joke!” Sid was forced to say.

“Ha! I knew there was some trick in it! So you admit you were trying to play a joke on me in having them identify you?”

“No, no!” cried Sid, alarmed at this misunderstanding. “They were joking when they said I wasn’t Henderson.”

“Well, who are you, then?”

"Why, I *am* Henderson. This is my camera."

"Don't make it any worse, young man," warned the teacher sternly. "Come with me to the proctor!"

There was no help for it, Sid had to go. He might have broken away from the professor, but he did not like to try it, for Mr. Tines seemed very determined, and the ensuing tumult would bring into the corridor a throng of students, so that Sid would never hear the last of the joke that had turned on him. He went along quietly, thankful that it was dark, and that no one would see him in the walk across the campus to the proctor's quarters.

"Here is a young man—a thief, if nothing worse, perhaps—whom I caught in the corridor of the west dormitory," explained Professor Tines to Mr. Zane a little later as he stood with his quarry before the proctor. Sid caught a glimpse of himself in a looking glass in the brightly-lighted office.

"Oh—I—do I look like that?" he gasped as he saw his slimy trousers, and his face, which was like unto that of a chimney sweep, his hands also being covered with the swamp mud.

"You certainly do!" said Professor Tines heartily. "Are you now ready to confess, before we send for an officer?"

"But I tell you I'm Henderson!" insisted the luckless Sid. "It was only a joke when Phil and Tom went back on me. I tell you I'm Henderson, of the sophomore class!"

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The proctor glanced sharply at him. Mr. Zane had good eyes and a memory for voices, which Professor Tines lacked.

"I believe it *is* Henderson," spoke the proctor at length. "But where in the world have you been?"

"Photographing a fox," explained Sid, and then he told the whole story. A dawning light of belief came into the countenance of Professor Tines, and when Sid had been allowed to wash his face and hands, there was no further doubt as to his identity.

"Well," remarked the proctor, trying hard not to laugh as he glanced at the student's mud-encased trousers, "I would advise you to wear rubber boots when you go on your next nature excursion."

"I will," promised Sid. "May I go to my room now?"

"I suppose so," rasped out the Latin instructor. "But—ahem! I am not altogether sure yet that you are not up to some mischief."

"I'll develop the picture of the fox and show you!" exclaimed Sid eagerly. "And here are some snails I picked up in the swamp," and with that he plunged his hand into the pocket of his coat and drew out a lot of the slimy creatures. Some of them dropped on the floor and started to crawl away, leaving a shimmering track.

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"That will do! The evidence is sufficient, I think!" exclaimed the proctor, who had a horror of such things. "Take them away at once, Mr. Henderson!" And Sid went down on his knees to gather up the *helix molluscæ*, while Professor Tines hurried from the room.

"Do you want to see the picture of the fox?" asked Sid as he arose, his hands filled with snails.

"No, thank you," answered the proctor. "I'll take your word for it, Mr. Henderson. But please be more careful," and he looked at the mud spots on his rug.

A little later Sid burst into the room where his two chums were pouring over their books.

"Say! What in blazes did you fellows go back on me that way for?" he demanded.

"What's that? He speaks in riddles!" said Phil softly. "Why, Siddie," he went on, as a mother might chide a little boy, "wherever have you been? You're all mud! Oh, such a state as your trousers are in! Whatever will papa say, Siddie?"

"What a dirty beast!" cried Tom in simulated horror.

Poor Sid looked from one to the other.

"Why did you tell Pitchfork I wasn't Henderson?" he demanded savagely.

"Tell Pitchfork you weren't yourself?" asked Phil, as if he had never heard of such a thing.

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"What do you mean?" inquired Tom innocently. "We haven't seen you since we left you going after the fox, and we got tired and came home."

"Do you mean to tell me," began Sid, "that you didn't—" And then he stopped, at the grins that appeared on the faces of his chums. "What's the use?" he asked wearily. "All right, I'll get even with you two," he concluded as he put his camera away and proceeded to change his clothes. But a little later, when he had developed the picture of the fox, and found it to be a fine one, he forgot his anger and the ordeal he had gone through, for Sid was a true naturalist.

It was approaching the date for the great game with Boxer Hall, and the football squad was practicing with a fierce energy; for, more than any other contest, they wanted to win that one.

The team was fairly "on edge and trained to the second," as Holly Cross said. They had won the two games that came before the final one, and now but two weeks elapsed before they would clash with Boxer Hall on the Randall gridiron.

"Are you going to the *Kappa Delta* dance?" asked Phil of Tom one night, referring to an annual

affair of one of the Greek letter fraternities.

"Sure," replied Tom. "I think we need something like that to get us in shape for the game with Boxer Hall. You're going, I suppose?"

"Of course. Who you going to take?"

"Haven't quite made up my mind yet. Are you going with a dame?"

"Sure."

"Who, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Madge Tyler," answered Phil, and he seemed to be very busy arranging his tie.

"Madge Tyler?" repeated Tom quickly.

"Yes. Any objections?"

Tom was silent a moment. He was struggling with a strange sensation.

"Well," asked Phil, turning and facing his chum—Sid was out of the room—"any objections?"

"Of course not," answered Tom slowly. "I took her last term, and—er—I was rather counting on ___"

"You were going to take her again this year," interrupted Phil, "but you waited too long. Sorry I cut you out, old man. No hard feelings, I hope?"

"No—no," answered Tom hesitatingly. "Of course not," he added more genially. "I was too slow, that's all."

"You'll have to ask some one else," went on Phil. "Are you sure you don't mind, old chap?" and he came over and stood beside his chum.

Tom did not answer for a few seconds. There was a strained quality in his voice when he replied, as cheerfully as he could:

"Of course not. You're first in war, first in football, and first in—the affairs with the ladies," he paraphrased.

"Whom will you take?" persisted Phil.

"Nobody!" exclaimed Tom, as he got up from the couch and started from the room. "I'm not going to the affair, after all," and he slammed the door as he went out.

"Whew!" whistled Phil. "Tom's jealous!"

CHAPTER XXIX

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

The *Kappa Delta* dance was a brilliant affair. Phil took Madge, and very charming she looked in a new gown of—oh, well, what difference does it make what her dress was like, anyhow? Besides, I don't know whether it was bombazine or chiffon, and the more I try to describe it the worse I will get tangled, so if you'll take my word for it, as well as Phil's, who ought to know, she looked very pretty indeed. The girls said she was "sweet," whatever that means.

"Isn't Ruth coming?" asked Phil of his partner after the first waltz.

"Why, I thought so," answered Madge slowly. "She was getting ready to come when I left."

"Who with?"

"I don't know. Didn't she tell you?"

"She never does," replied Phil. "I thought you'd know."

"Well, I usually do, but this time Ruth was quite mysterious about it."

"There she comes now!" exclaimed Phil, looking toward the entrance to the ballroom. "Who's that with her?"

"I can't see. She's in front—why, it's Tom—Tom Parsons!" added Madge quickly.

"Tom!" exclaimed Phil. "The sly beggar! He was going to take her all the while, yet he pretended to be jealous because I said I was going to take—"

He stopped in some confusion. Madge looked at him quickly.

"Was he—was he jealous about me?" she asked softly.

"He pretended to be," said her partner.

"Only pretended? How ungallant of you!" she cried gaily, yet there was more meaning in her tones than Phil was aware of. "Why don't you say he was madly jealous of me; and that you two quarreled dreadfully over me?"

"Well, I s'pose I could say it," replied Phil slowly, "but you see— Let's try this two-step," he interrupted, glad of the chance to get out of an awkward explanation.

"I was going to wait and speak to Ruth," said Madge.

"Later will do," answered Phil, and they swung out on the polished floor together.

"You frowsy beggar, why didn't you tell me you were going to bring my sister?" cried Phil to Tom, when the two-step finished and the four had come together. [248]

"I wasn't sure she'd go," replied Tom in a low voice, and Phil missed the usual friendly note in his tones. "Will you come down and have an ice?" he asked Ruth, and before Phil could say anything more Tom had led his fair partner away.

"Hang it all! There's something the matter with Tom!" thought honest Phil as he looked at Madge. "I'll have it out with him when this affair is over. We can't let girls come between us."

It was late when Phil got back to his room, after taking Madge home. Sid was asleep, and the quarter-back moved about softly, so as not to disturb him, for Sid had foresworn such dissipations as fraternity dances. Just as Phil was about to get into bed, Tom came in.

"Say, old man," burst out Phil in a whisper, "what's the matter?"

"Matter?" asked Tom, as if greatly surprised.

"Yes, matter. You've been different ever since I told you I was going to take Madge to the dance. Now, am I trespassing on your preserves? If I am, say so. But I thought you liked Ruth."

"So I do!"

"That's what I thought. I knew you used to go with Madge, but since— Oh, hang it all, I can't explain—I'm Ruth's brother, you know. But if you think I want to cut you out—"

"It's all right," broke in Tom with a forced geniality that Phil noticed. "Forget it, old man. Of course, you had a perfect right to go with Madge. I dare say she'd a heap sight rather have you than me." [249]

"I don't know about that," interposed Phil; "but I was afraid I was treading on your corns."

"It's all right," repeated Tom quickly. "Fine dance, wasn't it?"

"Very. But are you sure—"

"Oh, dry up!" exclaimed Tom, more like himself. "Here's a letter Ruth gave me to give you. It's from your mother. Your sister meant to hand it to you at the dance, but she forgot. Came late to-night—or, rather, last night—it's morning now. She's a little better, it seems."

"That's good!" exclaimed Phil eagerly. "But I wonder why she didn't write to me."

"She couldn't manage but one letter, I believe Ruth said," went on Tom gently.

"Say, I wish you fellows would cut out that gab!" suddenly exclaimed Sid, turning over in bed. "I want to sleep. I don't go out to dances, where there are a lot of silly girls, and then sit up all night talking about it."

"Get out, you grumpy old misogynist!" exclaimed Phil, shying a sofa cushion at his chum. "Wake up and hear the glad tidings of the dance!"

"Glad pollywogs!" grumbled Sid. "Get to bed and douse the glim." [250]

Which Phil soon did, as Tom showed no further inclination to talk.

In spite of Tom's assertions to the contrary, Phil could not help feeling that a coldness had sprung up between himself and his chum. That it was about Madge, Phil could not deny, yet he hesitated to speak further of it to Tom.

"Maybe it will work itself out," he said to himself. "I hope so, anyhow."

Meanwhile, the time for the final and deciding championship football game was drawing closer. Randall and Boxer Hall were easily the two best teams, not only in the Tonoka Lake League, but in that section of the country. Neither had done any remarkable playing, nor could it be said that their goal line had not been crossed, but the championship lay between them. The practice was exacting and constant, and the 'varsity eleven was "as hard as nails," to again quote my friend, Holly Cross, who had an extensive sporting vocabulary. They were eager for the contest.

Tom and Phil, between whom there was still a shadow of coldness, came walking together from the gridiron. They were talking about a wing-shift play that had been tried with some success.

"I don't like the signal for it," said Phil. "It's too complicated, and the other fellows may get on to it. I think I can work out a better combination. I'll use some of the old signal letters and numbers that we discarded. I've got a copy of them in my room." [251]

"Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea," commented Tom. "I think, myself, that the signal takes too long to understand. It ought to be snappier."

"That's my idea. We'll see if we can't work out a better one."

Hurrying from the gymnasium, where they had changed their clothes, Tom and Phil went to their room. Sid was there studying. Phil went over to the wall, where he had placed the new picture of Madge Tyler she had given him, and took it down.

"That's right!" exclaimed Sid. "It's about time you removed some of these flags, banners, ribbons and other effeminate decorations. Start in, Tom, on your share. We'll get this room to looking right, after a bit."

"Oh, I'm not taking it down," declared Phil as he removed the photograph from the wall. He had had it placed in rather a heavy and deep gold frame. "I want to get my copy of the football signals—the ones we discarded—from behind it," he explained. "I hid them there, as being the place least likely to be disturbed. I'm going to frame up a new signal—"

He stopped suddenly, and looked first from the picture to the floor, and then from the floor to the picture. [252]

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

"The copy of the signals—it's gone," he said quickly. "I had it fastened to the back of the picture by a bit of wire."

"Are you sure?" inquired Sid, getting up from the old easy chair, and making a cloud of dust in the operation.

"Of course!" exclaimed Phil. "They're gone—some one must have taken the signals."

Tom dimly recalled a certain scene he and Phil had witnessed, and also remembered the words of the coach when he had made a shift of the signals. Phil looked at Tom. He was thinking of the same thing. Suddenly Phil uttered a cry. From the deep, curved frame of the picture he held up a small gold watch-charm.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

"A freshman charm!" spoke Sid slowly, as he recognized the device affected by a certain first-year secret society.

"Whose is it?" asked Tom.

"There's no telling," replied Phil.

"Yes, there is," went on Sid. "They always have their initials on the back of the charm. Look and see."

Phil turned it over.

"Whoever left this here must have taken the copy of the signals," he said slowly. "He probably took down the picture and removed the paper. In doing so the charm slipped from his watch-chain and fell in the deep frame. He must have held it about at his belt to bend up the wire, for it was stiff." [253]

"Whose initials are on the back?" asked Tom in a low voice.

Phil looked at them.

"They are 'G. A. G.,'" he announced.

Sid reached for a college roster, and turned to the freshman class list. The room was strangely silent, not even the ticking of the alarm clock being heard, for it had run down.

"Well?" asked Tom.

"The only fellow with the initials 'G. A. G.' is Garvey A. Gerhart," answered Sid.

CHAPTER XXX

 [254]

A BITTER ENEMY

The breathing of the three chums was distinctly audible in the silence that followed. Varied thoughts rushed through their minds, but all centered around the idea that there was a traitor in college—some one who would go to extreme lengths to see the football eleven lose. That this person was Garvey Gerhart was the belief of Tom, Phil and Sid. The quarter-back was the first to break the silence that was becoming strained.

"The cowardly sneak!" he burst out. "He ought to be tarred and feathered and ridden around the campus on a rail. The dirty cad!" Phil clenched his fists. "And I'm going to do it, too!" he added fiercely.

"Do what?" asked Tom.

"I'm going to tell what we discovered. I'm going to let Holly Cross and Mr. Lighton know. It was Gerhart who stole the copy of the signals. He sneaked in here when we were out and found them, though how he knew enough to look behind the picture is more than I understand. Probably he wanted to see if the girl's name was on the back, and saw the paper by accident. Anyhow, he took it, and he lost the charm at the same time, though he didn't notice it. Then he went and bargained to sell the signals to Stoddard, of Boxer Hall. That was when we saw them talking together down by the bridge." [255]

"But Stoddard didn't take his offer," interposed Tom.

"No; Stoddard isn't that kind of a chap," went on Phil. "He let Mr. Lighton know anonymously. But what Stoddard did doesn't lessen Gerhart's guilt. He wanted to throw the team, and only for the fact that he made his offer to an honest chap we would have lost the game. I'd—I'd like to smash him into jelly!" and Phil fairly shook in righteous anger, for the team was very dear to his

heart. He felt everything that affected the eleven more, perhaps, than any other lad in Randall College, not even excepting the captain, Holly Cross. So it is no wonder that Phil raged. He started from the room.

"Where are you going?" asked Sid, interposing his bulky frame between Phil and the door.

"I'm going to tell the coach and Holly Cross what I've discovered. I'm going to show them this charm. I'm going to propose that we tar and feather Gerhart and ride him out of college to the tune of the 'Rogues' March.'"

"No, you're not," spoke Sid very quietly.

Phil looked at him for a moment. Then he burst out with: "What do you mean? Don't you want me to tell? I'm going to, I say!"

"No, you're not," repeated Sid, and he did not raise his voice. "You're going to sit right down," and he gently shoved Phil toward the yawning easy chair. Puzzled by his chum's action, Phil backed up, and before he knew it he had flopped down upon the cushions, raising an unusual cloud of dust.

"Say, Henderson, what's the matter with you?" he cried, as he struggled to get up. "Are you crazy? Don't interfere with me again! I'm going to inform on the dirty, sneaking cad who wanted to see his own college beaten!"

Sid put a hand on his chum's shoulder and pushed him back into the chair.

"You're going to do nothing of the sort, my son," went on the big first baseman slowly. "Tom, lock the door and put the key in your pocket."

Tom as though acting under the influence of some hypnotic spell, obeyed.

"Are you both crazy?" burst out Phil. "I tell you the whole college must know what a white-livered hound we've got here!"

"That's just what they mustn't know," said Sid quietly. "Now listen to me," he went on more sternly. "In the first place, you don't know that Gerhart is guilty."

"Don't know? Of course I know it!" almost shouted Phil. "Haven't I got the evidence?" and he held out the charm.

"Easy," cautioned Sid. "I grant that; I even grant that the charm is Gerhart's; but does that prove he took the signals?"

"It proves that he was in the room," declared Phil.

"Yes, I admit that. I saw him in here once myself—just before that accident to my hand. But that doesn't prove anything."

"He was in here some other time then, when none of us was here. He must have taken the picture down, else the charm would never have been caught in the frame and remained there."

"Granted; but you are still far from making out a case, Phil."

"Don't you believe he did it?" asked the quarter-back.

"I do, when it comes to that, but we've got to offer more evidence than our own beliefs when it comes to convincing other people. Besides, I don't see what need there is of proving your case."

"Don't you think the college ought to know what sort of a coward and sneak we've got at Randall?"

"No," said Sid decidedly, "I don't. That's just the point. That's just why I don't want you to go and tell Holly what we've found. I think Gerhart took those signals," he continued, "and I believe that when we saw him talking to Stoddard he was trying to dispose of them to him. But just because I feel morally certain of it doesn't justify me in spreading the news broadcast. Besides, do we want every one to know what a cad we have here? I take the opposite view from you. I think we ought not to wash our soiled linen in public. The more we can hush this thing up the better. I wouldn't let it get beyond us three. It ought to stop right here. We would be the laughingstock of Fairview and Boxer Hall if it got out. To think that the Randall spirit was capable of falling so low that there was a traitor among us! I'm glad Stoddard kept still. Evidently he didn't tell a soul, but warned Lighton privately, and the team has kept quiet about it."

"Now," continued Sid earnestly, "do you want to go and publish it? Do you want to let every one see our shame? I don't believe you do, Phil."

Phil was silent for several seconds. He was struggling with some emotion. Tom stood with his back to the door, though it was locked. Sid stood before his chum, looking anxiously at him as he sat in the big chair. Then, with a long breath, Phil said:

"I guess you're right, Sid. I—I didn't look at it that way. I'll keep still."

"I thought you would," spoke Sid significantly.

Phil put the charm in his pocket. The strain was over. They all seemed relieved. But Phil, so much was his heart bound up in the eleven, could not forget the great affront that had been planned against it. Two days later, meeting Gerhart alone on the campus, he approached him, and showing the freshman the watch-charm, exclaimed:

"Take care, you dirty coward! We know where you lost this!"

Gerhart started, turned first pale and then red. He soon recovered himself, and answered:

"I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do," snapped Phil. "You stole my signals!"

"That's a lie," said Gerhart coolly, and he walked on.

But if Phil could have seen him a little later, when he joined Langridge, the quarter-back would have wondered at the rage and fear shown by the freshman.

"Clinton knows! He found my charm! I was afraid I'd lost it in his room," said Gerhart.

"Well?" asked Langridge.

"One of us has got to leave Randall!" exclaimed Gerhart savagely. "It's he or I; and it will be he, if I can accomplish it!"

CHAPTER XXXI

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"IT'S TOO LATE TO BACK OUT!"

Gerhart and Langridge were walking along the road that led to Haddonfield. The freshman was filled with unreasoning rage against not only Phil, but Tom and Sid, as well.

"Probably all three know," said Gerhart. "I was a fool not to look to see if I left any clues behind when I was in the room."

"Maybe you were a fool for ever trying that signal and liniment trick at all," suggested Langridge, who did not mince words.

"Maybe," admitted his crony. "But I thought I could get back at Clinton, Cross and Lighton, for not letting me play. Only that Stoddard was such a white-livered chump I'd have pulled off the signal trick."

"As it was, you lost."

"Yes; but the game isn't over yet. There's still the Boxer Hall contest."

"You don't mean to say you're going to try and give away the signals in that game, do you?" cried Langridge.

"No; but I'm going to keep Clinton out of the game. If I can do that I'll feel that I'm even with him—the beast!"

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"But can you do it? If you do it, it may make our team lose, for Clinton is one of the best players, and it's hard to substitute a quarter-back."

"I can do it; and I wish the eleven would lose! That's what I want to see!"

"You haven't got much college spirit," observed Langridge.

"I've as much as you. Weren't you in with me on this scheme?"

"I suppose so." Langridge didn't seem to derive much satisfaction from the admission.

"Of course you were. You hate Clinton and his bunch as much as I do."

"Yes."

"And you'd like to see 'em laid out good and proper, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," hesitatingly, "I guess so."

"Of course you would! Well, you're going to if you stick to me. I've got the best plan yet."

"What is it?"

"Come along to town, and you'll see part of it. I've got to get certain things, and then I'll be ready."

"You want to be careful you don't leave any evidence after you this time."

"No danger. Will you help me?"

"I guess so, as long as it isn't anything rash."

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"No, it won't cause any permanent harm to any one, but it will knock Clinton out from playing the game, and that's what I'm after. Now come on. I want to get to Haddonfield before the college crowd starts. It won't do to be seen where we're going, or there might be an inquiry afterward."

About an hour later Langridge and Gerhart were in the telegraph office at Haddonfield. There might have been noticed about the sophomore a trace of nervousness as he walked up to the little window and inquired how long it would take to get some money from his uncle in Chicago.

"I want it to come by telegraph," Langridge explained. "I need it in a hurry."

"Yes, you college chaps usually do," said the agent. "Well, you can get it late to-night, I suppose, if you send a wire to Chicago now. How much would you need?"

"Oh, a couple of hundred; maybe five hundred."

The agent whistled.

"That's more than we have on hand here at a time," he said. "I'd have to get it from the bank, and that couldn't be done until morning."

"Well, there's no great hurry," went on Langridge. "Would I have to be identified to get it? My guardian—that's my uncle—frequently sends me money by telegraph when I'm off on trips."

"Oh, yes; you'd have to get some one to vouch for you," said the agent, "but that will be easy." [263]

"Then I guess I'll telegraph for some," continued the sophomore, and he began filling out a blank under the directions of the telegrapher. Langridge, for a youth who had received money by wire before, seemed to require minute directions, and he kept the agent at the window for several minutes, holding his attention closely.

"There, I guess that will do," said the student at length. "I'll call to-morrow for the cash. Hope you have it for me."

"Oh, I'll have it if your uncle sends it."

"He's sure to do that," retorted Langridge with a smile.

"Lucky dog!" murmured the agent as he turned back to his desk. "Some of those college chaps have more money than is good for them, though."

Langridge hurried from the office. He was joined outside by Gerhart, who had preceded him out of the door by a few seconds.

"Did you get it?" asked the sophomore.

"Sure," was the gleeful answer, and Gerhart showed several yellow slips. "Lucky the door was unlocked, so I could sneak in. I just took the blanks and envelopes off his desk when you held him in conversation. You know, they keep the receiving blanks in a private drawer, but the sending ones which you used they leave out where any one can reach them. But it's all right now. I'll soon put it through." [264]

"I wonder if I'll get that money?" spoke Langridge. "I took a big chance, but it seemed the only thing to do."

"Of course you'll get it, and I'll help you spend it. That's a fair division of labor, as Sam Weller used to say."

"Well, you'll have to do the rest," declared his crony as they walked back to college.

"I'll do it. Don't worry."

They proceeded in silence. Langridge grew less and less talkative, and to the jokes of Gerhart, who seemed in unusually good spirits, he returned monosyllabic answers.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" Gerhart finally exclaimed.

"Well, if you must know," answered Langridge, "the more I think of this the less I like it. It's a brutal thing to do. I wish I hadn't agreed to help you."

"But you have!" insisted Gerhart. "It's too late to back out now!"

"Yes, I suppose so," was the gloomy answer, and Langridge plodded on behind his crony.

CHAPTER XXXII

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TOM GETS A TIP

It lacked but two days of the big game with Boxer Hall. The Randall eleven had bucked against the scrub until that aggregation of substitutes was weary, worn and sore. For the 'varsity team was now a magnificent fighting machine. The men played together like clock-work, and were a joy to the heart of Coach Lighton. As for Holly Cross, no captain was ever prouder of an eleven than he was. The ends were fast, the backs could go through the line for gains every time, guards, tackles and Snail Looper at center were like a wall of flesh. The punting, while not all that could be desired, was good, and several trick plays had been worked up well nigh to perfection against the scrub. How they would work against Boxer Hall was yet to be seen.

But if Randall was in fine shape for the coming struggle on the gridiron, so was Boxer Hall. Reports from that institution showed that the eleven was the best that had been turned out in many a season, and by comparing the games played by Randall (the loss of one game to Fairview and the winning of the other) and those played by Boxer Hall against the same teams, an expert would have been hard put to pick the winner of the championship struggle. [266]

"But we're going to win, fellows!" cried Tom after two halves of hard practice. "Aren't we, Phil, old chap?"

"Of course," was the rather quiet answer.

"How's your mother, Phil?" asked Holly Cross. "I hope she is getting better."

"I haven't heard for two days," replied the quarter-back, and his face showed a little worry.

"Well, she must be all right, or your father would have wired," went on Dutch Housenlager. "My, but I'm tired!" he added.

"Don't go stale," cautioned the coach. "I think I can let up a bit on you fellows now. We'll have only light practice to-morrow, and the morning of the game we'll do some kicking and run through the signals. Don't forget to listen for the word to change the system. We may have to do it if they get on to our curves, so to speak. But I don't believe they will. And don't forget that the signals for trick plays have been altered a bit. Also remember the tip for the sequence plays. I depend on them for at least one touch-down. Now amuse yourselves some quiet way to-night. Get to bed early, and sleep well. I hope none of you have any lessons to worry over."

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"We'll not let study worry us, no matter what happens, until after the game!" cried Grasshopper Backus. "Wow! But what a celebration there'll be if we win! The baseball championship, and then the football on top of it! Wow!" and Grasshopper gave a leap into the air to show how exuberant he felt. But Dutch Housenlager slyly put out his foot, and Grasshopper went down in a heap.

"I'll punch your head for that, Dutch!" he cried, springing up; but Dutch, in spite of his bulk, was a good runner, and got away.

"Well, I suppose you gladiators are all ready for the fray," spoke Sid that evening, when Phil and Tom were in the room, one on the sofa and the other curled up in the easy chair. Sid was stretched out on his bed.

"Ready to do or die," answered Tom. "I hope it's a nice day."

"Why, you don't mind playing in the rain, do you?" asked Sid. "I thought you chaps were regular mudlarks."

"So we are," went on Tom. "Only I want to see a good crowd out. It's more enthusiastic."

"I know what you want," declared Sid. "You want a lot of girls from Fairview Institute to be on hand. And, what's more, you want some particular girl to see you make a star play. So does Phil, I'll wager."

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"Well, from what I hear there will be a good crowd of Fairview girls to see the game," said Phil. "Fairview is sore at being walloped twice by Boxer Hall, and the co-eds want to see us put it all over that crowd. So they'll be on hand to cheer us."

"Are you sure?" asked Tom.

"Sure—Ruth told me," went on Phil. "Oh, it will be a glorious occasion! Don't you wish you were playing, Sid?"

"Not for a minute! Baseball for mine! When I want to wallow in the mud and get my mouth and ears full of it, I know an easier way than playing football."

"Yes; go out with a camera and get stuck in the swamp!" cried Tom, and he got up, ready to dodge any missile which Sid might heave at him in revenge for having his misadventure recalled. But the naturalist only answered:

"That's all right. I got the best picture of a fox you ever saw. The mud will come off."

"Oh, you're a hopeless case!" exclaimed Phil as he got up and began to change his clothes, laying out a particularly "sporty" necktie.

"Hello!" exclaimed Tom in some surprise. "Where are you going?"

"Out," replied his chum noncommittally.

"I thought you were told to stay in and take it easy to-night," said Sid.

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"Well, I'm not going to any exciting place," came from Phil as he struggled with a stiff collar. "I'll be in early."

"Going to town?" asked Tom.

"Not Haddonfield."

"Where?"

"I'll bet he's going to see some girl!" exclaimed Sid. "He's got perfume on his handkerchief, and he never wears that tie unless there's a damsel in the offing."

"Well, I don't mind admitting that there is a young lady in the case," spoke Phil. "I'm going to call on my sister, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, you hard-shelled old misogynist!"

"I thought so!" cried Sid. "I knew it. But tell that yarn about your sister to your grandmother. It's somebody else's sister you're going to see. You'd never tog up like this for your own sister."

"Maybe," admitted Phil coolly as he finished dressing.

As he stooped over to lace his shoes an envelope fell from his pocket. Tom picked it up and handed it to him. He could not help seeing the address, and, with something like a start, he noticed that it was in the handwriting of Madge Tyler. He handed it to Phil without a word, and he noticed that a dull red crept up under the bronze skin of his chum's face. But Phil shoved the note into his pocket and made no comment.

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"He's going to see her—Madge," thought Tom, and he tried to struggle against the bitter feeling that seemed to well up in his heart.

"Leave the door unlocked," was Phil's parting injunction as he went out. "I'll be in early."

"Girls, girls, girls!" grumbled Sid as he rolled over to a more comfortable position. "I'll be hanged if I room with you fellows next term if you don't go a bit easier on this dame question. You don't give me any attention at all. It's all football and the ladies."

"It will soon be over," murmured Tom.

"Which; football or the ladies?"

"Football," was the answer, given with a laugh.

Sid was asleep when Phil came quietly in, but Tom was wide awake. Still, he said nothing as Phil went about, getting ready for bed, and when his chum came close to him, Tom shut his eyes and feigned slumber. There was something coming between Tom and Phil. Both realized it, yet neither liked to broach the subject, for it was a delicate one.

"Well, how was your sister?" asked Sid pointedly of Phil the next morning.

"Very well," replied Phil calmly. "By the way, Tom, she was asking for you."

"Yes," answered Tom, and there was coldness in his tones. He did not wait for Phil to go to lectures with him after chapel, but hurried off alone, and Phil, feeling humiliated, wondered if he had done or said anything to hurt Tom's feelings. Tom took care to keep out of Phil's way all that day, and when the last practice was over, save for some light work the morning of the game, the left-end hurried to his room. As he entered it he saw a note thrust under the door. He picked it up. It was addressed to him, and an odd feature of it was that the letters were all printed.

"Who brought this here?" he asked of Sid, who was studying his biology.

"Didn't know anybody had brought anything."

"Some one shoved this note under the door for me," went on Tom, ripping open the missive. He could not repress a start as he read, in the same printed letters that were on the envelope, this message:

"There is danger threatening Phil Clinton. Watch for it."

"Anything wrong?" asked Sid.

"No—no," spoke Tom slowly, as he tore the note into bits and tossed them into a basket. "It's just a tip, that's all, but I guess it doesn't amount to anything."

He walked over to the old sofa and sat down. His brain was in a whirl. What danger could threaten Phil? Whence had come the mysterious warning?

"It doesn't amount to anything," thought Tom. "If it had, who ever sent it would have signed his name. It's meant as a joke. I'll pay no attention to it. I'll not tell Phil. It might worry him. Besides, I guess he can look out for himself," and Tom shrugged his shoulders.

Ah, Tom, would you have said that but for what had happened in the last few weeks? But for the fact that Phil and a certain pretty girl had become fast friends? Tom felt those questions arising in his mind, but he put them resolutely from him. He did not want to answer them. He went over to the basket and carefully picked out the torn bits of the note. He thrust them into his pocket. Sid watched him curiously, but said nothing. He thought the note was from some girl.

Phil came in a little later. Tom was busy studying, and hardly looked up; nor did he say anything about the warning he had so mysteriously received.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"LINE UP!"

Out upon the gridiron they trotted; a mass of lads in suits which showed contact with mother earth many times, and which, in places, were marked with blood-stains. The eleven were as full of life as young colts, and some in their exuberance leaped high in the air, putting their hands on the shoulders of their mates. Others turned somersaults, and some gave impromptu boxing exhibitions.

From the grandstand burst a mighty cheer as the Randall supporters greeted their team. The spontaneous shout was followed by the booming of the Randall college cry. Then Bean Perkins, with wild waves of his arm, signaled for the "Rip 'Em Up!" song.

"What a crowd!" murmured Tom as he walked beside Phil. "I never saw such a bunch."

"Yes, there's a good mob," answered Phil, but somehow there was a note of indifference in his voice. He had not failed to notice Tom's recent change of demeanor, and it hurt him. Yet he was too proud to speak of it, or ask the reason, though, perhaps, he may have guessed what caused it.

As for Tom, the words of the mysterious warning rang in his ears. Several times he was on the point of speaking to Phil, but he feared he would be laughed at.

"After all," thought Tom. "I guess all that it amounts to is that some one has heard a rumor that there'll be an attempt on the part of some Boxer Hall players to knock Phil out. They may think

they can cripple him and, without him, our team will go to pieces. But I'll be on the watch for any dirty playing, and if I catch any one at it I'll smash him. I'll do my best to keep Phil from getting hurt."

But, if Tom had only known, it was a different sort of danger that threatened his friend.

Once more the cheers rang out, the shrill voices of the girls forming a strange contrast to the hoarse voices of the boys and men. For there were many men present, "old grads," who had come to do honor to Randall, and many others who came, hoping to see Boxer Hall win. Women there were, too; and girls, girls, girls! It seemed that all the pretty students of Fairview Academy were there. They were waving flags and bunches of ribbon—their own college colors mingled with those of Randall, for Fairview was on the side of Randall to-day, in retaliation for a severe drubbing Boxer Hall had administered to the co-educational institution. [275]

"Is—is your sister here?" asked Tom of Phil. He had meant to ask if Madge was present, but somehow the words would not come.

"Yes," replied his chum. "She and Madge are over in the A section," and he motioned with his arm to a certain portion of the grandstand. Tom looked, hoping he might distinguish two girls out of a crowd of several hundred. Of course, he could not, and his attention was suddenly called away from this by the sharp voice of the coach.

"Catch some punts, Parsons!" called Mr. Lighton. "After that we'll line up for practice."

The Randall eleven was lining up when the Boxer Hall team fairly burst from their dressing-rooms under the east grandstand. What a roar went up as they appeared on the white-marked field! The burst of yells seemed fully to equal the jumble of noise that had been made by the Randallites. For all of Boxer Hall was on hand to cheer mightily for their eleven, and the college was a slight favorite over Randall, who, in years past, had not been known to do anything remarkable on the gridiron.

Encased in their clumsy garments, the Boxer players looked like young giants, and when they lined up and ran through several formations they did it with the precision of clock-work.

"They've improved a heap," was the somewhat dubious remark of Holly Cross. [276]

"So have we!" exclaimed the coach heartily. "We beat them once, and we can do it again. Get that idea into your mind and don't let go of it."

"I guess we'll be all right if Clinton doesn't have to get out of the game," spoke the captain.

"Why? Do you think he'll be hurt?"

"Well, maybe. Boxer Hall sometimes plays a dirty game, and we'll have to be on the watch. I wish you'd warn the umpire to look out for holding in the line and slugging. They may do it. They'd go to almost any length to win this game. They don't want to lose the championship."

"Well, they're going to!" exclaimed the coach. "But about Clinton; you don't think he's any more likely to be hurt than any other player—nor as much, do you? He's well protected."

"Yes, I know; but Phil hasn't been himself for the last two days. I don't know what it is that's bothering him, but it's something. He doesn't say anything. First I thought it might be a scrap he'd had with Tom, but they're such good friends I didn't give that much concern. Then I imagined he might be worrying about his mother, but he told me yesterday that the chances for a successful operation were good. I don't know what it is, but he's certainly not himself."

"Oh, you imagine too much!" declared Mr. Lighton with a laugh. "Clinton is all right. He's a plucky lad. He'll play as long as he can stand. Look at that game with Wescott." [277]

"Yes, I know; but I——"

"Now, you stop worrying. You're as bad as a girl. But I guess it's almost time to begin."

Song after song came from the supporters of the rival colleges. The grandstands were packed to their capacity, and looked like some vast chessboard with many colored squares, the dark garments of the boys mingling with the gay dresses and hats of the girls, and the many-hued ribbons and flags waving over all.

Captain Cross met and shook hands with Captain Stoddard, of Boxer Hall, preliminary to the toss-up. They were to play similar positions—full-back. The coin was sent spinning into the air, and Captain Stoddard won. He elected to defend the south goal, which gave the ball to Randall to kick off. The referee, umpire and linesmen held a final consultation. Captain Cross gathered his men together for a word of encouragement.

"All I've got to say," he remarked simply, "is to play until you can't play any more."

"That's right," added the coach. "And don't forget about the possibility of a change in signals being made in the middle of play; nor about the sequences. I'll depend on you for that, Clinton."

"All right," responded Phil.

The field was slowly being cleared of stragglers. The newspaper reporters were getting their paper and pencils ready, and photographers, with their big box-cameras, were snapping individual players as a sort of practice for catching lightning-like plays later on. [278]

Across the field, toward the group of Randall players, came a lad. He walked as if undecided as to his errand.

"Get back," warned Holly Cross.

"I've got a message for a feller named Clinton!" cried the lad.

"There he is over there," and Holly, who was in conversation with the coach, pointed at Phil. The latter started as he took the envelope from the messenger.

"Who—who gave you this?" asked the quarter-back huskily.

"Feller outside. Give me a half a dollar fer bringin' it in. Any answer?"

"Wait," replied Phil. His bronze face was strangely white as he tore the envelope and hastily read the few words on the paper within. He seemed to sway, but, with a catch of his breath, he recovered his composure. He read the message again. A mist seemed to come before his eyes. He murmured to himself: "I mustn't tell them—until after the game—I—I must play the game out. But—but can I?" He clenched his hands, and his jaw became more square with the force of his teeth closing tightly together.

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"Any answer?" asked the lad.

"No!" said Phil in a low voice, and he crushed the telegram in his hand, and thrust the rustling paper inside his jacket.

The lad turned to go, anxious to get a place where he could view the game. None of Phil's companions seemed to have noticed that he had received a message. He looked around at his chums.

"I—I've got to play the game," he murmured.

The next instant the whistle blew.

"Line up!" came the cry, and Snail Looper, holding the new yellow ball, placed it on a little mound of earth ready for the kick-off.

CHAPTER XXXIV

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THE GAME

With a mighty swing of his foot Snail Looper sent the ball well into Boxer territory. Lamson, their right half-back, caught it in his arms, and, with a good defense, began to rush back with it. Over the chalk-marks he came, but Tom Parsons was rushing toward him, and dodging through the intervening players he made a vicious tackle, bringing Lamson to the ground with a thud on Boxer's thirty-eight-yard line. There was a quick line-up, and Stoddard, the full-back, made a good try to encircle Joe Jackson at right end. But the Jersey twin and his mates piled up on the mass of Boxer players with such good effect that hardly three yards were gained; and at this showing of the defense of Randall a punt was decided on.

Pinstock, Boxer's left half-back, made a magnificent drive, and Holly Cross had to skip nimbly back to catch it. But once he had the pigskin in his grasp he eluded the Boxer ends, and was well toward the center of the field before he was downed.

"Our ball!" cried Tom gleefully, and then there came the chance for Randall to show what she could do.

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"Signal!" cried Phil, and his companions wondered at the odd note that had crept into his voice. It was not of the confident style of orders that the quarter-back was wont to give. But, as the string of numbers and letters came rattling out, Phil, in a measure, recovered control of himself. He gave the word for Kindlings to take the ball at Boxer's left-end, and smash! into the line went the brawny right half-back. He gained ten yards so quickly that Boxer Hall was fairly stunned, and when Holly Cross ripped out eight yards additional the crowd of Randall supporters were in a mad frenzy of delirious joy.

"Swat 'em! Swat 'em! We have got 'em!" howled Bean Perkins, and forth from hundreds of throats came booming that song.

Grasshopper Backus and Dutch Housenlager opened a great hole between their opposite guard and tackle, and into this breach Jerry Jackson was pulled and hurled for several yards, until he fell under a crushing weight of husky players at Boxer's thirty-yard-line. Once more Phil's voice sang out in a signal, and back he snapped the ball to Holly Cross, who, like some human battering ram, went through for five yards more. It looked as if Randall was going right down the field for a touch-down, and Bean Perkins and his cohorts rendered the "Down the Line" song with good effect.

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A touch-down might have resulted from the next play, but unfortunately for Randall Jerry Jackson made a fumble, and in their anxiety several of his mates held in the line. There was a prompt penalty enforced, and back to the forty-yard line the pigskin was taken, where it was turned over to Randall for another try. Randall's hard work had not gained her much, and there was an ominous silence on the part of the cheering throng. Once more came rushing tactics, and they succeeded so well that in two downs the ball was carried to Boxer's thirty-yard line. Then Holly Cross decided to try for a field goal, but the wind carried it to one side, and his mates groaned. So did Bean Perkins and his comrades.

"Isn't that a shame!" exclaimed Madge Tyler to Ruth Clinton.

"Hush, Madge!" answered Ruth. "I want to watch the game. I can't talk. I want to see what Phil does. I'm afraid he'll be hurt."

"Aren't you worried about Tom Parsons, too?"

"Yes—of course. Aren't you?"

"Not so much."

Ruth looked at her friend sharply, but there was no time for further talk, as Boxer had brought out the ball to their twenty-five-yard line, and elected to line up with it instead of punting. At Randall's line they came, smashing with terrific force, but so well did Holly and his players hold that only four yards were made. Another attempt brought even less gain, and then Boxer had to kick. Kindlings saw the ball coming toward him, and managed by a desperate effort, to get it in his arms. Back he rushed to the forty-three-yard line, where he fell under a human mountain. [283]

The first play tried by Randall after this was a forward pass, and the ball went out of bounds. Holly Cross kicked a twisting punt, and when Lamson, the Boxer right half, caught it, Tom Parsons downed him almost in his tracks, so swiftly did the left-end get down under the kick.

"Go through 'em!" implored Captain Stoddard to his men, and at the line they came smashing with crushing force. For the first time since the play had begun Randall seemed to give way. Holes were torn in her line, and through the openings the backs came rushing. They had gained fifteen yards, in almost as good style as had Randall in the initial play, when they varied the smashing work by a try around Tom's end. But he was alert, and got his man in the nick of time. Another try at center failed to result in a gain, and Boxer Hall had to kick.

Jerry Jackson rushed the ball back for a good distance, and then, with a fierceness that the Boxer Hall lads could not seem to withstand, Randall came at their line, going through for substantial gains on every try. [284]

"That's the stuff! That's the stuff!" cried Dutch Housenlager during a breathing spell, when one of the Boxer Hall players had to be walked about to recover his wind. "Eh, Phil? Aren't we putting it all over them?"

"I—I guess so," answered Phil, and he passed his hand over his head as if he was dazed.

"Somebody hit you?" asked Tom, blaming himself for not having kept a closer watch over his chum.

"No—no; I'm all right."

The injured player limped back into line, and the game went on. Smash! bang! came the Randall players, and they went up to the ten-yard line with scarcely a stop. In vain did the cohorts of Boxer Hall implore them to brace. It seemed that they could not. But, just as it looked for all the world as if the ball would be carried over by Holly Cross, for it was decided to smash through and not kick, the brace did come, and the Randall players had to give up the pigskin. In a jiffy Captain Stoddard had punted out of danger. There was an exchange of kicks, and it ended with Boxer getting the ball on her forty-yard line.

Then, all at once, a new spirit seemed infused into her players. They came at Randall with a viciousness that argued well for their spirit. It was rough work, not noticeable, perhaps, but Tom felt that what he feared was about to happen; that some plan was afoot to injure Phil. He played in as far as he dared, but the opposite end was constantly drawing him out. [285]

At the line came Lamson, the Boxer right-half. He ripped out five yards, bowling over Sam Looper with such force that the Snail had to have a little medical treatment. He barely recovered in the two minutes, and was a bit wobbly when the attack was again directed at him. But Holly Cross and Jerry Jackson leaped in to his aid, and stopped the advance. Then Boxer went around right-end, and had ten yards before they were stopped. The game looked to be going the other way now, and there were strained looks on the faces of the Randall players and their supporters. As for the cheering contingent of Boxer Hall, they made the air ring with their song: "It's Time We Did a Little Business Now!"

"Don't let 'em get through you. Hold 'em! Hold 'em!" cried Holly. "Brace up, boys!"

Randall tried to, but Boxer had found a weak place between Snail Looper and Grasshopper Backus, and kept hammering away at it, until they had advanced the ball to the fifteen-yard line. Then Boxer Hall played a neat trick. There was every indication that a try for a field goal was about to be made, and Holly Cross got back. Instead, there was a double pass, and a play between tackle and right-end. Through the Randall line burst Frothon, the right-tackle, with the ball tucked under his arm. Holly Cross saw him just in time, and made a dive for him. But the Randall full-back's foot slipped, and he went down, making a vain grab for Frothon, who sped on, and planted the ball behind the goal posts. Boxer Hall had made the first touch-down, and the crowd of supporters went wild, while there was corresponding gloom on the grandstands where Randallites were gathered. The goal was missed, and a scrimmage had hardly begun after the next kick-off before the whistle blew. The half was up. [286]

What a buzz of excitement there was in the grandstands! Every one seemed talking at once.

"That was hard lines," remarked Ford Fenton to Sid, next to whom he was sitting. "If our fellows had only been a little quicker then, this would never have happened. My uncle says——"

"Fenton!" exclaimed Sid so fiercely that Ford almost turned pale, "if you mention 'uncle' again during this game, I'll throw you off the grandstand," and, as Fenton was rather high up, he

CHAPTER XXXV

VICTORY—CONCLUSION

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There was despondency in the quarters of the Randall players, where they gathered between the halves. Gloom sat upon the brow of every one, and the cheery words of the coach could not seem to dispel it.

"There's only one touch-down against you," he said. "You always play better uphill than down. Go at 'em now, and tear them apart! They play a fierce game, but you can play a fiercer! Are any of you hurt? How about you, Looper?"

"Oh, I'm all right now. It was only my wind. I've got it back. They won't get through me again," declared the Snail.

"I hope not. You're too fat; that's what's the trouble. How are you holding out, Clinton?" and the coach turned anxiously to the quarter-back. Phil was pacing up and down the dressing-room. There was a strained look on his face, and his hand was inside his blouse, where his fingers touched a crumpled paper. He did not seem to have heard Mr. Lighton's question. The coach repeated it.

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"Me? Why, I—I guess I can last the game out," said Phil slowly.

"Last the game out? Why, are you hurt?" The coach was a bit disturbed.

"No. Of course not. It was just my way of speaking. It's all right—it's all right," and Phil resumed his pacing of the narrow quarters.

"Guess he feels that we're going to lose," whispered Dutch Housenlager to Tom. But Tom shook his head. There was something else the matter with Phil, and he wondered what it was.

"Do you think they're on to our signals?" asked Holly Cross.

"No," said Phil shortly. "There's no need to change them. I'll use the same ones."

"Time's almost up," remarked the coach, looking at his watch for about the fifth time within two minutes.

To the lads it seemed as if they had not had more than a minute's respite, but they were ready for the fray again, and there was an eagerness in the manner in which they leaped out on the gridiron which betokened that snappy playing would follow.

Nor was it long in coming. When Boxer Hall kicked off, amid the chorus of a spirited song, Kindlings caught the ball, and came back with it on such a rush, and so well protected by his teammates, that he got past the center of the field before he was downed. Then at the line went the Randall lads. Smashing through it, there was no stopping them. Right up the field they came, surprising even their own coach by their steady advance. Phil was handling the players with a skill he had never shown before. Play after play he called for, and the lads responded with vim. Even a risky on-side kick was tried and was successful. Then a forward pass netted fifteen yards, and with joy in their hearts the Randall lads saw themselves approaching their opponent's goal-line.

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"Now, boys, play like Trojans!" cried Phil heartily, this being the signal for four sequence plays. They were ripped off one after the other, so quickly that, as Holly Cross said, "it made the hair of the Boxers stand up." For, almost before the visitors were aware of it, though they tried their best to stem the human tide, the ball was only a few feet from the line.

"Touch-down! Touch-down! Touch-down!" implored the cheering throng.

"Touch-down it shall be!" whispered Phil fiercely, and he snapped the ball to Holly Cross, who went through like a battering ram. There was a mass of players on top of him, the ball and the line. Not until they got up could it be seen if the pigskin was over. The referee rushed in. Slowly the players disentangled. The ball was over the line!

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"Touch-down!" fairly screamed Tom Parsons. "Touch-down!"

His cry was echoed from the Randall grandstands, and Dutch Housenlager began a dance around the team, carrying Holly Cross, Grasshopper and the Jersey twins with him.

"Kick the goal, and we'll be one point ahead of them!" cried Bricktop Molloy to Holly. "Put all the power ye have to spare into your toe, me lad, and boost the ball over."

"I'll try," promised the captain, but the wind had increased, and the pigskin struck the bar and bounded back. But the score was tied, and Randall felt that she was coming into her own.

"Fast and snappy play, now!" called Phil Clinton, and once more he passed his hand over his head. There was an air of desperation about him, and Tom noticed it.

"Maybe he's feeling sick," he thought, and he hurried over to his chum and asked him.

"I don't feel just right," answered Phil. "But I'm not sick. I'm all right. Don't say anything. We're going to win. We're going to win!" he repeated fiercely. "I'm going to run the team to

another touch-down. After that—after that,” he faltered—“well, it doesn’t matter, after that.”

The ball was kicked off. An exchange of punts followed the scrimmage, and Boxer Hall got the ball. Her players began some good work, but Randall was ready for it. Several of the best men were tackled so hard, though not unfairly, that time had to be taken out for them to recover. Then Pinstock had to retire because of a twisted ankle, but, to offset this, Jerry Jackson was knocked out and Everet took his place.

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For a few minutes it seemed as if Boxer Hall was going up the field for another touch-down, but Randall braced in time. Then a sudden change appeared to come over Phil. He had been playing for all he was worth, but now he seemed a perfect whirlwind as he called snappily to his men to take the ball through. And they did it. Through holes torn first on one side between tackle and guard, or guard and center, and then on the other wing, Everet, Holly Cross or Kindlings butted their way. Phil varied this with some end runs and then called for his favorite play, the fake right-half back and tackle shift, when Kerr took the ball on the fly and went through the opposite side of his opponents’ line with it. The play netted fifteen yards, and placed the ball on Boxer Hall’s twenty-yard line.

The time was fast drawing to a close. Could Boxer hold the line sufficiently to prevent Randall from scoring again, making the game a tie? Or could Randall break through? Those were the questions every one was asking.

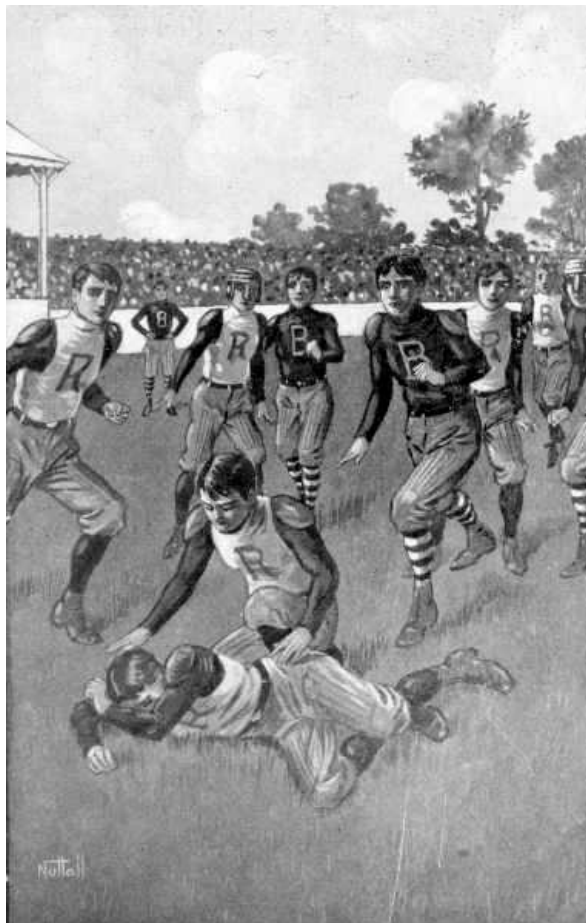
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“Now, fellows, for the ‘Conquer or Die’ song,” called Bean Perkins, and during a silence that followed a brief consultation between Phil and Holly Cross there welled out over the gridiron the inspiring strains of “*Aut Vincere Aut Mori!*”

“Signal!” cried Phil, and he gave one for a forward pass. He got the ball off in good shape, but Nottingham, the burly guard of Boxer Hall, broke through, and jumped right at the quarter-back, hoping to break up the play. Phil went down under him, and when Kindlings had been stopped, after a few yards’ advance, the quarter-back did not get up.

“Phil’s hurt!” cried Tom, and his heart reproached him for keeping quiet about the warning. “That was done on purpose!”

[There was a rush to where Phil lay.](#) Nottingham was bending over him.



[“There was a rush to where Phil lay”](#)

“By Jove, old man!” he exclaimed contritely. “I didn’t mean to hurt you. Hope I didn’t tackle you too hard.”

He began rubbing Phil’s hands. Holly Cross passed his fingers over the quarter-back’s head.

“He got a nasty bump!” he exclaimed. “Bring some water.”

The cold fluid revived the injured lad. He struggled to get up.

“Lie still!” insisted the captain.

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“I’m—I’m all right,” replied Phil, though faintly. “My head hit a stone, I guess. Give me a little water, and I’ll go on with the game!”

"He's got pluck!" exclaimed Nottingham admiringly, but neither he nor any of the others knew the full extent of the quarter-back's pluck. "I'm awfully sorry, old man," went on Nottingham, who was one of the best fellows in the world. "I didn't mean to come at you so hard."

"That's all right," spoke Phil gently, and he tried to smile. "We're going to beat you for that."

He got to his feet inside the required two minutes.

"Signal!" he cried, but there was lacking in his tones some of his old-time vigor. He called for a play between guard and tackle. Right at Nottingham the play was directed, and Dutch Housenlager was to make it—big Dutch, who seemed to be all bone, muscle and sinew. A gleam was in Phil's eyes as he gave the last letter of the signal.

There were but four yards to go to make a touch-down. Could Randall do it? "They must do it! They would do it!" Phil was deciding for the whole team. He felt that they must make that distance, if he had to carry the entire eleven on his shoulders. Snail Looper was about to snap the ball back. Boxer Hall was bracing as she had never braced before. It was now or never. If Randall got a second touch-down it would mean practically that she would win the game and the championship. [294]

Back came the ball. Phil passed it to Dutch, and up against the solid wall of flesh went the big right-tackle. You could almost hear the impact over in the grandstand. Behind him were his mates. In front of him, pulling and hauling on him, were more of them. On either side were the Boxer Hall players, who had been torn from their places to make a hole. From either side they came leaping in to stop the gap—to stop the advance of the man with the ball. On and on struggled Dutch. He felt that he was not himself—that he was but a small part of that seething, struggling mass—an atom in a crushing, grinding, whirling, heaving, boiling caldron of human beings. Breaths were coming short and quick, eyes were flashing. It was push and shove, haul, slip, stumble. Player was piled on player. Tom Parsons and the other ends were on the outside. Holly Cross was pushing and shoving, glad if he felt the mass in front of him give but the fraction of an inch.

Then, from somewhere beneath that mass of humanity, came the voice of Dutch Housenlager.

"Down!" he called faintly.

The heaving human hill slowly settled down, as when the fire is withdrawn from under a boiling kettle. [295]

The whistle blew. Slowly the mass was disintegrated. Sore, bruised, scratched; bleeding some of them, lame most of them, desperately anxious all of them, the players fell apart. Dutch was lying on his face, his big back arched. The ball was not to be seen. Had there been a fumble? The goal line passed beneath the stomach of the big tackle. Slowly he arose, and then such a shout as rent the air.

For the ball was under him! It was over the line! He had made the touch-down!

Oh, how the stands vibrated with the yells, the cheers, the songs, the delirious leaping up and down, the stamping of feet and the clapping of hands! How the Fairview girls shrilly screamed their college cry! How it was caught up, swallowed and silenced by the booming cheers from the Randall cohorts!

For Randall had won. Even if she could not kick the goal, she had won, as there remained but one minute more of play. But the goal was kicked. Holly Cross saw to that, and then, with a final, useless kick-off, and after the final whistle had blown, the Randall players gathered together, their arms about each other, and cheered heartily and mightily for the victory.

Dutch was hoisted to the shoulders of his mates protestingly, and carried about. The Boxer Hall eleven was cheered, and they gave back a perfunctory, complimentary yell for their opponents. They had been beaten where they hoped to win. Beaten twice in the season by their former victims. It was humiliating. [296]

"Here!" cried Holly Cross. "Up with Phil Clinton. He piloted the team to victory!"

"That's right!" shouted Bricktop. "Up with him!"

But Phil was running toward the grandstand at top speed; toward the A section where, he had told Tom, Madge and Ruth sat.

"He's hurrying to receive the congratulations of Madge," thought Tom bitterly.

Holly Cross took after the fleeing quarter-back.

"Come here!" he cried.

"Can't," answered Phil desperately, and the captain saw that his face was drawn and strained.

"Why not?" demanded Holly.

"Because—read that!" and Phil held out a crumpled telegram. Slowly Holly deciphered it:

"Come at once. Your mother is dying."

It was signed with Phil's father's name.

"When did you get this?" asked the captain slowly, while the other players gathered about.

"It came just—just before the game," answered Phil. "I must go—and get my sister. We must start for Florida—at once." [297]

"Just before the game?" said Holly in a low voice. "Just before the game? And you played, knowing that—that your mother was—was—"

Holly faltered. There was a huskiness in his voice.

"I played the game," said Phil simply. "I—I didn't want to tell you fellows, for fear you'd put a substitute in. But I'm going, now," and he turned toward the grandstand.

"Talk about pluck!" exclaimed Holly Cross. "If that isn't the best exhibition of it, I never want to hear of any."

"Pluck!" murmured Bricktop Molloy. "He's pluck personified. Poor Phil!" and the big left-guard turned aside. Slowly Phil's mates watched him making his way to where his sister sat. The gridiron was swarming with spectators now. Bean Perkins came running over.

"We'll have a great celebration to-night!" he cried to the players and the substitutes.

"No!" said Holly Cross simply.

"Why not?"

"Because Phil's mother is dying. He's got to go to her."

Up the grandstand leaped Phil. Tom had hurried after him, ready to do what he could to aid his chum to get a train. Phil saw Ruth and Madge together. At the sight of her brother Ruth cried:

"Oh, Phil, wasn't it glorious? I'm so glad you won! Why—wh—what's the matter?" she gasped at the sight of his pale face.

"Mother!" he exclaimed huskily. "Didn't—haven't you a telegram?"

"Yes. Did you get one, too?" and she fumbled in her muff. "Oh, Phil, I'm so happy! She's all better! The operation was a success, and she's going to get well! I got mine just before the game, and I supposed you did, too. I was waiting for you to come to me, but I guess you didn't have a chance. Oh, I'm so glad!" and she threw her arms around her brother's neck.

"Going to get well? Operation a success? Why, I—I didn't get a telegram like that!" exclaimed Phil in bewilderment.

"There's mine," said Ruth, producing it. "I left word to forward any that might come to Fairview to me here. I gave the number of my seat here to the Fairview operator, and I got the message just before play began. But didn't you get yours?"

Before Phil could answer a diminutive messenger boy pushed his way through the crowd.

"Is dis Phil Clinton?" he asked boldly.

"That's me," replied Phil quickly, but he hardly knew what he said.

"Den here's a message fer youse. I tried t' git it t' youse before de game, but de cop wouldn't let me in on de grass. So I stayed and seen de scrap. Hully chee! But it was a peach! I'm glad youse fellers won. Sign dere!" and the lad held out his book with the message in.

As in a dream Phil signed, and then tore open the envelope. The message was a duplicate of the one his sister had.

"Any answer?" asked the lad, as he gazed in admiration at Phil, and Tom, who stood close beside him. "Hully chee! But youse is husky brutes," spoke the modern Mercury, but it was only his way of properly admiring the football heroes.

"Yes, there's an answer," said Phil, and he scribbled on a piece of paper a bystander thrust into his hand this telegram:

"Dear Dad: Best news I ever got! We won the game!"

And he signed it with the names of his sister and himself.

"May I add my good wishes, not only on the recovery of your mother, but on the way you played the game?" asked Madge, blushing, and holding out her hand to Phil. He clasped her fingers in his.

"Same here!" cried Tom, as he caught a roguish glance from the eyes of Ruth. "Oh, but I'm glad for your sake, old man!" and he gave Phil such a clap on the back as to make the teeth of the quarter-back clatter. "I'm so glad!"

"I know you are," said Phil simply, and as he shook hands with his chum he knew, somehow, that the little cloud that had come between them had passed away.

"Tra, la, la! Merrily do we sing and dance!" cried Tom in the exuberance of his feelings. "Come down on the field, Phil, Madge, Ruth, and we'll play 'Ring Around the Rosy!'"

Laughingly they descended with him, and added to the merriment of the throng by gaily circling about in it.

But, with all his joy, Phil was puzzled. Where had the first telegram come from? Had it been a mistake? Had the operator blundered? He said nothing to his sister about the message received just before the game.

The good news quickly spread among the Randall players, and they soon arranged for a celebration. A big fire was kindled, on it were thrown their football suits, for the season was over, and then the champion eleven broke training. A dinner was served that night in the gymnasium, and many girls from Fairview, including Ruth and Madge, attended.

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"But I can't understand where this message came from," Phil was saying to Tom and Sid a few hours later in their room. "Jove, but it almost knocked me out when I got it! But I knew I had to play the game." He was examining the telegram he had first received.

"Let's see that message," said Sid, and he scanned it closely. "That's a fake!" he said suddenly.

"A fake!" repeated Tom and Phil.

"Yes. There's no check number on it. No message is ever sent out without a check number on it. This never came over the wire. Some one got hold of a receiving blank and an envelope, and played this brutal trick. Maybe it was one of the Boxer Hall fellows. He wanted to get your nerve, so you'd drop out of the game."

"I don't believe it was a Boxer Hall chap," said Phil.

"Then it was some one who had a grudge against you," insisted Sid. "We can inquire at the telegraph office and find out, maybe."

Tom uttered an exclamation. He had suddenly thought of the mysterious warning he had received. Quickly he brought out the torn pieces of paper. He saw it all now. The warning had been intended to cover the telegram—not a physical danger, but a mental one. Rapidly he explained how he got the note.

"I didn't say anything to you, Phil," he concluded, "because I was—I was afraid you'd laugh at me. And I kept my eyes open in the game."

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"I understand," spoke the quarter-back. "But who sent this warning?"

Sid was eagerly examining it, for Tom had pasted the torn pieces together.

"I have it!" cried Sid. "Langridge sent this!"

"How do you know?" came from Phil and Tom at once.

"Because that's the kind of paper he uses. It has a peculiar water-mark. I'll show you. I have an old baseball note I got from him last term."

Sid brought out his note. The two were compared. The paper was exactly similar, and there were even some characteristic similarities in the writing, though one was in script and the other printed.

"Langridge sent this," decided Sid, and the others agreed with him.

"Then who sent the fake telegram?" inquired Phil.

"Gerhart, for all the world!" exclaimed Sid. "The cad! To play such a brutal trick!" Sid caught up his cap.

"Where are you going?" asked Tom.

"I'm going to confront him with this evidence, and have him run out of college!" burst out Sid. "This ends his course!"

But Gerhart had anticipated what was coming, when he saw that the cruel telegram he had sent Phil had had no effect, and that the plucky quarter-back continued playing. He evidently knew the game was up, and fled. For, when Sid called at the fashionable eating club, where Gerhart and Langridge had recently taken a room, he found only the former 'varsity pitcher there.

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"Where's Gerhart?" asked Sid savagely.

"Gone," said Langridge, and he began to shake. He trembled more when Sid threw down the incriminating evidence, and blurted out the story.

"It's all true," confessed Langridge. "Gerhart stole the telegraph blank and an envelope, while I kept the agent busy talking about some money I expected to get. Gerhart made me go in the scheme with him, but I—I couldn't stand it, and I sent Tom the tip. I'm done with Gerhart. He faked the message to Phil and hired a boy to deliver it. I'm through with him!"

"I should think you would be!" burst out Sid, walking about the room. It was in confusion, for Gerhart had hurriedly departed. Sid's eye saw a bottle on the closet shelf. "What's this, Langridge?" he asked. "Why, it's liniment! The same kind Phil had, and which stiffened my hand! How did it get here? It's the same bottle that was broken—no, it can't be, yet there's the same blot on the label. How in thunder—"

Then Langridge confessed to that trick of Gerhart's also.

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"He ought to be tarred and feathered!" cried the angry Sid. "If I had him here! But you're almost as bad, Langridge. You helped him!"

"I know it. I'm going to leave college, if you'll only keep still about this. Will you?" pleaded the cringing lad.

"Yes; for the sake of the college, not for you," spoke Sid, and that is how only the three chums knew the real story of the dastardly meanness of the two cronies. They thought they were well rid of their enemies, but they were mistaken. Those of you who care to read further of the happenings at Randall College may do so in the next book, to be called "Batting to Win." In that volume we shall meet all our friends again, and learn what Sid did during the greatest baseball game of the next season, and when the collegiate championship hung in the balance.

"Well, it's all over but the shouting," said Phil to his chums, as they sat in their room that night.

From without came the joyous cries of those who were celebrating the football victory.

"All but putting a bronze tablet in the gym, to commemorate the pluck you showed," added Tom.

"Aw, forget it!" spoke Phil, as he got into a more comfortable position on the creaking sofa. "Anybody would have done the same to see his team win."

"Maybe," said Sid softly as he got up from the easy chair to look at his favorite football picture.

Then came a silence in the room, and the fussy little alarm clock had matters all to itself. It ticked away at a great rate.

Tom, who had been standing near the window, crossed to the opposite wall, and stood before the picture of a laughing girl. Phil saw him, smiled, and then, he, too, slowly arose from the decrepit sofa and went closer to a photograph of another girl. Thus the three stood, and the clock ticked on with quick, impatient strokes, and not a word was spoken.

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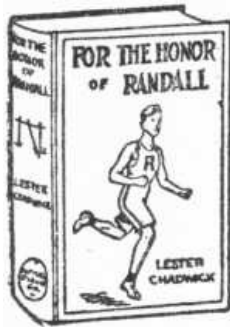
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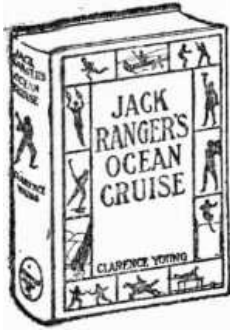
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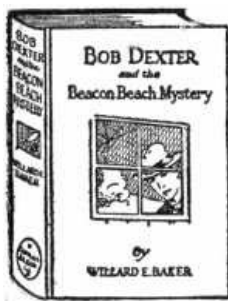
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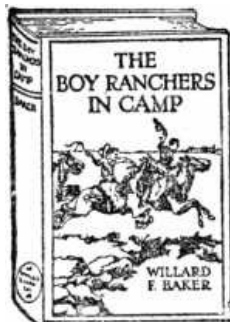
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Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

Standardized instances of "Westcott" (p. 220, p. 222) to the more frequent "Wescott" University.

Retained author's long dash style.

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