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by Lester Chadwick**

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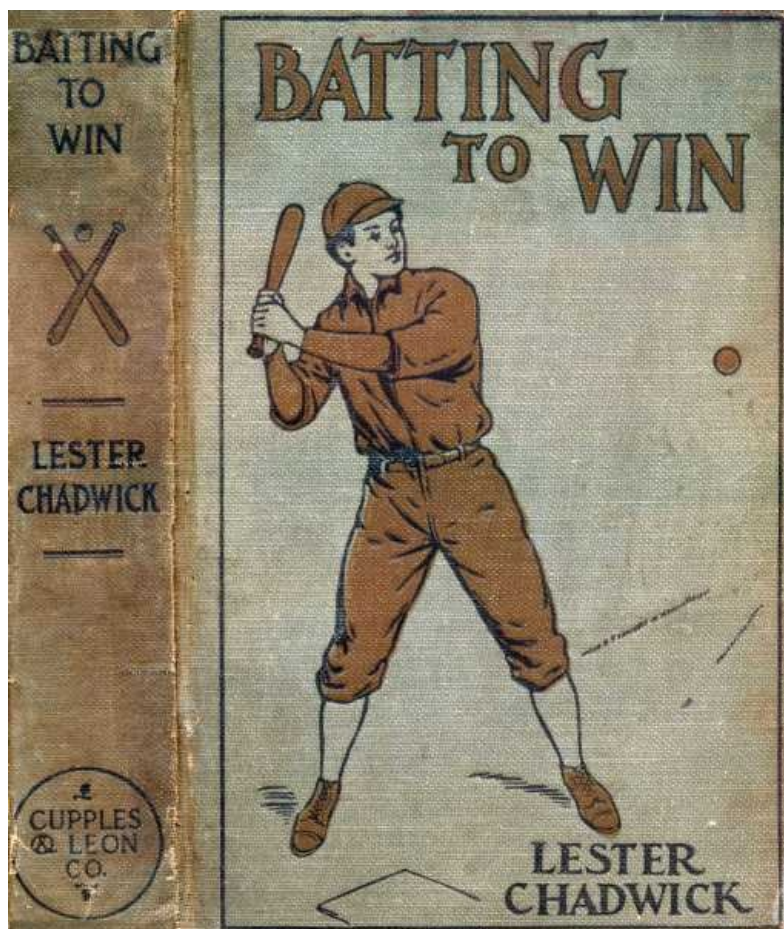
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BASEBALL ***





**HE SLAMMED IT OUT FOR A THREE-
BASE HIT.**

BATTING TO WIN

A Story of College Baseball

BY

LESTER CHADWICK

AUTHOR OF "THE RIVAL PITCHERS," "A QUARTER-BACK'S PLUCK," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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BATTING TO WIN

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[HE SLAMMED IT OUT FOR A THREE-BASE HIT.](#)

"MR. ZANE WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU, MR. HENDERSON."
HE LEAPED INTO THE AIR AND WITH HIS BARE HAND CAUGHT THE
HORSEHIDE.
"BAT TO WIN! IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOU!"

BATTING TO WIN

[1]

CHAPTER I

A STRANGE MESSAGE

Sid Henderson arose from the depths of an antiquated easy chair, not without some effort, for the operation caused the piece of furniture to creak and groan, while from the thick cushions a cloud of dust arose, making a sort of haze about the student lamp, and forcing two other occupants of the college room to sneeze.

"Oh, I say, Sid!" expostulated Tom Parsons, "give a fellow notice, will you, when you're going to liberate a colony of sneeze germs. I—er—ah! kerchoo! Hoo! Boo!" and he made a dive for his pocket handkerchief.

"Yes," added Phil Clinton, as he coughed protestingly. "What do you want to get up for and disturb everything, when Tom and I were so nice and quiet? Why can't you sit still and enjoy a good think once in a while? Besides, do you want to give that chair spinal meningitis or lumbago? Our old armchair, that has stuck to us, through thick and thin, for better and for worse—mostly worse, I guess. I say——"

[2]

"I came near sticking to it, myself," remarked Sidney Henderson, otherwise known as, and called, Sid. "It's like getting out of the middle of a featherbed to leave it. And say, it does act as if it was going to pieces every time one gets in or out of it," he added, making a critical inspection of the chair.

"Then why do you want to get in or out?" asked Phil, closing a book, over which he had made a pretense of studying. "Why do you do it, I ask? You may consider that I have moved the previous question, and answer," he went on. "How about it, Tom?"

"The gentleman is out of order," decided Tom, a tall, good-looking lad, with the bronzed skin of an athlete, summer and fall, barely dimmed by the enforced idleness of winter. "Sid, you are most decidedly out of order—I think I'm going to sneeze again," and he held up a protesting hand. "No, I'm not, either," he continued. "False alarm. My, what a lot of dust! But, go ahead, Sid, answer the gentleman's query."

"Gentleman?" repeated the lad, who had arisen from the easy chair, and there was a questioning note in his voice.

"Here! Here! Save that for the amateur theatricals!" cautioned Tom, looking about for something to throw at his chum. "Why did you get up? Answer!"

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"I wanted to see if it had stopped raining," announced Sid, as he moved over toward one of the two windows in the rather small living room and study, occupied by the three chums, who were completing their sophomore year at Randall College. "Seems to me it's slacking up some."

"Slacking up some!" exclaimed Tom.

"Stopped raining!" echoed Phil. "Listen to it! Cats and dogs, to say nothing of little puppies, aren't in it. It's a regular deluge. Listen to it!"

He held up his hand. Above the fussy ticking of a small alarm clock, which seemed to contain a six-cylindrical voice in a one-cylindrical body, and which timepiece was resting at a dangerous angle on a pile of books, there sounded the patter of rain on the windows and the tin gutter outside.

"Rain, rain, nothing but rain!" grumbled Phil. "We haven't had a decent day for baseball practice in two weeks. I'm sick of the inside cage, and the smell of tan bark. I want to get into the open, with the green grass of the outfield to fall on."

"Well, this weather is good for making the grass grow," observed Tom, as he got up from his chair, and joined Sid at the window, down which rain drops were chasing each other as if in glee at the anguish of mind they were causing the three youths.

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"Aren't you anxious to begin twirling the horsehide?" asked Sid. "I should think you'd lose some speed, having only the cage to practice in, Tom."

"I am, but I guess we'll get some decent weather soon. This can't last forever."

"It's in a fair way to," grumbled Phil.

"It would be a nice night if it didn't rain," came from Sid musingly, as he turned back to the old easy chair, "which remark," he added, "is one a little boy made in the midst of a driving storm, when he met his Sunday-school teacher, and wanted to say something, but didn't know what."

"Your apology is accepted," murmured Tom. "I don't know what you fellows are going to do, but I'm going to sew up a rip in my pitcher's glove. I think maybe if I do the weather man will get a hunch on himself, and hand us out a sample of a nice day for us to select from."

"Nice nothing!" was what Phil growled, but with the activity of Tom in getting out his glove, and searching for needle and thread, there came a change of atmosphere in the room. The rain came down as insistently, and the wind lashed the drops against the panes, but there was an air of relief among the chums. [5]

"I've got to fix a rip in my own glove," murmured Sid. "Guess I might as well get at it," and he noted Tom threading a needle.

"And I've got to do a little more boning on this trigonometry," added Phil, as, with a sigh, he opened the despised book.

For a time there was silence in the apartment, while the rain on the windows played a tattoo, more or less gentle, as the wind whipped the drops; the timepiece fussed away, as if reminding its hearers that time and tide waited for no man, and that 99-cent alarm clocks were especially exacting in the matter. Occasionally Sid shifted his position in the big chair, to which he had returned, each movement bringing out a cloud of dust, and protests from his chums.

The room was typical of the three lads who occupied it. At the beginning of their friendship, and their joint occupation of a study, they had agreed that each was to be allowed one side of the apartment to decorate as he saw fit. The fourth side of this particular room was broken by two windows, and not of much use, while one of the other walls contained the door, and this one Sid had chosen, for the simple reason that his fancy did not run to such things as did Tom's and Phil's, and he required less space for his ornaments. [6]

Sid was rather an odd character, somewhat quiet, much given to study, and to delving after the odd and unusual. One of his fads was biology, and another, allied to it, nature study. He would tramp all day for a sight of some comparatively rare bird, nesting; or walk many miles to get a picture of a fox, or a ground-hog, just as it darted into its burrow. In consequence Sid's taste did not run to gay flags and banners of the college colors, worked by the fair hands of pretty girls, nor did he care to collect the pictures of the aforesaid girls, and stick them up on his wall. He had one print which he prized, a representation of a football scrimmage, and this occupied the place of honor.

As for Tom and Phil, the more adornments they had the better they liked it, though I must do them the credit to say that they only had one place of honor for one girl's photograph at a time. But they sometimes changed girls. Then, on their side, were more or less fancy pictures—scenes, mottoes, and what not. Much of the ornamentation had been given them by young lady friends.

Of course the old chair and an older sofa, together with the alarm clock, which had been handed down from student to student until the mind of Randallites ran not to the contrary, were the chief other things in the apartment, aside from the occupants thereof. Each lad had a desk, and a bureau or chiffonier, or "Chauffeur" as Holly Cross used to dub them. These articles of furniture were more or less in confusion. Neckties, handkerchiefs, collars and cuffs were piled in a seemingly inextricable, if not artistic, confusion. Nor could much else be expected in a room where three chums made a habit of indiscriminately borrowing each other's articles of wearing apparel, provided they came any where near fitting. [7]

On the floor was a much worn rug, which Phil had bought at auction at an almost prohibitive price, under the delusion that it was a rare Oriental. Learning to the contrary he and his chums had decided to keep it, since, old and dirty as it was, they argued that it saved them the worriment of cleaning their feet when they came in.

Then there were three neat, white, iron beds—neat because they were made up fresh every day, and there was a dormitory rule against having them in disorder. Otherwise they would have suffered the fate of the walls, the rug or the couch and easy chair. Altogether it was a fairly typical student apartment, and it was occupied, as I hope my readers will believe, by three of the finest chaps it has been my lot to write about; and it is in this room that my story opens, with the three lads busily engaged in one way or another. [8]

"Oh, I say! Hang it all!" burst out Sid finally. "How in the mischief do you shove a needle through this leather, Tom? It won't seem to go, for me."

"You should use a thimble," observed Tom. "Nothing like 'em, son."

"Thimble!" cried Sid scornfully. "Do you take me for an old maid? Where did you ever learn to use a thimble?" and he walked over to where Tom was making an exceedingly neat job of mending his glove.

"Oh, I picked it up," responded the pitcher of the Randall 'varsity nine. "Comes in handy when your foot goes through your socks."

"Yes, and that's what they do pretty frequently these days," added Phil. "If you haven't anything to do, Tom, I wish you'd get busy on some of my footwear. I just got a batch back from the laundry, and I'm blessed if out of the ten pairs of socks I can get one whole pair."

"I'll look 'em over," promised the pitcher. "There, that's as good as new; in fact better, for it fits my hand," and he held up and gazed critically at the mended glove. "Where's yours, Sid?" he went on. "I'll mend it for you."

Silence was the atmosphere of the apartment for a few minutes—that is comparative silence, [9]

though the pushing of Tom's needle through the leather, squeaking as he forced it, mingled with the ticking of the clock.

"I guess we can count on a good nine this year," observed Tom judicially, apropos of the glove repairing.

"It's up to you, cap," remarked Sid, for Tom had been elected to that coveted honor.

"You mean it's up to you fellows," retorted the pitcher-captain. "I want some good batters, that's what I want. It's all right enough to have a team that can hold down Boxer Hall and Fairview Institute, but you can't win games by shutting out the other fellows. Runs are what count, and to get runs you've got to bat to win."

"Listen to the oracle!" mocked Phil, but with no malice in his voice. "You want to do better than three hundred with the stick, Sid."

"Physician, heal thyself!" quoted Tom, smiling. "I think we will have a good——"

He was interrupted by the sound of footsteps coming along the corridor. Instinctively the three lads started, then, as a glance at the clock showed that they were not burning lights beyond the prescribed hour, there was a breath of relief.

"Who's coming?" asked Tom.

"Woodhouse, Bricktop or some of the royal family," was Phil's opinion.

"No," remarked Sid quietly, and there was that in his voice which made his chums look curiously at him, for it seemed as if he expected some one. A moment later there came a rap on the door, and then, with a seeming knowledge of the nerve-racking effect this always has on college students, a voice added:

"I'm Wallops, the messenger. I have a note for Mr. Henderson."

"For me?" and there was a startled query in Sid's voice, as he went to the door.

Outside the portal stood a diminutive figure—Wallops—the college messenger, so christened in ages gone by—perhaps because of the chastisements inflicted on him. At any rate Wallops he was, and Wallops he remained.

"A message for me?" repeated Sid. "Where from?"

"Dunno. Feller brought it, and said it was for you," and, handing the youth an envelope, the messenger departed.

Sid took out the note, and rapidly scanned it.

"See him blush!" exclaimed Phil. "Think of it, Tom, Sid Henderson, the old anchorite, the petrified misogynist, getting notes from a girl."

"Yes," added Tom. "Why don't you sport her photograph, old man?" and he glanced at several pictures of pretty girls that adorned the sides of the room claimed by Phil and himself.

Sid did not answer. He read the note through again, and then began to tear it into bits. The pieces he thrust into his pocket, but one fluttered, unnoticed, to the floor.

"I've got to go out, fellows," he announced in a curiously quiet voice.

"Out—on a night like this?" cried Tom. "You're crazy. Listen to the rain! It's pouring."

"I can't help it," was the answer, as the lad began delving among his things for a raincoat.

"You're crazy!" burst out Phil. "Can't you wait until to-morrow to see her, old sport? My, but you've got 'em bad for a fellow who wouldn't look at a girl all winter!"

"It isn't a girl," and Sid's voice was still oddly calm. "I've got to go, that's all—don't bother me—you chaps."

There was such a sudden snap to the last words—something so different from Sid's usual gentle manner—that Phil and Tom looked at each other in surprise. Then, as if realizing what he had said, Sid added:

"It's something I can't talk about—just yet. I've got to go—I promised—that's all. I'll be back soon—I guess."

"How about Proc. Zane?" asked Tom, for the proctor of Randall College was very strict.

"I'll have to chance it," replied Sid. "I've got about two hours yet, before locking-up time, and if I get caught—well my reputation's pretty good," and he laughed uneasily.

This was not the Sid that Tom and Phil—his closest chums—had known for the last three terms. It was a different Sid, and the note he received, and had so quickly destroyed, seemed to have worked the change in him. Slowly he drew on his raincoat and took up an umbrella. He paused a moment in the doorway. The rain was coming down harder than ever.

"So long," said Sid, as he stepped into the corridor. He almost collided with another youth on the point of entering, and the newcomer exclaimed:

"Say, fellows! I've got great news! Baseball news! I know this is a rotten night to talk diamond conversation, but listen. There's been a new trophy offered for the championship of the Tonoka Lake League! Just heard of it. Dr. Churchill told me. Some old geezer that did some endowing for the college years ago, had a spasm of virtue recently and is now taking an interest in sports. It's a peach of a gold loving cup, and say——"

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"Come on in, Holly," invited Tom, "Holly" being about all that Holman Cross was ever called. "Come on in," went on Tom, "and chew it all over for us. Say, it's great! A gold loving cup! We must lick the pants off Boxer and Fairview now!"

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Holly started to enter the room, Phil and Tom reaching out and clasping his hands.

"Where are you bound for?" asked Holly, looking at Sid, attired in the raincoat.

"I've got to go out," was the hesitating answer.

"Wait until you hear the news," invited Holly. "It's great! It will be the baseball sensation of the year, Sid."

"No—no—sorry, but I've got to go. I'll be back—soon—I guess. I've—I've got to go," and breaking away from the detaining hand of Holly, the strangely-acting boy turned down the corridor, leaving his roommates, and the newcomer, to stare curiously after him.

"Whatever has gotten into old Sid?" inquired Holly.

"Search us," answered Phil. "He got a note a little while ago; seemed quite put out about it, tore it up and then tore out, just as you saw."

"A note, eh?" mused Holly, as he threw himself full length on a rickety old sofa, much patched fore and aft with retaining boards—a sofa that was a fit companion for the ancient chair. It creaked and groaned under the substantial bulk of Holly.

"Easy!" cautioned Phil. "Do you want to wreck our most cherished possession?"

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"Anyone who can wreck this would be a wonder," retorted Holly, as he looked over the edge, and saw the boards that had been nailed on to repair a bad fracture. "Hello!" he exclaimed a moment later, as he picked up from the floor a scrap of paper. "You fellows are getting most uncommon untidy. First you know Proc. Zane will have you up on the carpet. You should keep your scraps of paper picked up."

"We didn't put that there," declared Tom. "That must be part of the note Sid tore up."

Idly Holly turned the bit of paper over. It was blank on one side, but, at the sight of the reverse the athlete uttered a cry.

"I say, fellows, look here!" he said.

He held the paper scrap out for their inspection. It needed but a glance to see that it bore but one word, though there were pen tracings of parts of other words on the edges. But the word that stood plainly out was "*trouble*," and it appeared to be the end of a sentence, for a period followed it.

"Trouble," mused Holly.

"Trouble," repeated Phil. "I wonder if that means Sid is going to get into trouble?" and his voice took a curious turn.

"Trouble," added Tom, the last of the trio to use the word. "Certainly something is up or Sid wouldn't act the way he did. I wonder—"

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"It isn't any of our affair," spoke Holly softly, "that is unless Sid wants our help, of course. I guess we shouldn't have looked at this. It's like reading another chap's letters."

"We couldn't help it," decided Phil. "Go ahead, Holly. Tell us about the trophy. Sid may be back soon."

"All right, here goes," and wiggling into a more comfortable position on the sofa, an operation fraught with much anxiety on the part of Phil and Tom, Holly launched into a description of the loving cup. But, unconsciously perhaps, he still held in his hand that scrap of paper—the paper with that one word on—"trouble."

CHAPTER II

[16]

SID IS CAUGHT

"It's this way," began Holly, as he crossed one leg over, and clasped his hands under his recumbent head. "Randall has been looking up in athletics lately. Since we did so well last season on the diamond, and won the championship at football, some of the old grads and men who have such 'oodles' of money that they don't know what to do with it, have a kindlier feeling for the old college. It's that which brought about the presentation of the loving cup trophy, or, rather the offer of it to the winner of the baseball championship of the Tonoka Lake League. The cup will be worth winning, so the doctor says."

"How'd he come to tell you?" asked Phil.

"I happened to go to his study to consult him about some of my studies——" began Holly.

"Yes you did!" exclaimed Tom disbelievingly.

"You went there because Proc. Zane made you!" declared Phil.

"Well, no matter, if you can't take a gentleman's word for it," said Holly, with an assumed

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injured air. "Anyhow, I was in the doctor's office, and he had just received a letter from some old grad, honorary degree man, offering the gold cup. Doc asked me if I thought the boys would like to play for it. Has to be won two out of three times before any college can keep it. I told him we'd play for it with bells on!"

"Of course!" agreed Tom and Phil.

"Now, about the team for this spring?" resumed Holly. "You're captain, Tom, but we've got to elect a manager soon, and we'd better begin talking about it," and then the trio launched into a rapid-fire talk on baseball and matters of the diamond.

The three youths were sophomores in Randall College, a well-known institution located near the town of Haddonfield, in one of our Middle Western States. The college proper was on the shore of Sunny River, not far from Lake Tonoka; and within comparative short distance of Randall were two other colleges. One was Boxer Hall, and the other Fairview Institute—the latter a co-educational institution. The three, together with some other near-by colleges and schools, formed what was called the Tonoka Lake Athletic League, and there were championship games of baseball, football, tennis, hockey, golf, and other forms of sport.

Those of you who have read the previous volumes of this "College Sports Series" need little if any introduction to the characters who have held the stage in my opening chapter. Others may care for a formal introduction, which I am happy to give them. [18]

In the first book, called "The Rival Pitchers," there was told of the efforts Tom Parsons made to gain the place as "twirler" on the 'varsity nine. Tom was a farmer's son, in moderate circumstances, and had come to Randall from Northville. Almost at once he got into conflict with Fred Langridge, a rich student, who was manager of the 'varsity ball nine, and also its pitcher, and who resented Tom's efforts to "make" the nine. After much snubbing on the part of Langridge, and not a few unpleasant experiences Tom got his chance. Eventually he supplanted Langridge, who would not train properly, and who smoked, drank and gambled, thinking himself a "sport."

Tom soon became one of the most liked of the sporting crowd, and the especial friend of Phil Clinton and Sidney Henderson, with whom he had roomed for the last term. The three were now called the "inseparables." In the first book several thrilling games were told of, also how Randall won the championship after a hard struggle with Boxer and Fairview, in which games Tom Parsons fairly "pitched his head off," to quote Holly Cross, who was an expert on diamond slang. Langridge did his best to injure Tom, and nearly succeeded, but the pitcher had many friends, besides his two special chums, among them being Holly Cross, Bricktop Molloy, Billy or "Dutch" Housenlager, who was full of horseplay, "Snail" Looper, so called from his ability to move with exceeding slowness, and his liking for night prowlings. [19]

Then there was Pete Backus, known as "Grasshopper," from his desire, but inability, to shine as a high and broad distance jumper; "Bean" Perkins, a "shouter" much depended on in games, when he led the cheering; Dan Woodhouse, called Kindlings, and Jerry and Joe Jackson, known as the "Jersey Twins."

Of course, Tom and his two chums had many other friends whom you will meet from time to time. Sufficient to say that he "made good" in the eyes of the coach, Mr. Leighton, and was booked not only to pitch on the 'varsity again, but he had been elected captain, just before the present story opens.

Phil Clinton was the hero of my second volume, a story of college football, entitled "A Quarter Back's Pluck." Phil was named for quarter back on the 'varsity eleven, but, for a time it looked as if he would be out of the most important games. His mother was very ill in Florida, in danger of death from a delicate operation, and Phil, and his sister Ruth Clinton (who attended Fairview Institute) were under a great nervous strain. [20]

Langridge, seeing that Tom was beyond his vengeance, tried his tricks on Phil. Together with Garvey Gerhart, a freshman, Langridge planned to keep Phil out of an important game. They "doctored" a bottle of liniment he used, but this trick failed. Then they planned to send him, just before an important contest, a telegram, stating that his mother was dying. They figured that he would not play and that Randall would lose the contest—both Gerhart and Langridge being willing to thus play the traitor to be revenged on the coach and captain of the eleven.

But, with characteristic pluck, Phil went into the game, stuffing the fake telegram in his pocket, and playing like a Trojan, even though he believed his mother was dying. It was pluck personified. After aiding his fellows to win the championship, Phil hurried off the field, to go to Florida to his mother. Then, for the first time, he learned that the message he had received was a "fake"—for his mother was on the road to recovery as stated in a telegram his sister Ruth had received.

Of course the trick Langridge and Gerhart played was found out, and they both left Randall quietly, so that the name of the college might not be disgraced. [21]

But though Tom, Phil, Sid and their chums lived a strenuous life when sports were in the ascendency, that does not mean that they had no time for the lighter side of life. There were girls at Fairview—pretty girls and many of them. One, in particular—Madge Tyler—seemed to fit Tom's fancy, and he and she grew to be very friendly. Perhaps that was because Tom had rather supplanted Langridge in the eyes of Miss Tyler, who had been to many affairs with him, before she knew his true character. Then there was Ruth Clinton, Phil's sister. After meeting her Tom was rather wavering in his attachment toward Miss Tyler, but matters straightened themselves

out, for Phil and Miss Tyler seemed to “hit it off,” to once more quote Holly Cross, though for a time there was a little coldness between Tom and Phil on this same girl question. When this story opens, however, Tom considered himself cheated if he did not see Ruth at least twice a week, and as for Phil, he and Miss Tyler—but there, I’m not going to be needlessly cruel.

To complete the description of life at Randall I might mention that Dr. Albertus Churchill, sometimes called “Moses,” was the venerable and well-beloved head of the institution, and that as much as he was revered so much was Mr. Andrew Zane, the proctor, disliked; for, be it known, the proctor did not always take fair advantage of the youths, and he was fond of having them “upon the carpet,” or, in other words, before Dr. Churchill for admonition about certain infractions of the rules. Another character, little liked, was Professor Emerson Tines, dubbed “pitchfork,” by his enemies, and they were legion.

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I believe that is all—no, to give you a complete picture of life at Randall I must mention that Sidney Henderson, the third member of the “inseparables” was a woman hater—a misogynist—an anchorite—a dub—almost anything along that line that his chums could think to call him. He abhorred young ladies—or he thought he did—and he and Tom and Phil were continually at variance on this question, and that of having girls’ photographs in the common study. But of that more later.

With Holly stretched out on the old sofa, and Phil and Tom in various tangled attitudes in chairs—Phil in the depths of the ancient one—the talk of baseball progressed.

“Yes, we must have an election for manager soon,” conceded Tom. “But first I want to see what sort of a team I’m going to have. We need outdoor practice, but if this rotten weather keeps up —”

“Hark! I think I hear the rain stopping,” exclaimed Phil.

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“Stop nothing,” declared Holly. “It’s only catching its breath for another deluge.” And it did seem so, for, presently, there came a louder patter than ever, of drops on the tin gutter.

“Well, guess I’d better be moving,” announced Holly, after another spasm of talk. “What time is it by your town clock, anyhow?” and he shied a book at the alarm timepiece so that the face of it would be slewed around in his direction, giving him a peep at it without obliging him to get up.

“Here! What are you trying to do?” demanded Tom. “Do you want to break the works, and stop it?”

“Impossible, my dear boy,” said Holly lazily. “Just turn it around for me, will you, like a good fellow. I don’t see how I missed it. I must practice throwing, or I won’t be any good when the ball season opens. Give me another shot?” and he raised a second volume.

“Quit!” cried Tom, interposing his arm in front of the fussy little clock.

“That calls us to our morning duties,” added Phil, adding in a sing-song voice: “Oh, vandal, spare that clock, touch not a single hand, for surely it doth keep the time the worst in all the land.”

“Fierce,” announced Holly, closing his eyes and pretending to breathe hard. “It tells you how much longer you can sleep in the morning, I guess you mean,” he went on. “The three of you were late for chapel this a. m.”

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“That’s because Sid monkeyed with the regulator,” insisted Tom. “He thought he could improve it. But, say, it is getting late. Nearly ten.”

“And Sid isn’t back yet,” went on Phil.

“My bedtime, anyhow,” came from Holly, as he slid from the sofa, and glided from the room. “So long. Sid wants to look out or he’ll be caught. Proc. Zane has a new book, and he wants to get some of the sporting crowd down in it. See you in the dewy morn, gents,” and he was gone.

“Sid *is* late,” murmured Tom, as he began to prepare for bed. “Shall we leave a light for him?”

“Nope. Too risky,” decided Phil. “No use of us all being hauled up. But maybe he’s back, and is in some of the rooms. He’s got ten minutes yet.”

But the ten minutes passed, and ten more, and Sid did not come back. Meanwhile Tom and Phil had “doused their glim,” and were in bed, but not asleep. Somehow there was an uneasy feeling worrying them both. They could not understand Sid’s action in going off so suddenly, and so mysteriously—especially as there was a danger of being caught out after hours. And, as Sid was working for honors, to be caught too often meant the danger of losing that for which he had worked so hard.

[25]

“I can’t understand—” began Tom, in a low voice, when from the chapel clock, the hour of eleven boomed out.

“Hush!” exclaimed Phil.

Some one was coming along the corridor—two persons to judge by the footsteps.

“Is that Sid?” whispered Tom.

Phil did not answer. A moment later the door opened, and in the light that streamed from a lamp in the corridor, Sid could be seen entering. Behind him stood Proctor Zane.

“You will report to Dr. Churchill directly after chapel in the morning,” the proctor said, in his hard, cold voice. “You were out an hour after closing time, Mr. Henderson.”

"Very well, sir," answered Sid quietly, as he closed the door, and listened to Mr. Zane walking down the corridor.

"Caught?" asked Tom, though there was no need of the query.

"Sure," replied Sid shortly.

"Where were you?" asked Phil, sitting up in bed, and trying to peer through the darkness toward his unfortunate chum. [26]

"Out," was the answer, which was none at all.

"Humph!" grunted Tom. Then, suddenly: "You must have been hitting it up, Sid. I thought you didn't smoke. Been trying it for the first time?"

"I haven't been smoking!" came the answer, in evident surprise.

"Your clothes smell as if you'd been at the smoker of the Gamma Sig fraternity," declared Tom.

"Oh, shut up, and let a fellow alone; can't you?" burst out Sid, and he threw his shoes savagely into the corner of the room. Neither Tom nor Phil replied, but they were doing a great deal of thinking. They could not fathom Sid's manner—he had never acted that way before. What could be the matter? It was some time before they learned Sid's secret, and the keeping of it involved Sid in no small difficulties, and nearly cost the college the baseball championship.

CHAPTER III

MISS MABEL HARRISON

Neither Tom nor Phil made any reference, the following morning, to the incident of the night before. As usual, none of the boys got up when the warning of the alarm clock summoned them, for they always allowed half an hour for its persistent habit of running fast. As it was, it happened to be correct on this occasion, and they were barely in time for chapel, Tom having to adjust his necktie on the race across the campus.

"Well, what's on for to-day?" asked Phil, as, with Tom and Sid, he strolled from the chapel after service.

"Baseball practice this afternoon," decided Tom, for the rain had stopped.

"It'll be pretty sloppy," observed Phil dubiously.

"Wear rubbers," advised the captain. "The fellows need some fresh air, and they're going to get it. Be on hand, Sid?"

"Sure. Now I've got to get a disagreeable job over with. Me for the doctor's office," and that was his only reference to the punishment meted out to him. He was required to do the usual number of lines of Latin prose, which was not hard for him, as he was a good scholar. Tom and Sid went to their lectures, the captain, on the way, calling to the various members of the team to be on hand at the diamond in the afternoon. [28]

Sid accomplished his sentence of punishment in the room, and after dinner the three chums, with a motley crowd of players, and lovers of the great game, moved over the campus toward the diamond.

"Done anything about a manager?" asked Holly Cross, as he tightened his belt and began tossing up a grass-stained ball.

"Not yet," replied Tom. "There's time enough. I want to get the fellows in some kind of shape. We won't play a game for a month yet—that is any except practice ones, and we don't need a manager to arrange for them. Whom have you fellows in mind?"

"Ed Kerr," spoke Holly promptly. "He knows the game from A to Z."

"I thought he was going to play," came quickly from Tom. "We need him on the nine."

"He isn't going to play this season," went on Holly. "I heard him say so. He wants to save himself for football, and he says he can't risk going in for both. He'd make a good manager." [29]

"Fine!" agreed Tom, Sid and Phil.

"Yes, but did you hear the latest?" asked Snail Looper, gliding along, almost like the reptile he was christened after.

"What?" demanded several.

"There's talk of Ford Fenton for manager," went on Snail.

"What, Ford!" cried Tom. "He'd be giving us nothing all the while but 'my uncle says this' and 'my uncle used to do it that way'! No Ford for mine, though I like the chap fairly well."

"Same here," agreed Phil. "We can stand him, but not his uncle," for, be it known, Ford Fenton, one of the sophomore students, was the nephew of a man who had been a celebrated coach at Randall in the years gone by. Ford believed in keeping his memory green, and on every possible, and some impossible, occasions he would preface his remarks with "My Uncle says" and then go on and tell something. It got on the nerves of his fellows, and they "rigged" him unmercifully

about it, but Fenton could not seem to take the hint. His uncle was a source of pride to him, but it is doubtful if the former coach knew how his reputation suffered at the hands of his indiscrete youthful relative.

"Who told you Fenton had a chance for manager?" asked Sid Henderson.

"Why, Bert Bascome is his press agent."

"Bascome, the freshman?" Phil wanted to know, and Snail Looper nodded.

"Guess he didn't get all the hazing that was coming to him last fall," remarked Tom. "We'll have to tackle him again. Kerr is the only logical candidate for manager, if he isn't going to play."

"That's right," came in a chorus, as the lads kept on toward the diamond.

Tom was doing some hard thinking. It was a new responsibility for him—to run the team—and he wanted a manager on whom he could depend. If there was a contest over the place, as seemed likely from what Snail Looper had said, it would mean perhaps a dividing of interests, and lack of support for the team. He did not like the prospect, but he knew better than to tell his worries to the players now. At present he wanted to get them into some kind of shape, after a winter of comparative idleness.

"Here comes Mr. Leighton," observed Phil, as a young, and pleasant-faced gentleman was seen strolling toward the diamond. "Everybody work hard now—no sloppy work."

"That's right," assented Tom. "Fellows, what I want most to bring out this season," he went on, "is some good hitting. Good batting wins games, other things being equal. We've got to bat to win."

"You needn't talk," put in Dutch Housenlager, coming up then, and, with his usual horse play trying to trip Tom. "You are the worst hitter on the team."

"I know it," admitted Tom good naturedly, as he gave Dutch a welt on the chest, which made that worthy gasp. "My strong point isn't batting, and I know it. I can pitch a little, perhaps—"

"You're there with the goods when it comes to twirling," called out Holly Cross.

"Well, then, I'm going to depend on you fellows for the stick work," went on Tom. "But let's get down to business. The ground isn't so wet."

"Well, boys, let's see what we can do," proposed the coach, and presently balls were being pitched and batted to and fro, grounders were being picked up by Bricktop Molloy, who excelled in his position of shortstop, while Jerry and Joe Jackson, the Jersey twins, with Phil Clinton, who on this occasion filled, respectively, the positions of right, left and center field were catching high flies.

"Now for a practice game," proposed Tom. "I want to see if I have any of my curves left."

Two scrub nines were soon picked out, and a game was gotten under way. It was "ragged and sloppy" as Holly Cross said, but it served to warm up the lads, and to bring out strong and weak points, which was the object sought.

The team, of which Tom was just then the temporary captain, won by a small margin, and then followed some coaching instructions from Mr. Leighton.

"That will do for to-day," he said. "Be at it again to-morrow, and we'll soon be in shape."

The players and their admirers—lads who had not made the team—strolled off the diamond. Tom, walking along with Phil and Sid, suddenly put his hand in his pocket.

"Just my luck!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" asked Phil.

"I'm broke," was the answer, "and I want to get a new shirt. Phil, lend me a couple of dollars. I'll get my check from dad to-morrow."

"I'm in the same boat, old man," was the rueful reply. "Tackle Sid here, I saw him with a bunch of money yesterday. He can't have spent it all since, for he isn't in love."

"Just the thing," assented Tom. "Fork over a couple of bones, Sid. I'll let you have it directly."

"I—er—I'm sorry," fairly stammered the second baseman, for that was the position Tom had picked out for his chum, "I haven't but fifty cents until I get my allowance, or until—" and he stopped suddenly.

"Wow!" cried Phil. "You must have slathered it away last night then, when you were out, for I saw you with a bundle—"

Then he stopped, for he saw a queer look come over Sid's face. The second baseman blushed, and was about to make reply, when Phil remarked:

"I beg your pardon, Sid. I hadn't any right to make that crack. Of course I—er—you understand—er—I—"

"That's all right," said Sid quickly. "I was a little flush yesterday, but I had a sudden demand on me, Tom, and—"

"Don't mention it!" interrupted Tom. "I dare say I can get trusted at Ballman's for a shirt. I'm going out to-night, or I wouldn't need a clean one, and my duds haven't come back from the laundry."

"I didn't know my sister was going out to-night," fired Phil, for Tom had been rather "rushing" Ruth Clinton of late, "rushing" being the college term for accompanying a young lady to functions.

"I guess she doesn't have to ask you," retorted the captain. "But I understood you and Miss Tyler—"

"Speak of trolley cars, and you'll hear the gong," put in Sid suddenly. "I believe your two affinities are now approaching." [34]

"By Jove, he's right!" exclaimed Phil, looking across the green campus. "There's Ruth, and Madge Tyler is with her. I didn't know Ruth was coming over from Fairview."

"And they've got a friend with them—there are three girls," said Tom quickly. "Sid, you're right in it. There's one for you."

"Not on your life!" cried the tall and good-looking second baseman. "I've got an important engagement," and he would have fled had not Tom and Phil seized and held him, despite his struggles, until Miss Ruth Clinton, Miss Madge Tyler and the third young lady approached. Whereat, seeing that his struggle to escape was futile, as well as undignified, Sid gave it up.

"Hello, Ruth!" cried Phil good-naturedly to his sister, but his eyes sought those of Madge Tyler. "How'd you get here?"

"Trolley," was the demure answer. "I'm going to the Phi Beta theatrical with Mr. Parsons to-night, and I thought I'd save him the trouble of coming for me. Madge and I are staying in Haddonfield with friends of Miss Harrison."

"Good!" cried Tom, as he moved closer to Phil's pretty sister, while, somehow, Phil and Madge seemed to drift together.

"Oh, I almost forgot, you don't know Mabel, do you, boys?" asked Madge, with a merry laugh. "Miss Mabel Harrison. Mabel, allow me to present to you Tom Parsons, champion pitcher of the Randall 'varsity nine; Phil Clinton, who made such a good showing on the gridiron last year, he's Ruth's brother, you know, and—" she paused as she turned to Sid Henderson, who was moving about uncomfortably. [35]

"Sid Henderson, the only and original misogynist of Randall college," finished Tom, with a mischievous laugh. "He is the only one in captivity, but will eat from your hand."

"I'll fix you for that," growled Sid in Tom's ear, but the girls laughed, as did Phil and the captain, and the introductions were completed. Miss Harrison proved to be an exceptionally pretty and vivacious girl, a fit companion for Ruth and Madge. She was fond of sport, as she soon announced, and Phil and Tom warmed to her at once.

As might have been expected, Tom walked along with Ruth, Phil with Miss Tyler, and that left Sid nothing to do but to stroll at the side of Miss Harrison.

"So you play ball, too," she began as an opener, looking at his uniform.

"Yes—er—that is I play at it, sometimes," floundered Sid, conscious of a big green grass stain on one leg, where he had fallen in reaching for a high fly. [36]

"Isn't it great!" went on the girl, her blue eyes flashing as she glanced up at Sid. Somehow the lad's heart was beating strangely.

"It's the only game—except football," he conceded. "Do you play—I—er—I mean—of course —"

"Oh, I just love football!" she cried. "I hope our team wins the championship this year!"

"Your team?" and Sid was plainly puzzled.

"Well, I mean the boys of Fairview—I attend there you know."

"I didn't know it, but I'm glad to," spoke Sid, wondering why he never before thought blue eyes pretty. "Do you live at the college?"

"Oh, yes; but you see I happened to come to Haddonfield to stay over night with relatives, and when I found Madge and Ruth were going to a little affair here to-night, I asked them to stay with me. It's such a jaunt back to the college."

"Indeed it is," agreed Sid. "You and Miss Tyler and Miss Clinton are great friends, I judge," he went on, wondering what his next sentence would be.

"Indeed we are. Aren't they perfectly sweet girls?"

"Fine!" exclaimed Sid with such enthusiasm that his companion looked at him in some surprise, her flashing eyes completing the work already begun by their first glance. [37]

"I thought you didn't care for—that is—was that true what Mr. Parsons accused you of?" Miss Harrison asked. "Is a misogynist a very savage creature?" she went on demurely.

"That's all rot—I beg your pardon—they were rigging you—I—er—I mean—Oh, I say, Miss Harrison, are you going to the Phi Beta racket to-night—I mean the theatricals to-night?" and poor Sid floundered in deeper and deeper.

"No," answered the girl, "I'm not going."

"Why not?" asked Sid desperately.

"Because I haven't been asked, I suppose," and she laughed merrily.

"Then would you mind—that is—I have two tickets—but I didn't expect to go. Now, if you would ___"

"Oh, Mr. Henderson, don't go on my account!"

"Oh, it isn't on your account—I mean—that is—Oh, wouldn't you like to go?" and he seemed in great distress.

"I should love to," she almost whispered.

"Then will you—that is would you—er—that is——"

"Of course I will," answered Mabel, taking pity on her companion's embarrassment. "Won't it be lovely, with Madge and Ruth, and her brother and Mr. Parsons. We'll be quite a party." [38]

"It'll be immense!" declared Sid with great conviction. Thereafter he seemed to find it easier to keep the conversation going.

The little group came to the end of the campus. Phil, Tom, Madge and Ruth waited for Sid and Mabel.

"Well, we'll see you girls to-night," said Tom, for he and his chum were anxious to get to their room and "tog up." Then he added: "It's a pity Miss Harrison isn't going. If I had thought——"

"Miss Harrison is going!" cried Sid with sudden energy.

"What?" cried Tom and Phil together. Then, realizing that it might embarrass the girl, Tom added:

"Fine! We'll all go together. Come on, Sid, and get some of the outfield mud scraped away."

The girls waved laughing farewells, and Sid, rather awkwardly, shook hands with Miss Harrison.

"What's the matter, old chap?" asked Tom of him, when they were beyond hearing distance of the girls. "Are you afraid you'll never see her again?"

"Shut up!" cried Sid.

"Wonders will never cease," went on Phil. "To see our old misogynist being led along by a pretty girl! However did you get up the spunk to ask her to go to-night, sport?" [39]

"Shut up!" cried Sid again. "Haven't I got a right to?"

"Oh, of course!" agreed Tom quickly. "It's a sign of regeneration, old man. I'm glad to see it! What color are her eyes?"

"Blue," answered Sid promptly, before he thought.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Phil and Tom.

"Did you get her photograph?" asked Tom, clinging to Phil, so strenuous was his mirth.

"Say, I'll punch your head if you don't quit!" threatened Sid, and then, as he saw Wallops, the messenger, coming toward him, with a letter, there came to Sid's face a new look—one of fear, his chums thought.

He read the note quickly, and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he turned, and hastened after the three girls.

"Here, what's up?" demanded Tom, for Sid had acted strangely.

"I can't go to the theatricals to-night, after all," was the surprising answer. "I must apologize to Miss Harrison. Will you take her, Tom?"

"Of course," was the answer, and then, as Sid hastened to make his excuses to the girl who, but a few minutes before, he had asked to accompany him, his two chums looked at each other, and shook their heads. The mystery about Sid was deepening. [40]

CHAPTER IV

ELECTING A MANAGER

Sidney Henderson fairly broke into a run in order to catch up to the three girls. They heard him coming, and turned around, while Tom and Phil, some distance off, were spectators of the scene.

"I say!" burst out poor Sid pantingly, as he came to a halt, "I'm awfully sorry, Miss Harrison, but—er—I can't take you to the theatricals to-night, after all. I've just received bad news."

"Bad news? Oh, I'm so sorry!" and the blue eyes of the pretty girl, that had been merry and dancing, as she chatted with Ruth and Madge, took on a tender glance.

"Oh, it isn't that any one is sick, or—er—anything like that," Sid hastened to add, for he saw that she had misunderstood him. "It's just that I have received a message—I have got to go away—I—er—I can't explain, but some one is in trouble, and I—I'm awfully sorry," he blurted out, feeling that he was making a pretty bad mess of it. "I've arranged for Tom Parsons to take you to [41]

the theatricals, Miss Harrison."

[42]

"You've arranged for Mr. Parsons to take me?" There was no mistaking the anger in her tones. Her blue eyes seemed to flash, and she drew herself up proudly. Madge and Ruth, who had shown some pity and anxiety at Sid's first words, looked at him curiously.

"Yes, Tom will be very glad to take you," went on the unfortunate Sid.

"Thank you," spoke Miss Harrison coldly. "I don't believe I care to go to the theatricals after all. Come on, girls, or we will be late for tea," and without another look at Sid she turned aside and walked on.

"Oh, but I say, you know!" burst out the second baseman. "I thought—that is—you see—I can't possibly take you, as it is, and I thought——"

"It isn't necessary for anyone to take me!" retorted Miss Harrison coldly. "It's not at all important, I assure you. Good afternoon, Mr. Henderson," and she swept away, leaving poor Sid staring after her with bewilderment in his eyes. It was his first attempt at an affair with a maiden, and it had ended most disastrously. He turned back to rejoin his chums.

"Well?" questioned Tom, as Sid came up. "Is it all right? Am I to have the pleasure of two young ladies to-night?"

[43]

"No, it's all wrong!" blurted out Sid. "I can't understand girls!"

"That's rich!" cried Phil. "Here you have been despising them all your life, and now, when you do make up to one, and something happens, you say you can't understand them. No man can, old chap. Look at Tom and me, here, and we've had our share of affairs, haven't we, old sport."

"Speak for yourself," replied the pitcher. "But what's the row, Sid?"

"Hanged if I know. I told her I couldn't possibly go to-night——"

"Did you tell her why?" interrupted Phil.

"Well, I said I had received word that I had to go away, and—er—well I can't explain that part of it even to you fellows. I've got to go away for a short time, that's all. It's fearfully important, of course, or I wouldn't break a date with a girl. I can't explain, except that I have to go. I tried to tell her that; and then I said I'd arranged with you to take her, Tom."

"You what?" cried the amazed pitcher.

"I told her I was going to have you take her."

"Without asking her whether it would be agreeable to her?"

"Of course. I didn't suppose that was necessary, as you and Miss Clinton and Miss Tyler were all going together. I just told her you'd take her."

[44]

"Well, of all the chumps!" burst out Phil.

"A double-barreled one!" added Tom.

"Why—what's wrong?" asked Sid wonderingly.

"Everything," explained Phil. "You ask a pretty girl—and by the way, Sid, I congratulate you on your choice, for she is decidedly fine looking—but, as I say, you ask a pretty girl to go to some doings, and when you find you can't go, which is all right, of course, for that often happens, why then, I say, you coolly tell her you have arranged for her escort. You don't give her a chance to have a word to say in the matter. Why, man alive, it's just as if you were her guardian, or grandfather, or something like that. A girl likes to have a voice in these matters, you know. My, my, Sid! but you have put your foot in it. You should have gently, very gently, suggested that Tom here would be glad to take her. Instead, you act as though she had to accept your choice. Oh, you doggoned old misogynist, I'm afraid you're hopeless!"

"Do you suppose she'll be mad?" asked Sid falteringly.

"Mad? She'll never speak to you again," declared Tom, with a carefully-guarded wink at Phil.

[45]

"Well, I can't help it," spoke Sid mournfully. "I've just got to go away, that's all," and he hastened on in advance of his companions.

"Don't stay out too late, and get caught by Proc. Zane again," cautioned Phil, but Sid did not answer.

Tom and Phil lingered in the gymnasium, whither they went for a shower bath, and when they reached their room, to put on clothes other than sporting ones for supper, Sid was not in the apartment. There was evidence that he had come in, hastily dressed, and had gone out again.

"He's off," remarked Tom.

"Yes, and it's mighty queer business," remarked Phil. "But come on, we'll get an early grub, tog up, and go get the girls."

"What about Miss Harrison?"

"Hanged if I know," answered Tom. "I'd be glad to take her, of course, but I'm not going to mix up in Sid's affairs."

"No, of course not. Well, come on."

In spite of hearty appetites Tom and Phil did not linger long at the table, and they were soon

back in their room, where they began to lay out their dress suits, and to debate over which ties they should wear. Tom had managed to borrow a dress shirt, and so did not have to buy one.

"I say, Phil," remarked the pitcher, as he almost strangled himself getting a tight fifteen collar to fit on the same size shirt, "doesn't it strike you as queer about Sid—I mean his chasing off this way so suddenly?" [46]

"It sure does. This is the second time, and each time he scoots off when he's had a note from some one."

"Remember when he came back last night, smelling so strong of tobacco?"

"Sure; yet he doesn't smoke."

"No, and that's the funny part of it. Then there's the fact of him having no money to-day, though he had a roll yesterday."

There was silence in the small apartment, while the clock ticked on. Tom, somewhat exhausted by his struggle with his collar, sank down on the ancient sofa, a cloud of dust, like incense, arising around him.

"Cæsar's legions! My clothes will be a sight!" he cried, jumping up, and searching frantically for a whisk broom.

"Easy!" cried Phil, "I just had my tie in the right shape, and you've knocked it all squee-gee!" for Tom in his excitement had collided with his chum.

They managed to get dressed after a while—rather a long while.

"Come on," said Tom, as he took a final look at himself in the glass, for though he was not too much devoted to dress or his own good looks, much adornment of their persons must be excused on the part of the talented pitcher and his chum, on the score of the pretty girls with whom they were to spend the evening. [47]

"I'm ready," announced Phil. "Shall we leave a light for Sid?"

"I don't know. No telling when he'll be in. Do you know, Phil, it seems rotten mean to mention it, and I only do it to see if you have the same idea I have, but I shouldn't be surprised if old Sid was gambling."

"Gambling!"

"Yes. Look how he's sneaked off these last two nights, not saying where he's going, and acting so funny about it. Then coming in late, all perfumed with tobacco, and getting caught, and not having any money and—and—Oh, well, hang it all! I know it won't go any further, or I shouldn't mention it; but doesn't it look queer?"

Phil did not reply for a moment. He glanced at Tom, as if to fathom his earnestness, and as the two stood there, looking around their common home, marked by the absence of Sid, the fussy little alarm clock seemed to be repeating over and over again the ugly word—"gambler—gambler—gambler."

"Well?" asked Tom softly.

"I hate to say it, but I'm afraid you're right," replied Phil. "Sid, of all chaps, though. It's fierce!" and then the two went out. [48]

Tom and Phil called at the residence of Miss Harrison's relatives for Madge and Ruth. Tom tried, tactfully enough, to get Miss Harrison to come to the theatricals with himself and Ruth, but the blue-eyed girl pleaded a headache (always a lady's privilege), and said she would stay at home. Sid's name was not mentioned. Then the four young people went off, leaving a rather disconsolate damsel behind.

Sid was in bed when Tom and Phil returned, and he did not say anything, or exhibit any signs of being awake, so they did not disturb him, refraining from even talking in whispers of the jolly time they had had. There was a strong smell of tobacco about Sid's clothes, but his chums said nothing of this.

The next day Sid was moody and disconsolate. He wrote several letters, tearing them up, one after the other, but finally he seemed to hit on one that pleased him, and went out to mail it. Amid the torn scraps about his desk Phil and Tom could not help seeing several which began variously "My dear Miss Harrison," "Dear Miss Harrison," "Dear friend," and "Esteemed friend."

"Trying to square himself," remarked Tom.

"He's got it bad—poor old Sid," added Phil. "It will all come out right in the end, I hope." [49]

But it didn't seem to for Sid, since in the course of the next week, when he had written again to Miss Harrison asking her to go with him to a dance, he received in return a polite little note, pleading a previous engagement.

"Well," remarked Tom one afternoon, when he and his crowd of players had thronged out on the diamond, "we're getting into some kind of shape. Get back there, Dutch, while I try a few curves, and then we'll have a practice game."

"And pay particular attention to your batting, fellows," cautioned Coach Leighton. "It isn't improving the way it ought, and I hear that Boxer has some good stick-wielders this season."

"Yes, and they've got some one else on their nine, too," added Bricktop Molloy. "Have ye heard

the news, byes?" for sometimes the red-haired shortstop betrayed his genial Irish nature by his brogue.

"No, what is it?" asked Phil.

"Fred Langridge is playing with them."

"What? Langridge, the bully who used to be here?" cried one student.

"That same," retorted Bricktop.

"Have they hired him?" inquired Holly Cross.

"No, he's taking some sort of a course at Boxer Hall, I believe."

"A course in concentrated meanness, I guess," suggested Tom, as he thought of the dastardly trick Langridge had tried to play on Phil during the previous term. [50]

"Well, no matter about that," came from the coach. "You boys want to improve your batting—that's all. Your field work is fair, and I haven't anything but praise for our battery."

"Thanks!" chorused Tom and Dutch Housenlager, making mock bows.

"But get busy, fellows," went on the coach. "Oh, by the way, captain, what about a manager?"

"Election to-night," answered Tom quickly. "The notice has been posted. Come on, we'll have a scrub game. Five innings will be enough. There ought to be——"

"My uncle says——" began a voice from a small knot of non-playing spectators.

"Fenton's wound up!" cried Dutch, making an attempt to penetrate the crowd and get at the offending nephew of the former coach.

"Can him!" shouted Joe Jackson.

"Put your uncle on ice!" added Pete Backus.

"Leave him out after dark, and Proc. Zane will catch him," came from Snail Looper.

"Well, I was only going to say," went on Ford, but such a storm of protesting howls arose that his voice was drowned.

"And that's the chap they talk of for manager," said Phil to Tom disgustedly. [51]

"Oh, I guess it's all talk," remarked the pitcher. "We will rush Ed Kerr through, and the season will soon start."

The scrub game began. It was not remarkable for brilliant playing, either in the line of fielding or batting. Tom, though, did some fine work in pitching, and he and Dutch worked together like well-built machines. Tom struck out three men, one after the other, in the second inning, and repeated the trick in the last. Sid Henderson rather surprised the coach by making a safe hit every time he was up, a record no one else approached that day, for Rod Evert, who was doing the "twirling" for the team opposed to Tom's, was considered a good handler of the horsehide.

"Good work, Henderson," complimented Mr. Leighton. But Sid did not seem particularly pleased.

"Everybody on hand for the election to-night," commanded Tom, as the game ended, the pitcher's team having won by a score of eight to four.

There was a large throng assembled in the gymnasium that evening, for at Randall sports reigned supreme in their seasons, and the annual election of a baseball manager was something of no small importance. For several reasons no manager had been selected at the close of the previous season, when Tom had been unanimously selected as captain, and it now devolved upon the students who were members of the athletic committee to choose one. [52]

As has been explained, among the players themselves, or, rather, among the majority, Ed Kerr, the catcher of the previous season was favored, but, of late there had been activity looking to the choosing of some one else.

There were vague rumors floating about the meeting room, as Tom Parsons went up on the platform, and called the assemblage to order. It was noticed that Bert Bascome, a freshman who was said to be quite wealthy, was the center of a group of excited youths, of whom Ford Fenton was one. Ford had tried for the 'varsity the previous season, had failed, and was once more in line. As for Bascome, he, too, wanted to wear the coveted "R."

"Politics over there all right," observed Phil Clinton to Dutch. "Any idea of how strong they are?"

"Don't believe they can muster ten votes," was the answer. "We'll put Ed in all right."

Tom called for nominations for chairman, and Mr. Leighton, who was in the hall, was promptly chosen, he being acceptable to both sides.

"You all know what we are here for," began the coach, "and the sooner we get it over with the better, I presume. Nominations for a manager of the ball nine are in order." [53]

Jerry Jackson was on his feet in an instant.

"Mr. Chairman," he began.

"Are you speaking for yourself or your brother?" called Dutch.

Bang! went the chairman's gavel, but there was a laugh at the joke, for Jerry and Joe, the "Jersey twins" were always so much in accord that what one did the other always sanctioned. Yet the query of Dutch seemed to disturb Jerry.

"Mr. Chairman," he began again. "I wish——"

"Help him along, Joe," sung out Snail Looper. "Jerry is going to make a wish."

"Boys, boys," pleaded the coach.

"My uncle says——" came from Ford Fenton, indiscreetly.

"Sit down!"

"Put him out!"

"Muzzle him!"

"Silence!"

"Get a policeman!"

"Turn the hose on him!"

"Don't believe he ever had an uncle!"

These were some of the cries that greeted Ford.

Bang! Bang! went the gavel, and order was finally restored, but Fenton did not again venture to address the chair.

"Mr. Chairman," began Jerry Jackson once more, and this time he secured a hearing, and was recognized. "I wish to place in nomination," he went on, "a manager who, I am sure, will fulfill the duties in the most acceptable manner; one who knows the game from home plate to third base, who has had large experience, who is a jolly good fellow—who——"

"Who is he?"

"Name him!"

"Don't be so long-winded about it!"

"Tell us his name!"

"He's going to name Ford's uncle!"

Once more the horse-play, led by Dutch, broke out.

Bang! Bang! went Mr. Leighton's gavel again.

"I nominate Ed Kerr!" sung out Jerry.

"Second it!" came from his brother in a flash.

"Mr. Kerr has been nominated," spoke the chairman. "Are there any others?"

"Move the nominations be closed," came from Tom quickly, but, before it could be seconded, Bert Bascome was on his feet. He had a sneering, supercilious air, that was in distinct bad taste, yet he seemed to have a sort of following, as, indeed, any youth in college may have, who is willing to freely spend his money.

"One moment, Mr. Chairman," began Bascome, and so anxious were the others to hear what was coming that they did not interrupt. "When I came to Randall college," went on the freshman, with an air as if he had conferred a great favor by his act, "I was given to understand that the spirit of sportsmanship and fair play was a sort of a heritage."

"So it is!"

"What's eating you?"

"Who's the goat?" came the cries. Bert flushed but went on:

"Closing the nominations before more than one name——"

"The nominations have not been closed," suggested Mr. Leighton.

"Then am I out of order?" inquired Bascome sarcastically. He seemed to know parliamentary law.

"No," answered the coach. "You must speak to the point, however. Have you a name to place in nomination? Mr. Parsons' motion was lost for want of a second."

"I *have* a name to place in nomination," went on Bert deliberately, "and in doing so I wish to state that I am actuated by no sense of feeling against Mr. Kerr, whom I do not know. I simply wish to see the spirit of sport well diversified among the students, and——"

"Question! Question!" shouted several.

"Name your man!" demanded others.

"I believe Mr. Kerr is highly esteemed," continued Bascome, holding his ground well, "and I honor him. I believe, however, that he belongs to a certain crowd, or clique——"

"You're wrong!" was a general shout.

"Mr. Chairman!" shouted Kerr, springing to his feet, his face strangely white.

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"Mr. Bascome has the floor," spoke Mr. Leighton quietly.

"Name your man!" was the cry from half a score of youths.

"I nominate Ford Fenton for manager!" shouted Bascome, for he saw the rising temper of some of the students.

"Second it," came from Henry Delfield, who was the closest chum of the rich lad.

"Move the nominations close!" cried Tom quickly, and this time Phil Clinton seconded it. The battle was on.

"Two students have been nominated," remarked Mr. Leighton, when the usual formalities had been completed. "How will you vote on them, by ballot or——"

"Show of hands!" cried Tom. "We want to see who's with us and who's against us," he added in a whisper to Phil and Sid.

"I demand a written ballot," called out Bascome.

"We will vote on that," decided the chairman, and it went overwhelmingly in favor of a show of hands. [57]

"We've got 'em!" exulted Tom, when this test had demonstrated how few were with Bascome—a scant score.

A moment later the real voting was under way, by a show of hands, Kerr's name being voted on first. He had tried to make a speech, but had been induced to keep quiet.

It was as might have been expected. Possibly had the ballot been a secret one more might have voted for Fenton, but some freshmen saw which way the wind was blowing, changing their votes after having declared for a secret ballot, and all of Bascome's carefully laid plans, and his scheming for several weeks past, to get some sort of control of the nine, came to naught. Fenton received nine votes, and Kerr one hundred and twenty. It was a pitiful showing, and Fenton soon recognized it.

"I move the election of Mr. Kerr be made unanimous!" he cried, and that did more to offset his many references to his uncle than anything else he could have done. Bascome was excitedly whispering to some of his chums, but when Fenton's motion was put it was carried without a vote in opposition, and Kerr was the unanimous choice.

"Well, I'm glad that's over," said Phil with a sigh of relief, as he and his chums drifted from the gymnasium. [58]

"Yes, now we'll begin to play ball in earnest," added Tom. "Come on, Sid, I'll take you and Phil down to Hoffman's and treat you to some ice cream."

"I—er—I'm going out this evening," said Sid, and he blushed a trifle.

"Where, you old dub?" asked Tom, almost before he thought.

"I'm going to call on Miss Harrison," was the somewhat unexpected answer.

CHAPTER V

 [59]

RANDALL AGAINST BOXER

Tom and Phil stood staring at each other as Sid walked on ahead.

"Well, wouldn't that get your goat?" asked Tom.

"It sure would," admitted Phil. "He must have made up with her, after all."

How it came about Sid, of course, would never tell. It was too new and too delightful an experience for him—to actually be paying attentions to some girl—to make it possible to discuss the matter with his chums. Sufficient to say that in the course of two weeks more there was another photograph in the room of the inseparables.

Baseball matters began to occupy more and more attention at Randall. The team was being whipped into shape, and between Tom, Ed Kerr and the coach the lads were beginning to get rid of the uncertainty engendered by a winter of comparative idleness.

"Have you arranged any games yet?" asked Tom of Ed one afternoon, following some sharp practice on the diamond. [60]

"We play Boxer Hall next week," answered the manager. "And I do hope we win. It means so much at the beginning of the season. How is the team, do you think?"

"Do you mean ours or theirs?"

"Ours, of course."

"Fine, I should say," replied Tom.

"You know who'll pitch against you when we play Boxer, I dare say," remarked Mr. Leighton, who had joined Tom and Ed.

"No. Who?"

"Your old enemy, Langridge. He's displaced Dave Ogden, who twirled for them last season. But you're not frightened, are you?"

"Not a bit of it! If there's anything that will make our fellows play fierce ball it's to know that Langridge—the fellow who almost threw our football team—is going to play against them. I couldn't ask a better tonic. Will they play on our grounds?"

"No, we've got to go there. But don't let that worry you."

There was sharp practice for the next few days, and Tom and his chums were put through "a course of sprouts" to quote Holly Cross. They did some ragged work, under the eagle eye of the coach, and things began to look bad, but it was only the last remnant of staleness disappearing, for the day before the game there was exhibited a noticeable stiffness, and a confidence that augured well for Randall.

"The batting still leaves something to be desired," remarked Mr. Leighton, as practice was over for the day. "I have great hopes of Sid Henderson, though."

"Yes, if——" began Tom.

"If what?" asked the coach quickly.

"If he doesn't go back on himself," finished the pitcher, but that was not what he had intended to say. He was thinking of Sid's queer actions of late—wondering what they portended, and what was the meaning of his chum's odd absences, for, only the night previous, Sid had gone out, following the receipt of a note, and had come in late, smelling vilely of tobacco. Fortunately he had escaped detection by the proctor, but he offered no explanation, and his manner was disturbed, and not like his usual one.

As for Sid, well might his chums be puzzled about him. He seemed totally to have changed, not only in manner but in his attitude toward Tom and Phil. There was a new look on his face. Several times, of late, since his acquaintance with Miss Harrison, and the reconciliation following his little "*de trop faux pas*," as Tom termed it, Sid had been caught day dreaming. Phil or Tom would look up from their studying to see Sid, with a book falling idly from his hands, gazing vacantly into a corner of the room, or looking abstractedly at his side of the wall space, as though calculating just where would be the best spot for a certain girl's picture.

It was a most enthralling occupation for Sid—this day dreaming. It was a new experience—a deliciously tender and sweet one—for no young man can be any the worse for thinking and dreaming of a fine-charactered girl, albeit one who is amazingly pretty; in fact he is the better for it. In Sid's case his infatuation had come so suddenly that it was overwhelming. In the past he had either been shy with girls, or had not cared enough for them to be more than decently polite. But now everything was different. Though he had seen her but a few times, he could call to mind instantly the very way in which she turned her head when she addressed him. He could see the slight lifting of the eyebrows as she asked a question, the sparkle that came into the blue eyes, that held a hint of mischief. He could hear her rippling laugh, and he knew in what a tantalizing way a certain ringlet escaped from the coils of her hair, and fell upon her neck.

Often in class the lecturer would suddenly call his name, and Sid would start, for he had sent his thoughts afar, and it required a sort of wireless message to bring them back.

The day of the Boxer game could not have been better. There had been a slight shower in the night, but only sufficient to lay the dust, and it was just cool enough to be delightful. The Randall players and their supporters, including a crowd of enthusiastic "rooters," a number of substitutes and a mascot, in the shape of a puppy, fantastically attired, made the trip to Boxer Hall in special trolleys, hired stage coaches and some automobiles. Bert Bascome owned an automobile, and he made much of himself in consequence.

There was a big crowd in the grand stands when the Randall players arrived, and they were received with cheers, for the sporting spirit between the two colleges was a generous one.

"My, what a lot of girls!" remarked Tom to Sid and Phil, as the three chums looked over toward the seats, which were a riot of color.

"Yes, all the Fairview students are here to-day," spoke Phil. "Ruth said she and Miss Tyler were coming."

"I wonder if——" began Sid, and then he stopped, blushing like a girl.

"Yes, Miss Harrison is coming with them," replied Phil, with a laugh. "We'll look 'em up after the game—if we win."

"Why not, if we lose?" asked Sid quickly.

"I haven't the nerve, if we let Boxer Hall take the first game of the season from us," was the reply.

Fast and snappy practice began, and it was somewhat of a revelation to the Randall players to note the quick work on the part of their rivals. In getting around the bases, batting out flies, getting their fingers on high balls and low grounders, Boxer Hall seemed to have improved very much over last year.

"We've got our work cut out for us," remarked Phil in a low voice to his two chums. "Say, Langridge has some speed, too. Look at that!"

The new pitcher of Boxer Hall was throwing to Stoddard, the catcher, and the balls landed in the pocket of the big mitt with a vicious thud.

"Don't worry. Sid, here, will knock out a couple of home runs," said Tom. "Won't you, Sid?"

"I only hope I don't fan the air. How are his curves?"

"Pretty good, for the first few innings," answered Tom. "After that you can find 'em easy enough. He wears down—at least he did last year."

The practice came to an end. The preliminaries were arranged, and, with the privilege of the home team coming last to the bat, Randall went in the initial inning. The two teams were made up as follows:

RANDALL COLLEGE

Sid Henderson, *second base*.
William Housenlager, *catcher*.
Phil Clinton, *first base*.
Tom Parsons, *pitcher*.
Dan Woodhouse, *third base*.
Jerry Jackson, *right field*.
Bob Molloy, *shortstop*.
Joe Jackson, *left field*.
Holman Cross, *center field*.

BOXER HALL

Lynn Ralling, *second base*.
Hugh McGherity, *right field*.
Roy Conklin, *left field*.
Arthur Flood, *center field*.
George Stoddard, *catcher*.
Pinkerton Davenport, *first base*.
Fred Langridge, *pitcher*.
Bert Hutchin, *third base*.
Sam Burton, *shortstop*.

"Now, Sid, show 'em what you can do," advised Mr. Leighton, as Sid selected a bat, and walked up to the plate. He faced Langridge, and noted the grim and almost angry look in the eyes of the former pitcher on the Randall 'varsity.

"Make him give you a nice one," called Bean Perkins, who was ready to shout for victory.

A ball came whizzing toward Sid, and so sure was he that he was going to be hit that he dodged back, but he was surprised when it neatly curved out, went over the plate, and the umpire called:

"Strike One!"

There was a howl of protest on the part of the Randall sympathizers, but it died away when Mr. Leighton held up a warning hand.

Sid struck viciously at the next ball, and felt a thrill of joy as he felt the impact, but, as he rushed away toward first he heard the umpire's call of "Foul; strike!" and he came back.

"Wait for a good one," counseled Phil, in a low voice. "Make him give you a pretty one."

Langridge sent in another swift curve and Sid struck at it. Another foul resulted, and he began to wonder what he was up against. The next attempt was a ball, for Langridge threw away out, but Sid saw coming a moment later, what he thought would make at least a pretty one-bagger. He swung viciously at it, but missed it clean, and walked to the bench somewhat chagrined.

Dutch Housenlager, with a smile of confidence, walked up next. He was cool, and Langridge, having struck out Sid, seemed to lose some of his anger. He delivered a good ball—an in-shoot—and Dutch caught it on the end of his bat. It seemed to promise well, but Roy Conklin, out on left field was right under it, and Dutch ingloriously came back from first.

"Now, Phil, line one out!" pleaded Tom, as his chum selected his bat, and Phil struck at the first ball, sending a hot liner right past the shortstop.

Phil got to first, and stole second when Tom came up, making it only by a close margin.

"A home run, Tom," begged the coach, and Tom nodded with a grim smile on his face. But alas for hopes! He knocked a fly, which the right fielder got without much difficulty, and the first half of the initial inning was over with a goose-egg in the space devoted to Randall.

"Never mind, we're finding him," consoled Tom, as he walked to his box.

Lynn Ralling was up first for Boxer Hall, and Tom resolved to strike him out, if it was at all possible. It was his first pitching in a league game that season, and he was a trifle nervous. Still he held himself well in hand, and, though the first two attempts were called "balls" the next three went down as strikes. Ralling refused to swing on two of them, but the last one seemed to him as just right, but Tom had the satisfaction of striking him out. McGherity, the next man up, was a notoriously heavy hitter, and Tom purposely gave him a pass to first. He struck out Roy Conklin, but something went wrong with the next man, Arthur Flood, who knocked a two-bagger. Then George Stoddard got to first on a swift grounder, that, somehow rolled through the legs of Bricktop, much to that hero's disgust. There was some good playing the rest of the inning,

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George being caught napping on second, and it ended with two runs in favor of Boxer Hall.

"We've got to wake up!" decided Mr. Leighton grimly. "Put a little more ginger into it, boys!"

"What's the matter with our team?" Bean Perkins demanded to know in his loudest voice.

"It's all right," was the response, from scores of throats.

"Now for the 'Conquer or Die' song," called Bean, and as Dan Woodhouse went up to the bat in the beginning of the second inning the strains of "*Aut vincere aut mori*," welled out over the diamond. But the inspiring melody that, more than once had been the means of inspiring a faint-hearted team to victory, seemed to be of no effect now. Not a man got further than second, and another goose egg went up to the credit of Randall. But a similar dose was served to Boxer in the same inning, and when Randall opened the third with Holly Cross at the bat, there was much wonder, and not a little disappointment. What would Holly do? He soon showed by knocking a two bagger, but, alas for what followed. Though he managed to steal to third, Langridge pitched so well that those who followed were struck out, and there was another white circle.

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It was duplicated for Boxer Hall, however, and there began to be talk of a "pitchers' battle."

"We'll find Langridge this inning," prophesied Tom, and it was partly justified, for one run came in, which sent the grand stand where the Randallites were gathered wild with delight.

"Now, fellows, give 'em that song—'We're going to wallop you now,'" called Bean, and there arose a riot of "melody." In the fifth inning neither side scored, and then came the turn of Captain Tom's men again. They delighted their supporters by pulling down two runs, and making the score three to two in their favor. Then, when Boxer Hall came up for their inning, they hammered out two runs, which sent Randall stock down to zero again with the score of four to three against them.

The seventh and eighth innings saw big circles chalked up in the frames of both teams, though Tom and his men worked hard to bring in at least another run. But it was not to be.

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"Now, fellows, it's our last chance," remarked the coach, as Holly Cross stepped up in the ninth, his teeth fairly gritting together. "Two runs to win—that is if we hold 'em down when they come up."

"I'll do that part," guaranteed Tom grimly.

From the grand stands there were shouts and yells of encouragement—and otherwise. Bean led his cohorts in, "It's Your Last Chance, Boys—Soak It!" a Randall classic of the diamond. Well, Holly did "soak" it, with the result that he knocked the prettiest three-bagger seen in many a day. Then came Sid's turn. Two strikes were called on him, and then came a foul.

"I'm afraid he's going to fan," whispered Tom to the coach.

"Watch him," advised Mr. Leighton.

There was a reassuring "thump" as the next ball reached Sid. Away sailed the sphere right over the center fielder's head.

"It's a beaut! It's a beaut! Run! Run! Run!" yelled the frenzied students. Holly was legging it in from third and my! how Sid was running! Low down, and like the wind! The frantic center fielder was racing for the ball amid the daisies. On and on came Sid!

"A home run! A home run!" screamed Tom and his players, jumping up and down and over the bench in their excitement. Around the bases came Sid, following Holly. The second baseman swung around third and started for home, but the ball was on the way. Would he beat it?

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He did, by about a second, rushing in almost exhausted, over the plate which Holly had just crossed.

"Wow! Wow! Wow!" cried Sid's and Holly's mates. "That wins the game!" and they hugged Sid and his chum. "Two Runs!"

"The game is not won yet," said the coach, more soberly. "We need more runs."

But they couldn't get them. There was a sudden improvement on the part of Langridge, who had begun to weaken, and he struck out the next two men, the third getting out on a bingle. But the score was five to four in favor of Randall, and if Tom could hold them down, and strike out three men, the game was theirs. Could he do it?

There was a great strain on everyone as the Randall team went out to the field. From the grand stand came softly the "Conquer or Die" song, and Tom felt a sense of moisture in his eyes.

"I'll strike 'em out!" he muttered.

How he did it is college history to this day. Calmly he faced the first man, and delivered a ball.

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"Strike!" howled the umpire, and this time it was Boxer Hall that sent up a groan of protest. But it was silenced, and in two more balls delivered over the plate with faultless precision, but with puzzling curves, Tom had one down.

"Only two more," called Phil to him encouragingly.

Tom nodded. How he did pitch! The balls sounded like guns when they hit Dutch Housenlager's big mitt, but he held them.

"Three strikes—batter out!" yelled the umpire, and the second man threw down his stick and walked disgustedly to the bench.

George Stoddard was up next. Tom was afraid of him. He delivered a puzzling slow drop, but Stoddard got under it for a foul.

Tom breathed a bit easier. Two more chances. He sent one of his best out shoots, and Stoddard foolishly bit at it. The ball just grazed the bat, and bounded up into the air. Dutch made a desperate effort for it.

"Can't get it!" yelled the crowd, as it went over the back grand stand.

The umpire threw Tom a new ball. He hated to use it, as the other seemed just right. But the one that had gone over the stand was slow in being returned. Dutch signalled for another drop, but Tom shook his head. He wanted to try a delicate in-curve. [73]

It seemed that the players and spectators were scarcely breathing—it was the critical point of the game, yet with two down Boxer Hall could scarcely hope to win. Yet there was a chance. Tom delivered the ball. Stoddard swung at it with such force that he turned completely around. But the new, white ball was safe in the mitt of Dutch Housenlager. Stoddard had struck out—there were three down for Boxer in the ending of the ninth, and not a run. Randall had won—the score being five to four.

Then such a chorus of yells as went up! Even Bean Perkins could scarcely be heard.

"Wow! Wow! Wow!" cried Dutch, seizing Holly Cross around the waist, and doing a dance with him about the bench. "We did it!"

"Great work, boys!" cried the coach. "I congratulate you!"

"Three cheers for Randall!" proposed Pinkey Davenport for Boxer Hall, and the yells came with spontaneous enthusiasm.

"Three and a tiger for Boxer Hall!" yelled Tom, and his men nearly split their throats.

"Come on! Clean up, and then for some fun!" cried Phil. "We'll go hunt up the girls, as soon as we look decent again," he suggested to Tom and Sid, who nodded joyfully. [74]

Langridge passed Tom.

"It's only one game," growled the defeated pitcher. "We'll do you fellows next time!"

"You'll have the chance," retorted Tom good naturedly.

A little later the victorious pitcher, and his two chums, having donned their street clothes, were strolling across the field toward a knot of girls.

CHAPTER VI

 [75]

THE ACCUSATION

"Wasn't it glorious!" cried Madge Tyler, as Tom and his chums came up. "I was just gripping the seat when you threw that last ball, Mr. Parsons."

"So was I," admitted Ruth. "Phil, I'm proud of you, even if you are my brother."

"Humph!" grunted Phil. "If it hadn't been for Sid's home run we wouldn't have been in it. The fellows who followed him fanned."

"You should be very proud, Mr. Henderson," remarked Mabel Harrison, who looked charming in some sort of a soft, clinging dress which I'm not going to describe.

"Oh, it was just luck," spoke Sid modestly.

"Luck nothing, you old walloper!" cried Tom, thumping his chum on the back. "You just laid for that one, and lambasted it out where the buttercups and daisies grow."

"Oh, how poetic!" cried Miss Harrison.

"Some ice cream would sound a heap-sight more poetic," decided Phil. "What do you girls say? Will you come and have some?" [76]

"Oh, I've provided a little treat for you boys," said Ruth quickly. "By rare good luck Miss Philock, the ogress of Fairview Institute, is away to-day, and I secured permission from the assistant to have a little tea in one of the rooms. We three girls will feed you lions of the diamond, if you promise not to eat up all the charlotte russe and lady fingers I have provided."

"Great!" cried Tom. "I haven't the appetite of a butterfly, but——"

"Me either," interrupted Sid, with a laugh.

"Come on, then," invited Phil's sister. "We are just in time to catch a trolley for Fairview. I have a letter from home for you, Phil," she added.

A little later a merry crowd of young people were walking up the campus of the co-educational institution, where the three girls were pursuing their studies. It was Saturday afternoon, and a half holiday for everyone. Ruth, having secured permission, escorted her brother and his two chums to one of the rooms set aside for the use of the girl students in which to entertain their friends.

"Why, sis, this is quite a spread!" complimented Phil, as he saw the elaborate preparations in the shape of paper napkins, in the colors of Randall—yellow and maroon—spread about on the table, and as he noted the flowers and the rather more generous "feed" than that indicated when his sister had named lady fingers and charlotte russe.

"Yes, we provided this in case you won," replied Ruth, "but if you had lost——"

"Well, in case we had lost?" asked Sid, who was close to Miss Harrison.

"We were going to eat it all ourselves," finished Madge.

"And be ill afterward," interjected Tom. "I'm glad, for more reasons than two, that we won; eh, fellows?"

"Yes, but—er—if it's all the same to you, let's eat," suggested Phil, with the freedom of an elder brother.

There was a merry time. The fair hostesses had provided coffee and sandwiches, with plenty of ice cream and cake, and when they had been at the table for some time, Phil, with a sigh of satisfaction, remarked:

"I'm glad this didn't happen before the game, fellows, or I couldn't have caught even a pop fly."

"Ditto here," agreed Tom. "Pass the macaroons, Sid. I see you and Miss Harrison trying to hide them between you."

"No such a thing!" retorted the second baseman, while the blue-eyed girl blushed.

"Oh, Phil, I promised to get you the letter from home!" suddenly exclaimed Ruth. "I'll run up to my room for it. Excuse me," and she darted off, to return presently with two missives. "Here's one for you, Mabel," she said. "I found it on your dresser. It must have come in after the regular mail."

"A letter for me," repeated Miss Harrison in some bewilderment. "I didn't expect any."

"Unexpected ones are always the best," ventured Sid, and when Tom whispered "Bravo," at the attempt on the part of his chum to shine in the society of ladies, Sid muttered a threat to punch the captain when they got outside.

"Mother is well, and dad as busy as ever," remarked Ruth as she handed her letter to her brother, and passed the other to Miss Harrison. The latter gazed curiously at the missive.

"I don't know this writing," she remarked. "I wonder who it can be from."

"Better open it and see," suggested Sid.

She tore open the envelope, which fluttered to the ground, as she took out a piece of paper.

"Why, how funny!" exclaimed Miss Harrison. "There is nothing but a Haddonfield newspaper clipping, and—and—why it seems to be about you, Mr. Henderson," she added. "Why—why!" she stammered. "How odd! Of course it must be some one else. Just listen," and she read:

"During a raid on an alleged gambling house kept by Tony Belato in Dartwell, just outside of Haddonfield on Thursday night, a number of college students, believed to be from Boxer Hall, Fairview or Randall were captured. Several got away, and those who were locked up gave false names, it is believed. One young man, who stated that he was Sidney Henderson, fought the officers, and was not subdued until after a struggle. None of the college boys seemed to know him, but it was stated that he had lost heavily in playing poker. The prisoners were fined ten dollars each, and this morning were discharged by Judge Perkins with a warning."

There was silence for a moment following Miss Harrison's reading of the clipping.

"What's that?" cried Tom at last, and his words seemed to break the spell. "Arrested in a gambling raid—Sid Henderson? Of course it must be some one else! But who sent the clipping to you, Miss Harrison?"

"I don't know," was her answer, as she looked full at Sid. "It was a piece of impertinence, at any rate," and she began to tear up the newspaper item. "Of course it wasn't you, Mr. Henderson. I should not have read it. I don't suppose you were within miles of the place where it happened. These newspaper reporters are so careless, sometimes. You weren't there, were you?" she went on.

As they all remembered it afterward it seemed strange that Miss Harrison should so insist on her question, but, later, it was explained that her family, as well as herself, had an extraordinary abhorrence of any games of chance, since her brother had once been fleeced by gamblers, and there had been some disgrace attached to it.

"You weren't there; were you?" repeated Miss Harrison, and her eyes were fastened on those of Sid.

His face was strangely white, and his hands trembled. His chums looked at him in surprise.

"I—I wasn't arrested in any raid," he said, and his voice was husky. The girl seemed to catch at the evasion.

"Were you there?" she demanded. "I—of course—I have no right to ask you that—but—this clipping, coming to me—as it did—and under the circumstances——"

"I wasn't—I wasn't arrested," faltered Sid. "It's all—it's all a mistake!"

Almost instantly there came to Phil and Tom at the same time a memory of Sid's queer actions

of late—of his strange absences from college—of his hurried departures on receiving notes—of the smell of tobacco on his clothes.

“Were you at the gambling place, in Dartwell?” asked Miss Harrison coldly, and it was not until later that the others understood her strange insistence and hatred of games of chance. “Were you there?”

“I—I wasn’t arrested!” blurted out Sid. “I—I can’t explain—I was in Dartwell that night—but—but it is all a mistake—I don’t see how my name got in the paper.”

“Sometimes these matters get out in spite of all that is done to keep them quiet,” remarked the girl, and her voice sounded to Sid like the clash of steel.

“I tell you I wasn’t arrested—I wasn’t there—that is, I wasn’t gambling—I—I—er—Oh, won’t you believe me? Won’t you take my word for it?” He was pleading with her now.

“I haven’t any right to control your actions,” said Miss Harrison. “I don’t know who sent me this clipping—nor why—I wish I had never seen it,” and her eyes filled with tears. “Yet when I ask you if you were there, it seems as if you could say yes or no.”

“That’s it! I can’t!” cried poor Sid. “I—I wasn’t arrested. I was there—yes, in—in Dartwell that night—but I can’t explain—it’s a secret—it—Oh, won’t you believe me?”

Miss Harrison turned and looked full at him. The others were watching the little tragedy that was being enacted before them. [82]

“Won’t you believe me—I’ll—I’ll explain—some time,” faltered Sid desperately.

“I’m sorry, but unless you care to tell me everything, and explain why you were in a gambling house I can’t accept your excuses,” she said coldly. “I cannot retain the friendship of a person who goes to gambling places. I must ask you to excuse me,” and holding her head high, though there were tears in her blue eyes, and a sob in her trembling voice, she turned and left the room.

Ruth and Madge looked at each other.

“Come on,” said Phil to Tom huskily, and they filed out. Sid remained long enough to pick up the envelope that had contained the accusing clipping, and then he followed. None of the three chums spoke until they were out on the campus. Then Phil turned to Sid and demanded:

“What in blazes is the matter? If that didn’t mean you, and you weren’t there, why didn’t you say so?”

“I—I can’t,” was the answer. “Oh, fellows, don’t go back on me now. I’ll explain—some time.”

“Of course we won’t go back on you,” declared Tom. “Even if you were playing the ponies or shuffling a deck of cards, it doesn’t matter to us. It’s your money to lose, if you want to, only I didn’t think you cared for such things.” [83]

“I—I don’t!” blurted out Sid.

“Then why don’t you—”

“But I can’t explain! Don’t desert me now!”

“We’re not going to,” spoke Phil more gently, “only it hurts with a girl like Miss Harrison to have a thing like this come out. She’s done with you.”

“Do you think so?” asked Sid miserably.

“Sure,” agreed Tom, “but don’t worry over that. You’ve got to bat for us to win, as you did today,” for he feared Sid would go to pieces, such was the wild look on his face.

CHAPTER VII

GETTING BACK AT “PITCHFORK”

The three chums were not very jolly as they began their return to Randall college, whither the baseball team had preceded them some time before. Sid, Phil and Tom had sent their suits back with some of their friends while they attended the little tea given by Ruth Clinton—the tea which had had such an unfortunate ending.

Tom and Phil conversed in low tones about the team and the showing made that day in the first formal game of the season, but as for Sid, he kept to himself in one corner of the electric car, and there was a moody look on his face.

“He’s taking it hard,” observed Phil in a low voice.

Tom shook his head. “I can’t understand it,” he said.

Sid stalked into the room ahead of his chums and threw himself down on the old sofa, which creaked and groaned with his weight.

“Easy, old man,” called Phil good naturedly. “We’ve had that in the family for three terms, now, and it’s a regular heirloom. Don’t smash it for us. Remember what a time we had last term, patching it up, and moving it here from our old room?” [85]

"Yes, and how Langridge was upset trying to get down stairs past us," added Tom. "Have a little regard for the sofa, Sid."

"Oh, hang the sofa!" burst out the lad, and then Tom and Phil knew it was useless to talk to him. Phil crossed the room softly and sat cautiously down in the old armchair. Tom looked at the alarm clock, and exclaimed:

"Jove! If it hasn't stopped! Must be something wrong," and he hurriedly wound it, and then started it by the gentle process of pounding it on the edge of the table. Soon the fussy clicking was again heard. "It's all right," went on the pitcher, in relieved tones. "Gave me heart disease at first. The clock is as much of a relic as the chair and sofa. But I've got to mend my glove again. It's ripped in the same place. Rotten athletic goods they're selling nowadays."

There came a knock on the door, and Wallops, the messenger, who stood revealed as the portal was opened, announced:

"Mr. Zane would like to see you, Mr. Henderson."



"MR. ZANE WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU,
MR. HENDERSON."

"Me?" inquired Sid.

"Yep," was the sententious answer.

Saying nothing further, the second baseman got up, and, as the messenger went down the hall, he followed slowly.

"He's in for it, I'm afraid," remarked Tom dubiously.

"Looks so," agreed Phil. "It's about that item in the paper, of course. Too bad it leaked out."

But what took place at the interview with the proctor, Sid's chums did not learn until long afterward. All that became known was that Dr. Churchill was summoned, and that Sid was in the proctor's study a long time. He returned to his room a trifle pale, and with unnaturally bright eyes. Throwing himself on the creaking sofa he stared at the ceiling moodily, while Phil and Tom maintained a discrete silence.

"Why don't some of you fellows say something?" burst out Sid finally. "Think this is a funeral?"

"We didn't think you wanted to have a talk-fest," observed Tom.

"What in blazes am I to do?" asked Sid desperately.

"What about?" inquired Phil.

"You know—Miss Harrison. I don't want to have her think I'm a gambler. I'm not—I—"

"Then why don't you tell her why you were in Dartwell the night of the raid?" suggested the captain.

"I—I can't," burst out Sid. "It's impossible!"

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I know what you mean!" burst out Sid. "It looks as if I wasn't telling the truth. But I am—you'll believe me—some day."

"Forget it," advised Phil. "Let's talk about baseball. Have you seen the loving cup trophy?"

"It's a beaut!" declared Tom. "I saw it in the doctor's study. We're going to win it, too!"

"Hope so," murmured Phil. "If we have a few more games like to-day, we may. But speaking of games——"

He was interrupted by a knock on the door. Sid started and leaped up from the sofa.

"I'll go," he exclaimed. "If it's a message——"

He did not finish, but Tom and Phil looked significantly at each other. Clearly Sid expected another mysterious summons. But, as he opened the portal there stood the Jersey twins.

"Hello, fellows," began Joe, "do you want to see some sport?"

"Fine sport," added Jerry, who sometimes echoed his brother, a trick that was interchangeable with the twins.

"We're always ready for sport," replied Tom. "What is it: baiting a professor, or hazing some freshies?"

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"Professor," replied Joe.

"Pitchfork," echoed Jerry, that name, as I have explained, being applied to Professor Emerson Tines.

"What's up now?" asked Phil.

"Oh, he's been particularly obnoxious of late," went on Joe. "Some of us had a little smoker the other night, strictly sub-rosa, you understand, but he smelled us out, and now some of us are doing time for it. To-day Bricktop Molloy evolved a little scheme, and we thought we'd let you fellows in on it. Want to come, Sid?" for Sid had gone back to the sofa.

"No, I guess not," he answered listlessly.

"What's the matter—sick?" inquired Joe, in a whisper of Tom and Phil. They shook their heads, and motioned to the twins not to make further inquiries.

"What's the game?" asked Tom. "We'll come."

"We're going to get back at Pitchfork," went on Jerry. "Come along and you'll see. I'll just explain, though, that he has quietly been 'tipped off' to the effect that another smoker is in progress, and if he does as we expect him to, he'll try to raid the room."

"And if he does?"

"Well, he won't find what he expects to. Come on, and keep quiet. What's the matter with Sid, anyhow?" for by this time the four were out in the corridor, leaving the moody one in the room.

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"Hanged if we know," replied Phil, "except that there's a girl mixed up in it." He refrained from saying anything about the accusation, thinking that would be noised about soon enough.

"Oh, if it's only a girl he'll soon be over it," declared Joe with a professional air.

"Of course," echoed his brother. "Come on."

Phil and Tom soon found themselves in the midst of a number of choice spirits, who moved silently about the lower end of the corridor, near a room that was sometimes used for student meetings, and where, more than once, it was whispered, smokers had been held, in violation of the rules. The reason for the selection of this apartment was that it had an open fireplace, which carried off the fumes of the tobacco.

"Did he get the tip?" asked Jerry, as he and his brother, together with Phil and Tom, came up.

"He sure did," answered Bricktop. "Reports from the front are that he is on the warpath."

"Is everything working all right?" asked Joe.

"Fine. Can't you smell it?"

Tom and Phil sniffed the air. There was an unmistakable odor of tobacco.

"But if there's a smoker going on in there, why was Pitchfork tipped off?" inquired Tom.

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"Wait an' ye'll see, me lad," advised Bricktop in his rich brogue. "I think he's coming now. Pump her up, Kindlings!"

Then, for the first time Tom and his chum noticed that Dan Woodhouse had a small air pump, which he was vigorously working, as he stood in a dark corner.

Footsteps sounded down the corridor. There were hasty cautions from the ringleaders, and the lads hid themselves in the dim shadows of the big hall. The footsteps came nearer, and then they seemed to cease. But the reason was soon apparent, for Professor Emerson Tines was now tip-toeing his way toward the door of the suspected room. By the dim light of a half-turned down gas jet he could be seen sneaking up. The only sound from the students was the faint sound of the air pump. Tom and Phil could not imagine what it was for.

Professor Tines reached the portal. Then he gave a sudden knock, and called:

"I demand to be admitted at once, young gentlemen! I know the nefarious practice that is going

on in there, and it must stop at once! Open the door or I shall summon the janitor and have it forced! Open at once!"

The professor tried the knob. To his surprise it at once opened the door, and he almost stumbled into the apartment. He uttered an exclamation of delight, probably in the belief that he had caught the students red-handed, but the next moment he gave a gasp of dismay.

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For, as Tom, Phil, and all the others could see from their vantage points in the shadowy recesses, the room was empty. It was lighted, however, and in plain view on a table in the middle of the floor was a large flask. In the top of this there was a receptacle which contained a pile of burning tobacco, and it was glowing as though some giant was puffing on the improvised pipe. From a glass tube extending from the flask there poured out volumes of the pungent odor, and, as the puffs came, Tom and Phil could hear the air pump being worked. It was a "studentless smoker," the air pump, attached to a rubber hose which exhausted the air from the flask, producing exactly the effect of some one puffing a pipe. The room was blue with the haze of tobacco, and as the astonished professor stood and gazed at the strange sight more smoke arose from the flask. Then, from somewhere in the dark recesses of the corridor came a voice.

"Stung!" it ejaculated, and there was a hurried movement as the students fled in the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII

[92]

THE ENVELOPE

Plunging on through the darkened corridors Tom and Phil reached their room. They found Sid still on the sofa.

"Say, that was great!" cried Tom, venturing to laugh, now that there was no danger of being caught. "You should have been along, Sid. Pitchfork got his to-night, all right. I'll never forget the blank look on his face."

"I either," agreed Phil. "That was a smoker as was a smoker. I hope none of us are caught. The twins and Bricktop outdid themselves this trip."

Sid began to show some signs of interest, and the trick was told of in detail to him. Of course a faculty inquiry followed, but the hose and air pump had been taken from the school laboratory, and there were no clues to the perpetrators. Professor Tines was furious, and demanded that the guilty ones be dismissed.

"Willingly, my dear professor," agreed the venerable Dr. Churchill, "if I can only find them," and there was a twinkle in his deep-set eyes, which he took care that Mr. Tines did not see.

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Baseball practice went on for several days. One afternoon, as the lads were dispersing, Ed Kerr was seen coming over the diamond, holding in his hand a letter.

"We can't play Fairview Saturday," he announced.

"Why not?" asked Tom quickly.

"They say they're not quite ready to open their season," went on the manager. "They ask me to put the opening game off a week."

"Are you going to do it?" inquired several.

"Well, what do you fellows say?" asked the manager.

"Oh, well, they probably have a good reason. We'll let it go a week," assented Tom. "But can we get another game in place of it?"

"Yes, I can fill in with the Layton Preparatory school for this Saturday, and we can go to Wescott University the following Saturday, and then tackle Fairview, if you fellows say so."

"Sure," came in a chorus.

When Tom and Phil returned to their room Sid was not there.

"What do you think about it, anyhow, Phil?" asked the pitcher, and there was no need to be more explicit.

"Oh, hang it all, I don't know. It looks funny; about Sid not wanting to tell. And he sure is cut up over Miss Harrison. I wonder who sent her that newspaper clipping?"

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"Give it up. But I heard that there was a raid all right, and a lot of college fellows were caught. Some of 'em were our chaps, but they managed to keep their identity hidden. I don't see how Sid's got out."

"Then you think he was there?"

"No, I didn't mean that. But it looks mighty funny. I do hope he isn't going to cut loose, just at the opening of the ball season," and Tom sighed, as though he had the weight of worlds on his shoulders. And, indeed it is no small task to be captain of a lively college team, struggling to win the championship trophy, and the pitcher was beginning to realize this.

"Oh, maybe he just wanted a fling," suggested Phil. "Now he's had it he's ashamed to admit it,

and wants to cover it up.”

“But he denies that he was caught,” said Tom.

“I know it; but what good will that do him, if he doesn’t tell where he was that night? He admits that he was in Dartwell, and he must have been somewhere near the place of the raid, or his name would never have gotten in the papers.”

“Unless some one gave his name out of spite.”

“By hookey! That’s so!” admitted Phil. “I never thought of that. But no—no college fellow would be as mean as that.”

“Unless it was Langridge or Gerhart. Gerhart is in parts unknown, and Langridge——”

“I understand none of the Boxer Hall fellows were in it,” went on Phil. “Only some of our boys and a few from Fairview—more fools they! But it sure has put Sid on the blink as far as Miss Harrison goes. Ruth was telling me her family, as well as she, has a horror of gambling in any form. Poor old Sid. I wish we could help him; don’t you?”

“I sure do,” agreed Tom. “We need him on the nine, and we need him in good condition. First thing I know I’ll have to put a sub on in Sid’s place.”

“Oh, I hope not. But, say, I’ve got to do some studying if I’m to play on the team myself. I’m getting to low water mark in Latin and maths. Here goes for some hard boning.”

It was about a week after this, in which time Randall had met, and beaten, Layton Preparatory school, that Phil, Sid and Tom were taking a trolley ride one evening.

“Where shall we go?” asked Phil.

“Let’s take the Tonoka Lake car,” suggested Tom.

“Which means let’s go to Fairview,” asserted Phil. “Well, I don’t mind.” Sid said nothing.

Of course it was only a coincidence, but a little later the three lads were walking down toward the co-educational institution, and of course, I suppose, it was also only a coincidence that Miss Tyler and Miss Clinton should shortly come strolling over the campus.

“There’s Ruth,” announced Phil carelessly, though he was not looking at her, but at Miss Tyler.

“That’s so,” replied Tom, as if it was the queerest thing in the world.

“They’re headed this way—no use to turn back, I suppose?” asked Phil, as if there was some doubt of it.

“No,” agreed Tom. “Besides, I want to ask your sister what she thinks of the chances of Fairview beating us.”

“Oh, she’ll tell you her college will win, of course,” asserted Phil. “Well, come on,” and they walked to meet the girls who had pretended not to notice the approach of the lads.

“Oh, why hello, Phil!” called his sister. “Glad to see you; aren’t we, Madge?”

“Of course,” replied Miss Tyler, with a merry laugh.

“I’ll see you fellows later,” murmured Sid, who was very sensitive, and he was about to swing away.

“Don’t go,” urged Tom. “We’ll soon be going back.”

But Sid turned aside. As he did so there came around the corner of the main college building two figures, who strolled over the campus. It needed but a glance to disclose to Tom and Phil who they were—Miss Harrison and Fred Langridge. The couple were chatting and laughing merrily. Instinctively Tom turned to see if Sid had observed them. The second baseman had, and, for an instant he stood staring after the two, who had not seen him. Then, without a word, he kept on his way.

“Beautiful evening,” remarked Miss Tyler quickly, and she began to talk rapidly about the weather, as if to cover Sid’s retreat.

As Tom and Phil walked along the corridor leading to their room a little later that night, they saw a light streaming out of the cracks around the portal.

“Sid’s in there,” said Tom.

“Yes,” agreed Phil, “I wonder——” But he did not finish the sentence. Awkwardly he and Tom pushed in. They started back at the sight of their chum.

He was bending over a table on which he had placed a portable electric lamp, the college rooms being illuminated with both gas and the incandescents. Holding a paper in the glow of the bulb, Sid was examining the document with the aid of a magnifying glass. At the same time he seemed to be comparing other pieces of paper with the one he held.

“Studying?” asked Tom.

“Yes,” replied Sid shortly.

“Something new?” inquired Phil. “I didn’t know you were qualifying for a course in identifying handwriting,” for he saw that the papers Sid was looking at contained writing.

“Do you see this?” asked Sid suddenly, holding up an envelope.

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"Why—er—yes," answered Tom. "It's addressed to Miss Harrison, and—but—are you going over with a microscope a letter you've written to her, to see if it will pass muster? She's not as particular as that, you old bat."

"I haven't been writing to her," replied Sid coldly. "This is the envelope containing that clipping with my name in it—the report of the gambling raid—I picked up the envelope—that afternoon," and he seemed struggling with some emotion.

"What about it?" asked Phil, who did not exactly catch the drift.

"This," answered Sid quickly. "Look at this note," and he showed them a missive containing some reference to baseball matters. It was signed "Fred Langridge." [99]

"I got that from Langridge last term," went on Sid, "and I saved it, for some unknown reason. I'm glad, now, that I did."

"Why?" inquired Tom, who began to see what was coming.

"Because, look at that!" and Sid placed side by side the note from Langridge and the envelope that had contained the damaging clipping. He held the magnifying glass first over one and then the other. "Do you notice any similarity?" he asked.

"Looks to me as if the same person wrote both," said Tom.

"That's right," agreed Phil.

"They did!" cried Sid, as he held up the envelope. "Fred Langridge sent to Miss Harrison that lying clipping about me, and to-day he was out walking with her!"

CHAPTER IX

A CLASH

Sid stood facing his two chums, and his breath came quick and fast. He was much worked up over his discovery, as were also his roommates.

"From the time I picked up this envelope, after that day when we had lunch with your sister, Phil," he went on, "I've been trying to think in whose handwriting it was. Perhaps I had no right to take the envelope, but I couldn't help it after she—Miss Harrison dropped it. To-night, after I saw him—saw Langridge out walking with her—I came back here, and I had a suspicion. I knew I had an old note of Langridge's somewhere around. I found it, and compared it with the envelope. You see what it shows."

"He must have sent her the clipping," agreed Tom. "But why?"

"Easy enough to see that," answered Sid. "He was mad because I—er—I happened to go with her a few times, and he is taking this course to give me a bad name, though if she only knew it Langridge is no white-ribboner."

"Maybe that was a fake clipping," suggested Phil. "I've heard of such things being done before. Langridge might have hired a printer to set that item up so that it looked as if it was cut from a newspaper." [101]

"No," answered Sid quietly. "The item was genuine. I have a similar one I cut from the Haddonfield *Herald*."

"But it isn't true?" inquired Tom.

"No—that is—well, I can't say anything about it," and Sid looked miserable again. "But I'm glad I found out who sent it to Miss Harrison."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Tom.

"I'm going to have it out with Langridge the first time I meet him. I'll punch—"

"Better go slow," advised Phil. "Take it easy, old man. Langridge is a slick article. We know that of old. If you try a rough-house he'll have you at a disadvantage."

"I can't help it. I'm not going to let him get ahead of me this way."

"Oh, forget it and play ball," advised Tom with a laugh, for he felt that the subject was getting too serious, and his heart was wrapped up in his team, despite a certain pretty girl.

"I only wish I could—forget it," answered Sid.

It was several days after this, and a few days before the game with Wescott University, which was to be played on the latter club's grounds, that Phil, Tom and Sid journeyed to the town of Haddonfield to get some things to take with them on the trip. For it was quite a journey to play Wescott, a college with whom Randall had clashed in football, losing the game because Phil was taken sick and a new quarter back had to go in. It took a day to go and a day to come, and the lads would need to take some baggage with them. [102]

The three chums had made their purchases, and were on their way to take a car back to Randall, when Sid grasped the arm of Tom.

"There he is!" he exclaimed.

"Who?" asked Tom, who was critically examining a new tie he had purchased.

"Langridge!" cried Sid. "I'm going to have it out with him."

"Don't," begged Phil, but it was too late, for Sid had crossed the street to where the former pitcher for Randall was walking with another chap, as sportily attired as was he.

"I want to speak to you!" called Sid to his enemy, as he came up behind him, Tom and Phil following at a distance.

"What's that?" drawled Langridge, turning. "Oh, it's you, is it Henderson? Well, I don't know that I care to talk to you. I'm not used to associating with chaps caught in gambling raids!"

Sid was fairly trembling with rage, but he managed to take from his pocket a duplicate of the clipping which Miss Harrison had received. [103]

"Did you—did you send that to her?" spluttered Sid.

"Send it to whom?" asked Langridge insolently.

"Miss Harrison? That lying clipping about me? Did you send it, I ask?"

"Well, supposing I did? It's a free country; isn't it? Besides, I'm not so sure that the clipping doesn't tell the truth."

"Then you sent it!" cried Sid. "You don't dare deny it!"

"Dare you deny that you are the person referred to in it? Dare you deny that you were in that gambling hall the night of the raid? Dare you deny that?" fired back Langridge.

Sid seemed stunned.

"I—I—er—how—how did you——" he was stammering.

"I see you don't dare deny it," went on Langridge with a sneer. "Your manner is answer enough. Come on, Perkins. I don't care to prolong this discussion."

"But I do!" cried poor Sid, now beside himself. "I'll get even with you for this dirty, sneaking piece of work! You dare send that clipping to her—to her! I'll——" he sprang forward, with clenched fists, and before Tom or Phil could stop him, he had struck Langridge. The latter, with a snarl of rage, jumped toward Sid, but his friend clasped his arm. [104]

"Not here! Not here!" implored Perkins. "You can't fight here, Langridge."

"No, that's right," admitted the other with a shrug of his shoulders, as he calmed himself with an effort. "And I don't know that I care, after all, for the notoriety of fighting him." He turned aside. Sid was about to spring forward again, his face distorted with rage, but Tom and Phil held him back.

"Come on," whispered the pitcher in his ear. "You don't know what you're doing, Sid. You're only making matters worse."

With something like a sob in his throat, Sid allowed his chums to lead him away.

CHAPTER X

 [105]

SID IS SPIKED

"By Jove, but I'm glad we're going out of town for a game," remarked Tom to Phil the next morning.

"Why?" inquired the first baseman, as he critically examined his favorite mushroom bat, which he had mended with wire and tape.

"Because of Sid. It may put him on his feet again, after this business of Langridge, Miss Harrison, and the newspaper clipping. Hang it all! girls can sure mix things up when they want to, can't they?"

"Yes, but it isn't her fault. She merely doesn't care for a fellow that gambles, and Sid can't say that he doesn't."

"I don't believe Sid gambles," said Tom quickly. "I was going to add," he went on, "that I'd 'gamble' on that. After the way he acted with Langridge last night, almost coming to a fight, I think there is something more in this than we've thought of."

"Probably there is; but why doesn't Sid come out and say he wasn't in the raid, and clear himself? It ought to be easy enough to do, but he doesn't do it." [106]

"I know; and yet he may have a reason."

"Very likely. But things look suspicious. Mind you, I don't say to us, for I'd stick to Sid, no matter what he did. But there's the fact of him suddenly being broke, being out late several times, going off after getting mysterious notes, and coming in smelling strongly of tobacco. It looks bad, and I don't see why Sid doesn't own up and confess, or else clear himself."

"Maybe he can't. But that's neither here nor there. I'm glad he and Langridge didn't fight. Now we're going out of town to play Wescott, and maybe get beaten, for they have a fine nine. But,

anyhow, it will do Sid good. He may come back entirely different."

"Let's hope so, for there's no fun living with him, as he is now. I was glad when he got so infatuated with Miss Harrison, even going to the length of taking up hammered brass work because she had a fad that way. But since she turned him down poor Sid chucked all his brass stuff out of the window the other day. Well, maybe it will come out all right."

"It's got to," declared Tom fiercely. "Well, I'm going down to see Kerr and Leighton, to learn if everything's all ready for the trip."

The next day the team started for Wescott University, accompanied by as many of the students as could cut their lectures. It was a day's trip to the big college, one day would be devoted to the game, which was an annual affair, and the return trip would be made the third day. [107]

The Randallites were accorded an enthusiastic welcome as they were escorted to their hotel by the Wescott lads.

"Remember how sick I was when we were here last year to play 'em football?" asked Phil, as he and his chums went to their rooms.

"I sure do. Please don't repeat the experience. We want to beat these fellows if we can."

The morning of the game did not prove very auspicious, as it had rained in the night, and was still threatening. But when the two nines went out to the diamond the sun broke through the clouds and it cleared off.

"Now, fellows," said Coach Leighton, as he gathered the captain and his men about him, "you've got to play fast, snappy ball to win. We're up against a better team than either Boxer Hall or Fairview, and I want to see what you can do."

"If they don't do what's right they'll answer to me," said Tom, with a grim smile.

"And if you fellows lose you'll have to walk home," added Manager Kerr.

"Sure, then we'll not allow 'em a hit," prophesied Bricktop Molloy. [108]

"We'll whitewash 'em," added Dutch Housenlager, as he tried to trip up Joe Jackson, but failed.

It was a fast, snappy game from the very start, Tom doing some superb work in the box, but being fully matched by Marshall, the Wescott twirler, who was "a southpaw," or left hander.

"He certainly's hard to hit," conceded Holly Cross, when the Randallites came to bat in the fifth inning, with never a run scored, while Wescott had two, one each having been garnered in the second and third innings.

"We ought to have some left-handed batters to sort of fool him," remarked Tom.

"I can bat left handed," said Sid, who had been unusually quiet during the trip and the game.

"Get out! Then it's something new!" exclaimed Mr. Leighton.

"Yes," admitted Sid, "and yet it isn't either. I used to bat left handed before I came to Randall, but I gave it up. I've been practicing it on the quiet, lately, and if you like I'll try it now."

"It's risky," objected Tom. "Wait until we see what we can do this inning."

But they couldn't do anything, and after three men had gone down, one after the other, under the scientific twirling of Marshall, Mr. Leighton, Kerr and Tom, after a consultation decided to let Sid try, as he was to bat first in the next round. [109]

Wescott managed to get two more runs, as the players were "finding" Tom, and things began to look black for the visiting team.

"See if you can't rap out a home run," begged the captain, as Sid went to the plate in the sixth. There was manifest surprise when he took the left-handed position, and Marshall and Bradshaw, the latter being the Wescott catcher, held a whispered consultation.

Whatever line of play they decided on availed them nothing, however, for Sid caught a "beaut" on the end of his bat, selecting the first ball pitched, and he sent it away over in the right field bleachers, easily making a three-bagger of it. He could have come on home, except for ground rules, which allowed only three bases on a ball that went among the spectators, of whom there was an enormous crowd present, almost up to the base lines.

"Good!" delightedly cried the Randall supporters, and the record was soon bettered for Holly Cross came up next, and, though he batted right handed, he managed to whale out a two-bagger, which brought in Sid and made the first tally for the visitors. That gave them confidence and they made three runs that inning, coming within one of tying the score.

Tom, too, seemed to stiffen in his work, and he struck out three men in quick succession. [110]

"Now if we can only do as well this inning," remarked the coach, as Dutch Housenlager came up. Dutch knocked a pretty fly, and was off like the wind to first. He never would have reached it, but for an error on the part of the right fielder who muffed the ball, amid the groans of his fellows. Then, for a time, the Wescott team seemed to go to pieces, until, when the eighth inning opened, the score was tied.

Goose eggs were chalked up in the frames of both teams in the eighth, however, the pitchers both working hard. Then came Randall's chance at the bat in the ninth.

"One run will beat 'em, if we can only hold 'em down when they come up," muttered Kerr to Tom.

"I'll do my part," the nervy pitcher assured him.

It fell to Sid again, to do the trick. There were two men out, when he came up, and it looked hopeless, but he again batted left handed, and once more caught a "beaut" on the end of his bat. He got two bases on it, and, by great good luck Holly Cross, next player, whaled out what proved to be a triple, and Sid, as soon as he heard the crack of the ball, started home.

As he swung around toward third base the player there perhaps unintentionally got in his way. The baseman pretended that the ball was being fielded to him, in his endeavor to throw Sid out of his calculations, but the nervy Randall second baseman kept on. There was a collision between him and the man covering the bag, and, for an instant, Sid hesitated on third, and almost fell over, seizing his left foot in both hands, and hopping about. [111]

"Sid's spiked!" cried Tom. "The third baseman spiked him, just as he had a chance to score! Come on in, Sid. Come on in!" yelled the captain frantically.

There was a confusing chorus of yells, so much so that the fielder after the ball, which had gone past him, did not know what to do, after he had the horsehide. But by this time Sid was limping toward home, running fairly well, but with a look of agony on his face. Holly Cross was racing from second now.

"Home with that ball, you loon!" yelled the Wescott catcher, who saw Sid coming, for the Wescott fielder was stupidly holding it.

Then the fielder woke up, and threw to second, hoping to catch out Holly, who was somewhat undecided. But Sid kept on to home, and tallied the run, though he almost collapsed a moment later, while Holly leaped on to third.

"Hurt bad?" asked Tom, as he and several others hurried up to Sid. [112]

"I should say so," remarked Mr. Leighton, as he saw the blood running from Sid's shoe.

Meanwhile Holly had reached third, though the decision was close. He died there, for the next man struck out, retiring the side, and making the score five to four, in favor of Randall, though with Wescott still to have a chance in the ending of the ninth.

The third baseman made all sorts of apologies to Sid, who indeed had a nasty cut, for a spike had gone through the outer, fleshy part of his foot. It was so evidently an accident, however, that nothing unpleasant was said, though Sid could not play, and had to be replaced by Pete Backus.

There was a grim look on Tom's face as he took his place in the box, and it was justified, for he struck out two men. The third knocked what seemed was going to be a nice hit, but Pete Backus caught it, though he had to jump well for it, a feat for which his training stood him well in hand.

"Wow! We've done 'em!" cried Tom, when he realized that the third Wescott man was out, without a run having been scored by their rivals in the last inning.

"We sure have," agreed Mr. Leighton. "Poor Sid, though. He'll be out of it for a few days."

"I don't care, as long as we won the game," spoke the plucky lad, as he limped along, his foot having been dressed, and peroxide applied, to prevent blood poisoning. [113]

"It was a glorious victory," sang Holly Cross, the others joining in, after cheers had been given for Wescott, and returned by those fine-spirited lads.

It was a jolly crowd that journeyed back to Randall next day, with the Wescott scalps hanging at their belts.

"It was just what Sid wanted," decided Tom to Phil as he noted the lively look on the second baseman's face, for he was jolly and laughing, in spite of the pain of his injured foot.

There was a great celebration in Randall when the victorious team marched up the campus that night, and bonfires galore glared all around.

"A feast to-night," decided a crowd of the team's most enthusiastic supporters. "Sid Henderson will be toastmaster, on account of his great work."

But Sid, who had limped to his room to change his clothes, shook his head.

"Why not?" asked Tom and Phil in surprise.

"Because I—I've got to go away to-night," and Sid tried to conceal a letter in his hand—a letter which he had found awaiting him when he returned from Wescott with his chums.

CHAPTER XI

 [114]

A JOKE ON THE PROCTOR

For a moment neither Tom nor Phil answered. There was an embarrassed silence, but it only affected the three chums, for all about them was a rollicking, shouting crowd of students intent on arranging for a celebration in honor of the nine, and Sid—the player who had done so much to help win.

"Have you *got* to go?" asked Tom, in a low voice. "Can't you put it off, Sid?"

"I've got to go. I can't put it off," was the reply, as Sid turned and limped away.

"Oh, I say! Where's he going?" demanded Snail Looper. "We want to form a procession and carry him."

"Oh, he'll be back—later," answered Phil, for both he and Tom wished to conceal, as long as possible, the growing mystery that seemed to be enveloping their chum.

There was no time for longer talk with Sid, as he had hurried off as fast as his injured foot would let him, though Mr. Leighton had advised him to stay in his room for a couple of days. [115]

"Where do you s'pose he's going?" asked Tom of Phil.

"Give it up, unless he's going to call on Miss Harrison, and it doesn't seem very likely. He'd be more cheerful if it was that. As it is he acts as if he was going to a funeral."

"That's right. He got another one of those queer letters, and, as usual, when he does, he scoots off somewhere. Do you know what I think?"

"You think of so many things, Tom, I can't be sure."

"No joking. I mean we ought to follow him, and see where he goes so mysteriously. Maybe we could help him."

"Oh, we couldn't do that, but I'd do anything else to help Sid."

"No, of course it wouldn't be fair to play the spy; but, just the same, I wish I knew what was worrying him."

A moment later the two players were caught up in a rush of enthusiastic students that involved the whole nine except Sid, and were carried off to an impromptu celebration. Bonfires were blazing, and hastily-organized banquets were in order.

"Why, you'd think we'd won the championship to see the way they take on," remarked Holly Cross. [116]

"Well, we're in line for it, after the way we beat Wescott," said Tom. "It's the best nine Randall has had in many a year, if I do say it myself," and Tom looked proudly on his team.

"My uncle says——" began a voice.

"Smother him!"

"Into the lake with him!"

"Make him eat soft soap!"

"Choke him with a double ice-cream cone!"

These cries, and many more, greeted the almost fatal announcement of Ford Fenton. Much abashed, he turned aside from the crowd into which he had made his way.

"I wouldn't stand for that, if I were you," remarked Bert Bascome to him. "Why don't you go back at 'em."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Ford hesitatingly.

"You'd have been manager of the team if some of the mollycoddles around here had had any spunk," went on the sporty freshman. "I'm not done yet, either. I'll make the team wish, before the season is over, that Ed Kerr hadn't been manager."

"You'll not do anything rash, will you?" asked Ford, who was somewhat afraid of his wealthy chum, who proposed daring pranks sometimes.

"I don't know," answered Bascome with a superior air. "If I had some one to help me I know what I'd do. Come over here, I want to talk to you," and he led Ford off to where a number of freshmen of Bascome's crowd were looking on at the celebration in honor of the nine, but taking no part. Tom saw Ford going off with Bascome, the enthusiastic welcome of the players having calmed down for a moment. [117]

"I don't like that," he observed to Phil. "Bascome is a chap likely to get Ford into trouble. There's a fast set in the freshie crowd this year."

"Yes, we didn't take enough temper out of 'em with the hazing last fall. Have to do the job over again, I guess. But come on, enjoy life while you can," and the two were once more caught up in the happy rush.

The celebration went on the better part of the evening, and when Phil and Tom got to their room Sid was not there. He came in later, narrowly missing detection by the proctor, and said little. He was limping quite badly.

"How's the foot?" asked Tom.

"Not much better," answered Sid. "I shouldn't have gone out to-night, only—I had to."

He was dead lame the next day, and for two days after that had to stay in bed, his place on the nine, in practice games, being taken by Pete Backus, who did not do half badly.

The game with Fairview was approaching and it was likely to be a severely-contested one. Tom was a little anxious but seemed more at ease when Dr. Marshall, the college physician, gave it as his opinion that Sid could play, his foot having almost healed. [118]

"And you've got to bat as you did before too, old sport," insisted Tom, with a laugh. "Why didn't

you spring that left-hand racket before?"

"Well, you see I wasn't at all sure of it. When I was a kid I always batted left handed. Then I broke my shoulder and I had to bat right handed after it mended, for it was stiff. Then later I found I could bat either way, but I favored right, until lately, when I began practicing left again."

"We'll keep you for a pinch hitter," declared Tom. "I must revise the batting order, and get you up first, after this."

Sid got into practice a few days before the Fairview game, but was so stiff that it was decided to have some one run for him, after he had gotten to first.

The day before the game, when Sid, Phil and Tom were in their room, Sid putting some strips of adhesive plaster on his lame foot, there came a cautious knock at the door. Dutch Housenlager was at once admitted.

"Are you fellows game?" was his first question.

"For what?" asked Phil.

"For a joke on Proc. Zane?"

"Oh, we're always ready for that!" exclaimed Sid. "He has caught me once this term, and nearly twice. What's the joke?"

"I'll explain," went on Dutch, fairly bubbling over with mirth. "Only you fellows may have to stand for part of it."

"How?" asked Tom. "We'll do our share, of course."

"We want to use one of your windows for part of the trick. May we?"

"Sure," answered Phil. "We'll stand for anything short of setting fire to the college, and we'll throw in a hazing of Pitchfork if it's possible."

"Oh, he'll get his some day," replied Dutch, "but just now we're after Zane. Here's a cord. When you hear three tree-toad whistles down below, lower it from your window, and then at two tugs haul up."

"You're not going to pull the proctor up here, are you?" inquired Phil in some alarm.

"No, but I wish we could. He's been on the job pretty brisk, lately. Just haul the cord, and then I'll be back to explain more," and leaving a stout string in Tom's hands Dutch hurried away. The three chums tried to guess what was to follow, and made all sorts of wild hazards, in the midst of which they were interrupted by hearing from below the cautious imitation of the trill of a tree-toad, thrice repeated.

"Lower the cord," whispered Phil, and Tom dangled it from the window. In a few minutes he felt two tugs, which was the signal for hauling up, and he pulled until he had hoisted to his window sill a coil of strong wire. The inseparables were wondering what it was for, when Dutch reappeared.

"Anything heavy we can fasten this to?" he asked, as his eyes roved about the room.

"There's the alarm clock," replied Sid. "It wakes us out of a heavy sleep, sometimes."

"Rotten joke," commented Dutch. "Here, this will do," and he approached the old sofa, holding the coil of wire.

"It won't damage it; will it?" cried Phil in some alarm.

"Impossible, son! Impossible!" replied Dutch. "I only want to anchor the wire to the sofa. There we are," and he rapidly made a loop in the wire, and strung it around the ancient piece of furniture. Then the other end of the wire was dangled out of the window. It was promptly pulled taut, and seemed to be stretched out for some distance.

"That's the stuff!" commented Dutch. "Holly and the rest of the boys are on the job."

"But what are you going to do?" asked Tom, much mystified.

"You'll soon see," answered Dutch, as he hurried from the room again.

CHAPTER XII

PLANNING A PICNIC

When Dutch returned, after an absence of about half an hour, he seemed in considerable of a hurry. He went directly to the window, out of which there stretched away in the darkness the tight wire, and from the casement dropped a cord. Then he gave a whistling signal, which was answered. Dutch began to haul up on the cord.

"Say, look here!" burst out Phil. "What's up, anyhow? Let us in on the joke, as long as you're using our room to work it from."

"Sure," agreed Dutch. "It's all ready now, as soon as I get the cord Snail Looper is fastening to this one."

He hauled up a thin but strong rope, and once more gave some whistling signals. Then he closed down the window.

"Now we'll have to wait about an hour," he explained, "but I'll tell you what's up. You know the proctor has been unusually officious of late, and several of us have suffered."

Sid nodded appreciatively.

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"Well," resumed Dutch, "some of us have rigged up an effigy, in the shape of a student in a dress suit, and at this moment the said imitation student is strung on this wire, which extends from your window across the campus, to the clump of elms just beyond Booker Memorial chapel. The effigy is a sort of trolley car, and this is the wire. This cord, which I just hauled up is also attached to the figure. Now at the proper time, when Proc. Zane goes out to catch some poor chap, who has been off to see his best girl, and has stayed too late, I'll pull this string, the figure will slide along the wire, with the feet just touching the ground, and the proctor thinking it is a student, will rush up to identify him. There will be something interesting when the two meet," and Dutch began to chuckle.

"But how can we see it?" asked Tom. "It's as dark as a pocket to-night."

"All the better. The fellows hidden in the clump of elms have an automobile search light, which they will turn on at the proper moment. Do you catch on?"

"Wow! It's rich!" cried Phil.

"All to the mustard and the spoon, too!" decided Tom.

"A lallapaloosa!" was Sid's comment.

"And not a bit of danger," added Dutch. "As soon as the search light flashes on the scene, and the proctor is made aware of the joke, I'll cut the wire from your window, it will fall to the ground, be hauled in by the fellows in the elms, together with the figure, and not a bit of evidence will remain."

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"Great!" commented Tom. "But how can you be sure that the proctor will be out there?"

"Oh, we've arranged for that. Snail and Holly took pains to converse, rather loudly, in Mr. Zane's hearing to-night, though they pretended not to see him. They intimated that they might try to sneak in about eleven o'clock."

"Then the trick comes off then?" asked Phil.

"Exactly. We've got half an hour yet."

The students sat and talked of many things while waiting, chiefly baseball, until a slight vibration of the wire and a tug of the cord warned them that the time for action had arrived. Dutch explained that he had arranged a code of signals with his chums so that he knew when to haul in on the cord which would pull the stuffed figure along the wire.

"There it goes!" he whispered finally. "Now watch the fun!"

He began to haul, and the sagging of the wire told of a weight on it. Listening, as they peered from the window into the darkness, Tom and his friends could hear some one running across the campus. Then came a challenge.

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"Stop, if you please, sir! I see you, and it is useless to try and sneak into college at this hour! I demand your name, sir!"

"That's Zane!" whispered Phil.

A moment later the wire was violently agitated.

"He's caught him!" exclaimed Dutch. "Why don't they turn on the light, so he can see it's only a stuffed scarecrow?"

At that instant a dazzling pencil of light cut the air, wavered around uncertainly, and then was focused on a queer sight. The dignified proctor of Randall College held in his embrace the swaying figure of an effigy, attired in full evening dress, but with a caricature of a face. The image swayed from the overhead wire, and the proctor cried out:

"It is disgraceful, sir! I believe you are intoxicated! You will be expelled for this!"

Then, as the light suddenly became brighter the official was made aware that what he had grasped was only rags and straw in a dress suit. So bright was the light that the amazed anger on the proctor's face was plainly depicted. Suddenly Mr. Zane leaped back from the image, looked up and saw the wire, and darted for the clump of elms, toward which it extended.

"Why don't they turn off that light?" demanded Dutch, anxiously, and, as though in answer, it went out. Hurriedly he cut the wire, and closed the window.

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"It worked like a charm," he said. "Mum's the word now."

What happened outside in the darkness Tom and his chums could not see, but later they learned that the image and wire was safely hauled out of sight, and the students escaped from the group of trees before the proctor got there. Of course he made diligent efforts to find out who had played the trick, but it was useless.

"That puts us in good humor for the game to-morrow," observed Tom, as, chuckling, he and his chums went to bed. But if they had known what was in store for them on the morrow, they would not have slept so peacefully.

For they suffered a severe drubbing at the hands of Fairview Institute when they met that nine on the diamond the next afternoon. How it happened they did not like to think of afterward, but it was mainly due to poor fielding. Tom pitched well, and Sid made some good hits, but his foot went back on him, even in the short spurt to first. Then, too, Dutch and Holly, usually to be depended on, disgraced themselves by making almost inexcusable errors.

Nor was Fairview's playing anything to boast of, aside from the work of the battery. It was just one of those occasions when both teams seem to go stale, and probably on the part of Randall the prank of the night before, which kept several members of the team up late, had not a little to do with it. Sufficient to say, that though Tom managed to whip his men into some kind of shape for the last three innings it was too late, and they went down to defeat by a score of 3 to 10.

"And the girls watching us, too!" groaned Phil, as they were changing their clothes after the game.

"Are you going to see them when we get washed up?" asked Sid eagerly.

"I don't feel much like it," grumbled Tom, but, somehow, he and Phil did manage to gravitate to where Madge Tyler and Ruth Clinton were standing. Sid followed at a discreet distance, but when he saw Miss Harrison strolling about the grounds with Langridge, the second baseman took a trolley car for home.

Tom and Sid had to stand considerable chaffing on the part of their two pretty companions, but they didn't mind so much, and Tom declared that his team was only practicing, and would eventually win the championship, and the gold loving cup.

"Oh, by the way," remarked Phil, at parting, "Ruth, don't you and Miss Tyler want to come to our doings next week?"

"What doings?" asked his sister. "See you defeated at baseball again, or go to a fraternity dance?"

"Something on the order of the latter," replied her brother, making a wry face. "The sophs are going to have a little picnic on Crest Island, in Tonoka Lake, next Wednesday, and it will be one swell affair. Regular old-fashioned picnic—basket lunches, ants in the butter, snakes under the leaves, and all that. Holly Cross thought it up, and it's great!"

"What a wonderful brain he must have," said Miss Tyler, with a delicious laugh. "But it sounds nice. What do you say, Ruth? Shall we go?"

"I will, if you will. But—er—Mabel——" She looked questioningly toward her chum, who was strolling with Langridge.

"Oh, bring her along," invited Phil. "This is an old-fashioned affair, and no special person will bring any one else. Tom and Sid and I will look after you girls."

"But, Phil, you forget that Mr. Henderson and Mabel——" began Ruth.

"Oh, hang it all, don't let that matter," spoke Phil. "I dare say Sid won't be around. As soon as he gets in the woods or fields he's always after bugs or animals—he's a naturalist, you know."

"I should say so," agreed Tom. "Remember last fall how he went out after a picture of a fox, and got stuck in the bog, and how Zane caught him, all covered with mud, and thought poor Sid was a thief, and how we pretended we didn't know our own chum, when the proctor brought him to our room for identification? Remember that, Phil?"

"I should say I did. Well, that's probably what Sid will do this time, so Miss Harrison needn't worry about having to accept him as an escort, though for the life of me I can't understand what's up between her and Sid?" and Phil looked questioningly at his sister.

"We don't know, either," answered Ruth, "except that Mabel is very miserable over it."

"She can't be taking it very hard, when I see her off with that chump, Langridge," retorted Phil.

"Yes, I'm sorry she goes with him," retorted Madge Tyler. "But she won't listen to us. However, to change the subject—are we to go to the picnic, Ruth?"

"Oh, I guess so. How will we get there, Phil?"

"Tom and I will come for you, we'll go to the summer resort on the west shore of the lake, and row to the island. It will be sport. Now pray for good weather."

"And you boys pray that there aren't any snakes," added Miss Tyler.

"Nor ants in the butter," went on Ruth, as the boys bade the girls good-by.

CHAPTER XIII

A SPORTY COMPANION

"Where's my blue tie?" cried Tom, tumbling about the things on his bureau. "Have you seen it, Phil?"

"Well, I like your nerve! Yes, I used it as a shoe polishing rag," remarked Phil sarcastically.

"You'll find it on the blue-tie hook, I should say. Why don't you look there."

"Blue-tie hook?" queried Tom.

"Yes. You're such an orderly chap," added Phil, as he looked at his chum's disordered side of the room, "that I supposed you had a hook for each tie."

"Oh, cut it out," advised Tom, making a perfect shower with a rainbow effect of colored silks, as he looked in vain for the blue article of adornment.

"I don't know where in blazes your blue tie is," went on Phil, as he gazed with a puzzled air into a box on his dresser; "but I'd like to know where my garnet cuff buttons are. Have you been sporting 'em, Sid?"

"Me? No!" answered the other chum, who was quietly dressing, a task which Tom and Phil seemed to think called for more or less elaborate effort. "But, say, what's getting into you chaps, anyhow? You're toggging up as much for the soph picnic as though it was a frat. dance. Are there some damsels in the offing?"

"Oh, there are always girls to these affairs," carelessly spoke Tom, as he opened another drawer and began tumbling about his collars and cuffs. "Hang it all, where *is* that tie, anyhow."

"I s'pose nothing but a baby-blue one would suit your fair complexion," remarked Phil, glancing at Tom, who was as brown as an Indian from his out-door life.

"It will suit me as well as your cute little garnet cuff buttons will you. I never saw such a fusser! Ah, there's the tie. I remember now, I put it there to hide it away from you chaps," and Tom pulled out a gorgeous affair of silk from inside a cuff.

"Speak for yourself, you old fossil!" retorted Phil, who just then discovered his cuff buttons marking a place in his Ovid. "Wonder how in blazes they got there?" he murmured, as he proceeded to put them in his cuffs, while Tom was busy trying to make just the proper knot with the blue tie.

"Why are you fellows toggging up so?" demanded Sid. "Are you going to take some girls, as well as meet some there?" And, for the first time he seemed to entertain some suspicions of his friends.

"Oh, well, Ruth wanted to go," said Phil, as indifferently as he could, "and Tom and I promised to—"

"I suppose Miss Tyler is going?" asked Sid quietly.

"Yes," assented Tom, his face flushing under its bronze coat, though possibly it was from his exertion in pulling his tie into place.

"And so is Miss Harrison," went on Phil, with a desperate effort, as if desirous of getting the worst over. "But you don't need to worry," he added, as he saw Sid sit limply down in a chair. "She probably won't see you, so there need be no embarrassment. I thought it was a pity to have her miss it, especially as Ruth and Madge are going, and she rooms with them. We thought you wouldn't mind, old fellow, but we weren't going to tell you."

"So that's what you've been so mysterious about these last few days," commented Sid. "I thought something was up. Of course it's all right. I sha'n't annoy Miss Harrison, only—Oh, what's the use!" and he went on with his preparations.

It was the morning of the day of the annual sophomore picnic, and there was much excitement, especially in the ranks of the second-year men, and the more or less numerous fair ones who counted on being taken to the charming little island in the middle of Lake Tonoka. The affair was always held at this season of the year, when there was no danger of an attack from the freshmen students, who, by this time, had settled down into something approaching dignity.

"You're not going to back out, because she—Miss Harrison—is coming, are you?" asked Phil, as he saw Sid cease his arrangements for dressing.

"No—no—of course not. I was just—just thinking. I'll take my camera and specimen box along, and do a little work in biology and nature study. I need a little freshening up for the final exams. I probably won't see much of you chaps."

Phil and Tom departed ahead of Sid, who busied himself with his camera, his specimen box and his cyanide bottle, with which latter he painlessly killed such bugs and butterflies as he captured.

"We'll see you later," called Tom, as, with his blue tie very much in evidence, he and Phil went to get the girls.

A picnic is pretty much the same the world over, even if it is gotten up by a college crowd, and the one on Crest Island was no exception. There was the usual screaming of the girls when the boats tipped, and the usual strolling in shady nooks by youths and maidens, there was fun galore and happiness on all sides, for the day was perfect.

Madge Tyler, Ruth Clinton and Mabel Harrison were walking along with Phil and Tom, having just come in from a ride around the lake in a motor launch.

"What shall we do now?" asked Ruth.

"We'll soon have the pleasure of seeing some ants do a waltz or a two-step in the butter," announced Tom. "I see the waiters getting the tables ready," for a caterer had been hired by the students to provide luncheon.

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"How interesting," remarked Madge. "Suppose we go over there in the shade——" She paused suddenly, and with a little gesture to Ruth went on hurriedly: "Oh, no, let's go this way."

"That's too sunny," objected Mabel. "I'd rather go over in the shade, and——"

She, too, stopped, and then she saw what had made her chum hesitate. Sid Henderson was approaching them on a path which had no turn in it, as they had passed the only one just as Madge tried to branch off. There was no help for it. Sid was creeping up with his camera, intent on getting a picture of a large butterfly that had alighted on a flower, and, as yet, he had not seen the little party.

Miss Harrison was at once aware that her two girl chums had endeavored to save her the embarrassment of meeting Sid, but it was too late to turn back gracefully now, and with an admirable assumption of calmness the girl said:

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"Oh, isn't it interesting! I hope Mr. Henderson gets his picture. I did not know he was a naturalist."

Tom and Phil both breathed easier. It seemed that Miss Harrison would not "cut" Sid after all. Perhaps their precautions had been useless.

They were not aware that a girl can sometimes, under force of circumstances, assume a part she does not feel. It was this way with Mabel Harrison. She did not want to meet Sid, but she was too cultured to cause his friends sorrow by refusing to notice his presence. So, with somewhat heightened color, she stood in the group composed of her chums, Phil and Tom, and watched the young naturalist coming nearer and nearer. So intent was Sid on getting the picture that he had not, as yet, seen his chums or the girls.

There was a click of the camera, and, a moment later, after the exposure had been made, the gorgeous butterfly sailed gracefully off through the air.

"Did you get it?" called out Tom, and Sid looked up.

"Yes," he replied. "A fine and rare specimen." Then he saw Miss Harrison, and halted in his approach, which he had begun. But, he also, was too proud to turn back now, and came on. The others advanced toward him, and Miss Harrison was just bowing, coolly perhaps, but with a show of cordiality, when from the bushes there stepped a gaily attired youth, whom neither Phil, Tom, nor either of the girls seemed to know.

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"Hello, Sid, old chap!" greeted the newcomer in easy but rather too loud tones. "I've been trying to pipe you off for ever so long. Looked all over for you. Say, this place is dead slow. Not even so much as a ring-cane game. What makes you college sports come here? It's too dead for me. But I've found a bunch of good things. Come on over and we'll have a little poker, and I'll depend on you to——"

The sportily dressed youth paused, for Sid had started back with horror at the sight of him, and had made an unmistakable gesture of caution.

"What's the matter?" went on the flashily attired one. "Ain't I good enough to speak to you? Or maybe you think the dames give me the fussers. Not a bit of it. Pleased to meet you, girls," and he made pert bows to the three young ladies, who returned them with mere nods, for they expected to learn that the new arrival was a friend of Sid's, however undesirable he might seem.

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"How came you here? What do you want?" demanded Sid, and the hand that held the camera trembled.

"I came after you," was the answer. "Called up at the brain factory, and they told me the whole bunch of second year boys were off on a chowder party, so I took a boat and came here. I thought I'd have some sport, but it's dead slow. Come on, and I'll show you some fun. I've got a deck of cards and——"

Sid was quickly at the side of the sporty one, and uttered something in a hoarse whisper.

"Oh, that's all right then, don't mind me," came the answer, and the youth leered at the girls. Tom was with difficulty keeping down his anger, while Phil was hopelessly wondering who on earth Sid's acquaintance could be.

Miss Harrison, who had started to greet Sid, drew back and there was a look of disgust on her face. She turned aside, and started back.

"Don't go away—I like your style," called the sporty lad. "We need another lady as it is. Don't go away."

"Keep quiet!" begged Sid desperately. "I'll go with you. Come on," and, to the surprise of his friends, Sid turned into the woods, and followed the youth, who impudently took off his hat and threw kisses to the girls, as they turned their backs. Miss Harrison had disappeared around a turn in the path.

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CHAPTER XIV

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"MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS!"

For a moment no one knew what to do or say. Tom was nervously kicking at the pebbles in the path, while Phil got out his knife and began whittling a stick furiously. As usual it was the girls who saved the situation.

"I suppose he's gone off to get some more pictures," said Madge, with a nervous little laugh. "Come on, Ruth, we mustn't let Mabel go back there all alone. After all, I don't believe we want to go sit in the shade. Isn't dinner almost ready? I'm nearly famished, boys."

"Yes, bring on the butter, ants and all," added Ruth.

"All right, just as you say," responded Phil, with a quick look at Tom, who rather avoided the glance, for he was sorely puzzled. "I dare say grub is ready. We'll dine beneath the greenwood tree, from whence all care shall banished be."

"Bravo!" cried Miss Tyler. "You never told me your brother was a poet, Ruth."

"He doesn't know it himself," commented his sister dryly. "Oh, there's Mabel. Wait!" she called, and the girl in advance turned. There was a troubled look in her blue eyes, but otherwise she was calm.

"Isn't it perfectly charming in the woods," she remarked. "I wish Fairview College was nearer the lake."

"Oh, we'll come over and get you, any time you want to come," said Tom quickly.

"Thank you," responded Miss Harrison, with a grateful look at him. She seemed to have recovered control of herself, but there was a pathetic air about her, which did not vanish.

Luncheon was a gay affair, as Tom and Phil felt that it was their duty to make up, in a measure, for the strange action of Sid, in going off in company with a flashily-dressed youth who had practically insulted his chums' companions.

In the afternoon there was a period of idling beneath the trees, walks along shady and moss-grown paths, and trips about the lake in boats, until the declining sun warned the merry-makers that it was time to depart. Phil and Tom took the three girls to Fairview, but they had no further sight of Sid that afternoon, nor was any mention made of him, though Tom rather hoped the girls would say something that would enable him to defend his chum.

For, somehow, in spite of it all, Tom felt that there was something he didn't understand in relation to Sid. He was puzzled over it, grieved deeply, too, yet he could not condemn Sid.

But no mention was made of the little incident of the morning, and the two youths left, promising to come over again at the first opportunity.

"It was awfully kind of you to bother with me," said Miss Harrison, as she shook hands with Phil and Tom. "I was rather in the way, I'm afraid, and I realize——"

"Why, Mabel, what a way to talk!" interrupted Ruth. "If they hadn't taken you with us, we wouldn't have gone with them; would we, Madge?"

"Of course not."

"It's awfully kind of you," went on Mabel, as she turned into the college, leaving Phil and Tom to say good-by to their friends.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Phil, when he and Tom were on their way back to Randall.

"Hanged if I know what to say. Who was that sporty chap, anyhow?"

"Search me. He seemed to take a good deal for granted. The puppy! I felt like punching him one, the way he leered at the girls."

"So did I. Would have, too, only for Sid. He seemed to be friendly with the flashy chap."

"Yes, and that's the funny part of it. He seemed somehow to have Sid under a spell."

"It's just another phase of the mystery that seems to have been enveloping poor old Sid, of late," went on Tom. "I only hope one thing, and that is, that whatever it is that it doesn't interfere with baseball. We've got to depend a lot on Sid this season, as the other fellows aren't batting as I hoped they would, and this includes myself, but I never was much as a hitter. I never could get above two sixty-eight, but Sid won't have any trouble getting to four hundred, and he can bat both ways, placing a ball in either right or left field. But if this thing is going to keep up," and Tom shook his head dolefully, "I don't know what to do."

"Losing that game to Fairview didn't do our standing any good," remarked Phil.

"I should say not! But we play Dodville Prep school Saturday, and they're easy fruit."

"That will help pull our average up some," admitted Phil.

They made the rest of the trip back to Randall almost in silence, Tom making an occasional remark about baseball, and Phil replying, but the thoughts of both were more on the events of the day than on the great game.

Sid was not in the room when Phil and Tom entered. The latter took off his cherished blue tie, and placed it carefully away, probably in a place he would forget the next time he wanted it, while Phil made a point of sticking his garnet sleeve links in a box that contained everything from fish hooks to waxed ends for sewing ripped baseball covers.

"Well, I'm glad to-day's over," remarked Tom, as he threw himself in the old armchair, with a

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sigh of relief, "but it was lots of fun while it lasted. Still I didn't exactly know what to do when that fellow showed up."

"Same here, yet the girls got through all right. Trust them for a thing like that? Girls are queer creatures, anyhow."

"You laughed at me when I said that last term," remarked Tom, as Phil stretched out on the ancient sofa, raising a cloud of dust. "Well, to-day is done. I wonder what will happen to-morrow?"

"Same old grind. I've got to brush up a bit if I want to pass with honors. Guess I'll do some boning to-night."

"Yes, and I've got to arrange for some more baseball practice," went on Tom. "I wonder where Sid is? I didn't like the looks of that chap. And did you hear what he said about playing poker?"

"Yes, I'm afraid Sid's in bad, in spite of what he says."

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There was a moment of silence, broken only by the ticking of the alarm clock. Then Tom resumed:

"I wish we could help him. If he's got in with a bad crowd we ought to help save him. Poor old Sid, I wish——"

At that moment the door opened, and the chum whose troubles they were discussing walked in. He had heard what Tom had said, and a dull red flushed up under his brown skin.

"Were you fellows talking about me?" he asked hotly.

"We were just saying," began Phil, "that we couldn't——"

"I wish you fellows would mind your own business!" blurted out Sid. "I guess I can look after myself!" and he crossed the room and gazed moodily out of a window, into the darkness of the night, while the tick of the fussy little alarm clock seemed to echo and re-echo through the apartment.

CHAPTER XV

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AN UNEXPECTED DEFENSE

There wasn't much said in the room of the chums after Sid had "gone off the handle," as Tom expressed it later. In fact there was not much that could be said. Phil shrugged his shoulders and glanced at Tom in a significant manner, and the captain of the nine shook his head discouragedly. Matters were getting worse, he thought, and he began to fear for the effect of Sid's trouble on the second baseman's ability as a player. But what could be done?

Though he did not refer to the scene of the previous evening, when he greeted his chums next morning, Sid, by his manner showed that he realized it. There was a tender gruffness in his words and actions, and he seemed so contrite, and so anxious to make amends that Phil and Tom did not have it in their hearts to stand out against him.

"A fine day for practice," observed Tom, as he sprang out of bed, at the first summons of the alarm clock.

"Cæsar's battle-axe! What's going to happen?" demanded Phil, lazily turning over. "You're up, Tom."

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"Sure. I'm behind in my psychology work, and I've got to attend a stiff lecture this morning and stand for a quizz afterward. I'm afraid I'll slump."

"I'll help you," came unexpectedly from Sid. "I've been all over that stuff, and I know what Pitchfork will try to stick you on. Get something on, and I'll help you bone."

This was unexpected on Sid's part, but Tom was none the less grateful, and soon the two were delving deep into problems of mind and matter, while Phil protested that it was against all rules, and that he wanted to sleep.

Tom did well in the "quizz," and this made him more than ever anxious to help Sid in his trouble. But the second baseman made no reference to it, and in practice that afternoon he did better than in several previous days at his stick work.

"We'll eat up Dodville," prophesied Tom exultantly. "That's the way to lambast 'em, Sid!"

But Randall didn't "eat up" Dodville. They beat the preparatory school nine, as indeed they should have done, but the score was no great showing of the abilities of Randall.

For the smaller lads hit Tom rather too frequently, and their fielding was a joy to the heart of their coach and captain. Even Mr. Leighton complimented them on it, and he did not say much to his own men, who, to say the least, were a bit ragged.

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"Dodville shouldn't have gotten more than one run," declared the coach as the nine was returning, "yet you fellows let them get six."

"Yes," added Tom bitterly. "I can see a large, gold-framed picture of us winning that loving cup,

when we go up against Boxer Hall and Fairview again.”

“You needn’t talk,” declared Sid, somewhat bitterly. “You issued plenty of walking papers today, and they found you several times, in spite of your curves.”

“I didn’t muff a ball, and let a man get away from me on second, though,” retorted Tom.

“Oh, come on, fellows, let’s sing,” proposed Holly Cross, as a way out of the difficulty, and when some of the old college lays had been rendered the team was in better humor.

That evening, when Tom was putting a new toe-plate on his shoe, and Sid was pretending to study in one corner of the room, but scarcely glancing at his book, there came a summons at the door. Sid jumped up at the knock, and there was a look of apprehension on his face, which vanished, however, when Wallops, the messenger, came with word that Phil was wanted on the telephone. The first baseman returned presently, to announce:

“My sister wants to see me, over at Fairview.”

“Anything the matter?” asked Tom quickly, and with suspicious interest.

“No, she has a letter from dad, with something in about vacation plans, and she wants to talk to me about it. I’ll be back soon. Don’t sit up for me—ta-ta,” and Phil was gone.

It was not quite as difficult for him to gain admission to the young ladies’ side of the Fairview institution as it had been for Tom, on one memorable occasion, when he had called to tell Ruth that her brother had been hurt in a football game. Then Miss Philock, the preceptress, seemed to think Tom was going to carry off some of her charges out of hand.

“What is it, sis?” asked Phil, when his sister had come down to talk to him.

“Oh, it’s about where we’re going this summer. Dad and Momsey have left it to me. I want to go to Europe awfully, Phil, and if you and I both ask, maybe they’ll take us. Will you? That’s what I wanted to see you about, and I couldn’t wait to write, so I telephoned. Don’t you want to go to Europe?”

“Not much! I’m going camping with Sid and Tom. No Europe for me! We’re going to do Yellowstone Park, and——”

“Oh, Phil, and I was so counting on Europe,” and Ruth began to argue with her brother. In the midst of it the door of the little reception room opened, and in came Madge and Miss Harrison.

“Oh, excuse us, dear,” exclaimed Madge. “We didn’t know you were here.”

“Do stay,” urged Ruth. “It’s only Phil. Perhaps you can help me persuade him to join with me in begging the folks to take us to Europe,” and Phil’s sister looked knowingly at Madge.

“Oh, wouldn’t that be fine!” exclaimed Miss Tyler. “I heard mamma and papa talking about making a tour this year, and of course if they went I’d go too. Then we might see each other, Ruth. I don’t see why you’re so opposed to Europe, Mr. Clinton.”

“Oh, I’m not,” answered Phil quickly, doing some hard thinking before he reversed himself. “In fact I rather like it. Perhaps we will postpone the camping trip and—er—well, I don’t care, sis. If you can work the folks for a trip across the pond I’m with you.”

“Oh, thank you so much!” exclaimed Ruth, and she made a motion as though to kiss her brother, only Phil ducked.

“How fortunate you people are to go abroad,” spoke Miss Harrison. “I’ve been longing to go,” and they began to talk of many things they wished to see. From that the talk switched to baseball, and before she thought Ruth remarked:

“Is Mr. Henderson batting as well as ever?”

“Not as well as he might,” declared Phil, and he spoke not to disparage Sid, but merely as a lover of his team. “There’s something wrong with Sid,” he went on, scarcely aware of what he was saying. “He’s going down, somehow. I’m afraid he’s gotten in with a bad crowd. That sporty chap we met him with isn’t doing him any good, and Sid will slump, if he isn’t careful. He used to be a steady chap, but I’m afraid he’s going to the bad.”

“Oh, what a shame!” remarked Ruth.

“Yes, and he was so steady,” added Madge.

Miss Harrison was biting her lips. Her face had first flushed, but now was white.

“I think it’s very mean of you to say such things about him when he isn’t here,” she burst out. “Sid—I mean Mr. Henderson—doesn’t—I mean—I’m sure he wouldn’t—anyhow, why don’t you be fair to him?” and, before any of the others could answer, she burst into tears and fled from the room.

CHAPTER XVI

A SERIOUS CHARGE

“Well, what do you know about that?” exclaimed Phil, turning to his sister and Miss Tyler. “If

that isn't the limit!"

"Hush!" begged Ruth. "Poor Mabel! She isn't herself."

"I wasn't saying anything against Sid," went on Phil. "I only said it was too bad something seemed to have gotten hold of him lately. Then she flies up——"

"How dare you speak about Mabel flying up?" interrupted Ruth, stamping her little foot, and shaking her finger at her brother. "She's nervous and upset, that's all. You'd better go to her, Madge. Perhaps she has a headache."

Miss Tyler, with a sympathetic look at Phil, glided from the apartment.

"What do you s'pose ailed Miss Harrison?" asked Phil.

"I don't know," replied Ruth. "Of course it was rather unexpected when she and Mr. Henderson became such friends. Then came that item in the paper, and his refusal to explain, and then meeting that horrid fellow at the picnic, and then—but I never expected her to break a lance for him in this fashion. I guess she cares more than she shows," and with this philosophical reflection Ruth bade her brother good night, as Miss Philock was marching aggressively up and down the corridor like a sentinel, for the hour of retiring was approaching. [153]

"Now don't say a word about this to Sid," cautioned Ruth.

"Of course not," growled Phil.

"Nor Tom Parsons, either."

Phil grunted, but that night he told Tom everything, and the scene further added, in the mind of the pitcher, to the mystery that was enveloping Sid.

"Maybe the worst of it's over," suggested Tom, as they were discussing the matter. "Sid hasn't been out late nights for two weeks now, and he's studying hard. He's playing the game, too. We'll beat Fairview the next time we tackle 'em, and wipe up Boxer Hall, likewise."

But alas for Tom's hopes. Two nights later, as the three chums were studying in their room, Wallops brought a note for Sid, who showed much perturbation, and hastily went out, saying nothing to his chums.

"There he goes again," remarked Tom helplessly, as the door closed on Sid. [154]

"Um," grunted Phil. He had nothing to say.

Phil and Tom, who were taking up some advanced work in mathematics, spent two evenings a week "boning" with Mellville, a senior, and this was one of the occasions when they went to his room. They had permission to be up beyond the usual hour, and it was rather late when they returned to their own apartment. Mellville had his rooms in a new fraternity house, not far from Booker Memorial Chapel, and to get to their own room, which was in the west dormitory, Phil and Tom had to cross the campus, and go in the rear of the "prof house," as the building was called where Dr. Churchill and the faculty had their living quarters. As the two chums were walking along, they became aware of a figure coming up the campus from another direction—from where the main entrance gates of the college loomed up dimly in the darkness.

"Some one's coming in late," murmured Phil.

"Likely to get caught," added Tom. "I saw Proc. Zane sneaking around a few minutes ago."

"By Jove, that walks like Sid!" whispered Phil, a moment later. "It is Sid," he added.

"Yes, and there goes Zane after him!" groaned Tom. "He's caught, sure, unless we can warn him. Poor old Sid!"

"Too late," remarked Phil, as he saw the figure of the proctor break into a run. Sid also darted off, but soon he saw he had no chance to escape, and he stood still. [155]

"Ah, Mr. Henderson, good evening," greeted the proctor sarcastically. "Out rather late, aren't you?"

"I'm—I'm afraid so, sir," answered Sid hesitatingly; his two chums, from their position in the dark shadows of the faculty house being able to hear everything.

"No doubt about it," went on the proctor gleefully. He had kept vigil for many nights of late, and his prey had escaped him. Now he had a quarry. "Have you permission to be out after hours?" demanded the official.

"No, sir."

"I thought not. Report to Dr. Churchill directly after chapel," and the proctor, by the light of a small pocket electric lamp he carried, began to enter Sid's name in his book. As he did so Tom and Phil could see the watch-dog of the college gate gaze sharply at their chum. Then Mr. Zane, putting out his hand, caught hold of Sid's coat.

"Are they going to fight?" asked Tom in a hoarse whisper. "Sid must be crazy!"

A moment later came the proctor's voice.

"Ha, Mr. Henderson, I thought I smelled liquor on you! I am not deceived. What have you in that pocket?" [156]

"Noth—nothing, sir," stammered Sid.

There was a momentary struggle, and the proctor pulled something from an inner pocket of

Sid's coat. By the gleam of the electric lamp, Tom and Phil could see that it was a bottle—a flask of the kind usually employed to carry intoxicants—broad and flat, to fit in the pocket.

"Ha! Mr. Henderson, this is serious!" exclaimed the proctor. "Trying to smuggle liquor into the college! Come with me to my room at once. This must be investigated. I will find out who are guilty with you, in this most serious breach of the rules. A bottle of liquor! Shameful! Come with me, sir! Dr. Churchill shall hear of this instantly!" and he took hold of Sid's arm, as if he feared the student would escape.

"What do you think of that?" gasped Tom, as the full meaning of what he had seen came home to him.

"I give up," answered Phil hopelessly. "Poor, old Sid!"

CHAPTER XVII

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SID KEEPS SILENT

Tom and Phil wished they could have been a witness to the scene which took place a little later in the study of Dr. Churchill. Not from mere motives of curiosity, but that they might, if possible, aid their chum. That he was in serious straits they well knew, for the rules of Randall (as indeed is the case at all colleges) were most stringent on the subject of liquor.

Poor Sid, led like a prisoner by the proctor, walked moodily up to the faculty residence, while Tom and Phil, with sorrow in their hearts, went to their room. Their grief was too deep and genuine to admit of discussion.

"You wished to see me?" inquired Dr. Churchill, coming out of his study into his reception room, as Sid and the proctor stood up to greet him, having previously sent in word by the servant. "Ha, what is it now?" and the venerable head of Randall looked over the tops of his spectacles at the two; the official, stern and unyielding, and the student with a puzzled, worried air, sorrowful yet not at all guilty. Dr. Churchill held a book and his finger was between the pages, as if he hoped soon to be able to go back and resume his reading at the place he had left off.

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"I regret to announce that I have a most flagrant violation of the rules to report to you, Dr. Churchill," began Mr. Zane.

"Another of my boys out late," remarked the doctor, a half smile playing around his lips. "Well, of course that can't be allowed, but I suppose he has some good excuse. He went to see about a challenge for a ball game, or it was so hot in his room that he couldn't study," and the president smiled, then, as he caught sight of a little blaze of logs in the fireplace of his reception room (for the evening was rather chilly), he realized that his latter explanation about a hot room would scarcely hold. And, be it said, Dr. Churchill was always looking for some excuse for indiscreet students, to the chagrin of the officious proctor.

"Doubtless a baseball matter took him out," went on the president. "Of course we can't allow that. Discipline is discipline, but if you will write out for me a couple of hundred lines of Virgil—by the way, you play at shortstop, don't you?" and the doctor looked quizzically at Sid. The president had rather less knowledge of baseball than the average lady. "How is the eleven coming on, Mr. Henderson?"

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The doctor tried to appear interested, but, for the life of him he never could remember whether baseball was played with nine, ten or a dozen men, albeit he attended all the championship games, and shouted with the rest when the team won. He wanted to appear interested now, however, and he was anxious to get back to his reading.

"I regret to inform you," went on the proctor (which was not true, for Sid well knew that Mr. Zane took a fiendish delight in what he was about to say), "I regret to state that I caught Mr. Henderson coming in after hours to-night; and I would not think so much of that, were it not for the condition in which I caught him," and the proctor assumed a saintly air.

"I don't quite understand," remarked the doctor, laying down his book, but taking care to mark a certain passage. Sid was idly aware that it was a volume of Sanskrit, the doctor being an authority on that ancient language of the Hindoos.

"I regret to say that Mr. Henderson is intoxicated!" blurted out the proctor.

"I am not, sir!" retorted the second baseman, it being his first remark since entering the room. "I have never touched a drop of intoxicating liquor in my life, sir!"

There was a ring in his voice, and, as he stood up and faced his accuser there was that in his manner which would indicate to any unprejudiced person that he was perfectly sober.

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"Intoxicated!" exclaimed the doctor, for he had a nameless horror of anything like that. "Don't make such a charge, Mr. Zane, unless you are positive—"

"I am positive, Dr. Churchill."

"I have never touched a drop of liquor," insisted Sid.

Dr. Churchill, with a stern look on his rugged face, advanced and took hold of Sid by the arms,

not severely, not even tightly, but with a gentle, friendly pressure. He looked into the troubled eyes of the lad—troubled but not ashamed—worried, perhaps, but not abashed. The doctor bent closer.

“I am no authority on intoxicants,” went on the president grimly, “but I should say you were mistaken, Mr. Zane.”

“Will Mr. Henderson deny that I took a pint bottle of liquor from him not ten minutes ago?” asked Mr. Zane, as he produced the incriminating evidence.

Sid’s face turned red under its tan—it had been rather pale before—but he did not answer. Dr. Churchill looked grave.

“Is this true?” he asked.

“I did have the bottle in my pocket,” admitted Sid. “But it was not for myself. I took it——”

The president raised a restraining hand.

“Wait,” he said. “I will send for Dr. Marshall. This is serious.” He sighed as he looked at his book. To-night he felt, more than ever, what it meant, to be the head of an institution where several hundred young men—healthy, vitalized animals—were held in leash only by slender cords. Dr. Churchill summoned a messenger, and sent him for the college physician.

“Mr. Henderson is no more intoxicated than I am, and I never take a drop, nor give it,” declared the physician. “I guess you’re mistaken, Mr. Zane.”

“Is this liquor?” demanded the proctor, extending the bottle.

Dr. Marshall looked at the bottle through the light, poured out some of the contents into his palm, and smelled of the liquid.

“It seems to be whisky,” he said doubtfully, “but I should have to make an analysis to be perfectly sure.”

“You need not go to that trouble,” said Sid quickly. “I have every reason to believe that it *is* whisky.”

“And what were you doing with it?” demanded Dr. Churchill sternly.

“That is a question which I must decline to answer,” and Sid drew himself up haughtily.

The venerable president drew back, almost as if he had received a blow. He looked at Sid keenly.

“Very well,” he remarked quietly, and there was a note of sadness in his voice. “I shall have to inflict severe punishment. The rules call for suspension or expulsion, but, in view of your previous excellent record, I will make an exception. You will be debarred from all further participation in athletics for the remainder of the term—unless,” and the doctor paused, “you can make some explanation that will prove your innocence,” and he looked almost as a father might at an erring son.

“I—I can’t make any explanation,” answered Sid brokenly, as he turned away, while the doctor, with a shake of his head, took up his Sanskrit book, and went back to his study.

CHAPTER XVIII

BASCOME GIVES A DINNER

Of course, the story was all over college the next day, for those things leak out, through messengers or servants, or in some mysterious manner. But, in this case, the suspension of Sid from further participation in the ball games, had to be made known.

“For the love of onions, what are we going to do?” demanded Tom. “We can’t do without Sid.” He was quite broken up over the affair.

“We’ll have to play Pete Backus in his place,” suggested Phil.

“Yes, I know, but Pete——” began the perplexed captain.

“He’ll have to train harder than he has been,” observed the coach, who, with Tom and some friends, were talking over the alarming situation.

“Oh, Pete’ll do it, if he once makes up his mind to it, and I’ll see that he does,” agreed Tom.

“Does this mean that we’ll have to cancel the next game with Fairview?” asked Ed Kerr, who was anxious to know, for, as manager, he would have to shift his dates.

“No, we’ll play ‘em,” replied the coach. “It will mean more and harder practice for the next two weeks, though, and we have a game with that Michigan school Saturday. They’re hard as nails, too, I hear, but maybe it will do our fellows good to get a few more drubbings. It may wake them up, for there’s no denying that the fellows are not playing up to the mark.”

“I’m sure it’s not my fault,” began Tom, a bit aggressively.

“I didn’t say it was,” retorted Mr. Leighton, and there was a sharp tone in his words. “Only

we've got to play better if we want to win."

Tom, with a fierce feeling in his heart, put his men through a hard practice previous to a game with the scrub team, and the men seemed to wake up. Pete Backus surprised his chums and himself by knocking a home run.

"That's the stuff!" cried Tom.

"Work like that wins games," added the coach, brightening up a bit.

Tom and Phil, in tacit agreement with the rest of the athletic set, had avoided mentioning Sid's disgrace, but coming home from practice that afternoon, Tom, seeing his chum, curled up in the old armchair, studying, could not help remarking:

"What in the world did you do it for, old man? You've put us in a fierce hole."

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"I'm sorry," spoke Sid contritely.

"Why don't you explain?" asked Phil.

"I can't."

"You mean there's nothing to explain?" queried Tom.

"You can put it that way, if you like. I wish you fellows would let me alone."

"That's all right, Sid," went on Tom, "but when we count on you to play on the team—and when we need you—to go back on us this way—it's not—"

"Oh, let me alone; will you?" burst out the unfortunate one. "Haven't I got troubles enough? You know it hurts me, as much as it does you, not to play. Don't I want to see Randall win?"

"Doesn't look much like it," mumbled Phil.

"Say, look here," exploded Sid, "if you fellows don't want me here any longer, just say so, and I'll get out." He sprang to his feet, and faced his chums, a look on his face they had never seen there before. It brought to them a realization of what it all meant, though they could not understand it.

"Oh, hang it all, we're getting too serious!" declared Tom. "Of course, we want you to stay here—we wouldn't know what to do if you left us. Only it's tough on the team."

"Glad you appreciate my abilities," remarked Sid, with a little softening of his manner. "I'm as much broken up over it as you are. All I can say is there's been a big mistake, and all I ask for is a suspension of judgment."

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"But if it's a mistake, why can't you tell?" insisted Phil.

"I can't, that's all. You'll have to worry along without me. I hear Pete is doing good."

"Oh, yes, fair," admitted Tom, "but he isn't as sure a batter as you are. We need you, Sid."

"Well, I'm sorry—that's all. It may be explained—some day, but not now," and Sid fell to studying again.

"I don't like this," remarked Tom to Phil, a few days later, following some practice the day before the game with Michigan, a team that had won a name for itself on the diamond.

"Don't like what, Tom?"

"The way some of our team are playing and acting. They seem to think any old kind of baseball will do. They play fine—at times—then they go to pieces. Then, too, there seems to be a sort of clique forming in the nine and among some of the subs. There's too much sporting around, and staying out nights. Too many little suppers and smokers."

"Leighton doesn't kick—why should you?"

"He doesn't know it, but if it keeps on I'm going to tell him, and have him stiffen up the men. Ed Kerr's got to help, too. Bert Bascome is responsible for some of it. He's got lots of money, and he spends it. Then, with his auto, he's playing old bob with some of the fellows, taking them on joy rides, and keeping them out until, first they know, Zane will have them down on his list."

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"Oh, it's not as bad as that, I guess."

"It isn't, eh? You just watch, that's all," and Tom kept moodily on to his room. On the table were three envelopes, one each for the captain, Sid and Phil.

"What's up?" asked Phil. "I wonder if Ruth is going to have a blow-out again, or if Madge—"

He opened his missive and began to read it, Tom already having perused his.

"There, what did I tell you?" asked the captain. "Bascome is giving a dinner to-night, and he wants the whole 'varsity nine, and the subs, to attend. The little puppy! He gives himself as many airs as if he was a senior. Why doesn't he dine the freshman nine, if he has to blow in his money?"

"Are you going?" asked Phil.

"Going? Of course not, and none of the nine will, if they have to ask me. It will break them all up for the game to-morrow. I won't stand for it."

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"What will you do?"

"Tell Leighton, and have him officially forbid it."

"Isn't that going it pretty strong? We can easily beat Michigan, even if the fellows do have a little fun to-night."

"Look how we were fooled on Dodville Prep. I'm going to take no chances. I'll see Leighton," which Tom did, with the effect that the coach kindly, but firmly, forbade members of the 'varsity nine from dissipating at Bascome's dinner.

Sid came in a little later, picked up his invitation, and read it.

"They say Bascome gives very fine spreads," was his remark.

"You're not going, are you?" asked Tom in some surprise, for he likened Bascome to Langridge, though the latter was more of a bully, and he did not believe Sid would take up with the rich freshman.

"Why shouldn't I go?" asked Sid, and there was challenge in his tone. "I might as well have the game as the name," and he laughed uneasily.

"Why, none of the 'varsity nine are going," said Tom.

"Oh," and Sid turned aside, as he put the invitation in his pocket. "Well, I'm not on the 'varsity any longer," and he laughed, but there was no mirth in it.

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CHAPTER XIX

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FAIRVIEW AND RANDALL

Tom did not reply to Sid's almost sneering allusion to the unfortunate fact that he was barred from playing. There was little the captain could say, and when Sid went to Bascome's dinner, together with a number of the more sporty students, Tom and Phil, who were in bed, did not greet their chum on his return.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" demanded Sid, as he entered the darkened room, and proceeded to get ready to retire. "You'd think I'd committed an unpardonable crime. It was a jolly crowd I was with, and nothing out of the way. Bascome isn't half bad, when you get to know him."

"Only a little fresh, that's all," remarked Phil, while Tom mumbled a few words that might have been taken for anything.

The game with Michigan the next day demonstrated in how poor a condition was Randall, for the contest nearly went by the board, and Tom only pulled it out of the fire by excellent pitching, though he was not in the best of form.

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"Well, we won, anyhow," remarked Phil that night.

"Yes, but nothing to boast of. I'm worried about the Fairview game Saturday," said the captain.

"Do we play on their grounds?"

"No, they come here."

"Well, that's something in our favor. We'll have Bean Perkins and the other shouters with us. We've just got to win, Tom!"

"I know it, but——"

"There are no 'buts,' old man," declared the genial first baseman. "Just remember that the girls will be on hand, and they mustn't see us go down to defeat twice to a co-ed college."

"No, of course not," and Tom turned in.

The following days were devoted to practice—practice harder than any yet that term, for Tom and the coach worked the men every spare hour they could devote to the diamond, outside of lecture and study hours. Pete Backus improved wonderfully. He was not Sid's equal, but the best substitute that could be found.

"Oh, Sid, but I wish you were going to play," said Tom, with a little sigh, the night before the Fairview game.

"So do I," came in sorrowful tones from the second baseman. "But—Oh, well, what's the use of talking?" and he tried to laugh it off, but it was a poor attempt.

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Fairview was on hand early with a crowd of "rooters" and supporters, both young men and maidens, the next afternoon, when the Randall team fairly leaped out on the diamond.

"I wonder if Ruth is here?" said Phil, as he stopped a particularly "hot" ball Tom threw.

"Let's take a look," suggested the pitcher, and while the grand stand and bleachers were filling up the two strolled along, scanning the hundreds of faces.

"There she is!" cried Tom at length. "Miss Tyler's with her."

"And Miss Harrison is up there, too," added Phil. "And see who's with her—Miss Harrison, I mean."

"Who?"

"Langridge."

"By Jove! you're right," agreed Tom. "I guess he came to get a line on us. Well, he'll get it."

"Queer place he picked out to see the game from," went on Phil.

"Why?"

"It'll be sunny there, after a bit," replied Phil, for part of the seating accommodations on the Randall grounds were not of the best, and some grand stands were little better than the bleachers in the matter of shade. "He'll have the sun almost in his face before the game is half over," continued the first baseman. [173]

"Well, if it suits him, we oughtn't to kick," said Tom.

"No, I s'pose not. Hello, if there isn't Sid, and he's going to sit right down behind Langridge and Miss Harrison."

"That's so. Maybe he doesn't see 'em. Rather awkward if he and Langridge have a run-in here. But come on, we'll say how-d'y-do to the girls, and then get at practice," and, after greeting their friends, and assuring them that Fairview would go home beaten, Tom and Phil took their places with the other players.

"Now, fellows, we've got to win!" declared Tom emphatically just before the game started. "Last time we played Fairview we lost by a score of ten to three. Don't let it happen again."

"No, don't you dare to," cautioned Mr. Leighton.

A moment later the Randall players went out in the field, the home team having the privilege of batting last. The umpire took the new ball from its foil cover, and tossed it to Tom. The tall, good-looking pitcher looked at it critically, glanced around the field to see that his men were in position, and then sent in a few practice balls to Dutch Housenlager, who loomed up big and confident behind home plate. [174]

Ted Puder, the Fairview center fielder and captain, was the first man up, and was greeted with a round of cheers as he tapped his bat on the rubber. Dutch signalled for an out curve and Tom delivered it, right over the plate.

"Strike!" called the umpire.

"Wow!" jeered Fairview's friends, for Puder had not swung at it.

"Robber!" yelled some one, but the Fairview captain only laughed. "Make him give you a good one, Puder," he said.

But waiting availed Puder nothing, for Tom neatly struck him out, and followed it by doing the same to Lem Sellig. Frank Sullivan managed to find Tom's second delivery, and sent a neat little liner out toward Bricktop Molloy, at short. Bricktop seemed to have it fairly in his grasp, even though he had to reach out to one side for it, but his foot slipped, and the ball went on past him.

"Run, Frank, run!" screamed a score of voices, and Frank legged it for first, reaching the bag before Joe Jackson in left field could run up and redeem Bricktop's error by stopping the rolling ball.

"Never mind, two down—play for the batter," advised Dutch in a signal to Tom, and the pitcher nodded comprehendingly. Ned Williams, who followed Sullivan, knocked two fouls, both of which Dutch tried hard to get, but could not. Then Tom struck him out with a puzzling drop, and a goose egg went up on the score board for Fairview. [175]

"Guess they're not finding us as soft as they expected," remarked Holly Cross, as his side came in.

"It's early yet," advised Tom. "Wait until about the fifth inning, and then talk."

"Do you wish to spank me?" asked Bricktop, as he came up to Tom, looking sorrowful over his error.

"Don't do it again, that's all," said Coach Leighton.

"Not for worlds," promised the red-haired shortstop.

CHAPTER XX

RANDALL SCORES FIRST

Holly Cross was up first, and he faced John Allen, the Fairview pitcher, with a grin of confidence. He swung viciously at the first ball, and missed it clean.

"Make him give you a nice one," called Bricktop, who was coaching from third. "We've got all day, Holly. He'll tire in about two innings. He has no Irish blood in him, as I have," and there was a laugh at Bricktop's "rigging" while the Fairview pitcher smiled sheepishly.

But though Holly waited, it availed him but little. Three balls were called for him, after his first strike, though the Fairview crowd wanted to injure the umpire. Then Allen stiffened, and Holly walked back to the bench without even swinging the stick again. [176]

"Only one gone. We've got plenty of chances yet," called Bricktop, from the coaching box, and in his enthusiasm he stepped over the line. The umpire warned him back. Dan Woodhouse was up next.

"Make kindling wood of your bat," yelled an enthusiastic freshman in the Randall bleachers, but though Dan sent a nice bingle to center, well over the pitcher's head, the second baseman pulled it down, and Dan was out. Bricktop repeated this, save that he flied to Herbert Bower, in left field, and Randall had a zero to her credit. [177]

In the second and third innings neither side scored, and when the fourth was half over, with another minus mark for Fairview the crowd began to sit up and take notice.

"This'll be a hot game before it's through," prophesied Bert Bascome, who with Ford Fenton, and a crowd of like spirits sat together.

"That's right," agreed Ford. "My uncle says——"

"Sit down! Sit down!" yelled a score of voices about him, though the unfortunate Ford was not standing. He knew, however, what was meant, and uttered no protest.

Though Randall did her best when her chance came in the ending of the fourth, nothing resulted. Backus flied to Sam Soden and Tom Parsons managed to get to first on a clean hit to right field, but Joe Jackson, who followed him, struck out, and, as though emulating his brother, the other Jersey twin did likewise, letting Tom die on second.

"Say, when is something going to happen?" asked Holly Cross of Tom, as the home team filed out in the field. [178]

"It ought to, pretty soon now," replied Tom, as he kicked a small stone out of the pitchers' box.

Bean Perkins, with his crowd of "shouters" started the "Wallop 'em" song, in an endeavor to make things lively, and he very nearly succeeded, for John Allen, who came up first in the beginning of the fifth, rapped out a pretty one to left field. It looked as if Joe Jackson would miss it, but Joe wasn't there for that purpose. He had a long run to the side to get within reaching distance of the horsehide, but, as though to make up for striking out, he made a sensational catch, and was roundly applauded, while Allen walked back disgustedly from first, which he had almost reached.

"Pretty catch! Lovely catch!" yelled Bean Perkins. "Now a couple more like that, and things will be all ready for us when our boys come in."

Herbert Bower and Sam Soden, the next two Fairview players who followed Allen, were both struck out by Tom, who was doing some fine twirling, having given no player his base on balls yet.

"Now, boys, show 'em what you can do!" pleaded a score of Randall "fans," as Tom and his men walked in to the bench for their share of the fifth inning. [179]

Dutch Housenlager was up first, and he selected a bat with care.

"What are you going to do, me son," asked Bricktop solicitously.

"Knock a home run," declared Dutch, and he faced the pitcher with a grim air. He didn't do that, but he did rap out a single, and got to first. Then came Phil Clinton, who made a sacrifice bunt. That is, it was intended for that, but the pitcher fumbled it, and was delayed in getting it to first. Then the throw was so wild that the Fairview first baseman had to take his foot off the bag to get it, and, meanwhile Phil was legging it for the bag for all he was worth, while Dutch went on to second.

"Batter's out!" howled the umpire, though it seemed to all the Randall players that Phil was safe. Tom protested hotly at the decision, but it stood, and, though it looked as if there would be trouble, Mr. Leighton calmed things down.

"Only one gone," he said, "and Holly Cross is up next. He'll bring in Dutch, and score himself."

Holly sent out a beautiful hit to center field, and there was a chorus of joyful cries.

"Go on! Go on!"

"Make a home run!" [180]

"Come on in, Dutch, you old ice wagon!"

Dutch legged it from second to third, and started home, but the ball, which the center fielder had managed to get sooner than had been expected, looked dangerous to Dutch, and he ran back to third, after being halfway home. Holly was safe on second, and amid a storm of encouraging yells Dan Woodhouse got up.

"Now a home run, Kindlings!" called the crowd, and then Bean and his cohorts began singing: "We've Got 'em on the Run Now."

Dan got two balls, and the third one was just where he wanted it. [He slammed it out for a three base hit](#), and Dutch and Holly scored the first two runs of the game, while Tom did a war dance at third, where he was coaching. On a single by Bricktop Dan came in, though he was nearly caught at home, for the ball was quickly relayed in from left field, where the shortstop had sent it, but old Kindlings slid in through a cloud of dust, and Charley Simonson, who was catching for Fairview, dropped the horsehide, so Dan's run counted.

"Three—nothing! Three—nothing!" yelled Tom, wild with joy. "Now, boys, we've struck our

gait! And only one out!”

“Watch his glass arm break!” shouted several in scorn at the Fairview pitcher, but the latter refused to let them get his “goat” or rattle him and kept a watchful eye on Bricktop at first, when Pete Backus came up. [181]

“Now, Pete, don’t forget what I told you!” shouted Tom, as the lad who was taking Sid’s place stepped up, but poor Pete must have had a poor memory, for he struck out, and when Tom himself took up his stick, Bricktop, who had been vainly trying to steal second and who was somewhat tired out, by the pitcher’s efforts to catch him napping on first, finally did what the Fairview players hoped he would do—he played off too far, and he couldn’t get back, when Allen suddenly slammed the ball over to the first baseman. Bricktop was out, and the Randall side was retired, but with three runs to its credit.

“That’ll do for a starter,” observed Tom, as he put on his pitching glove. “We’ll duplicate that next inning.”

But the sixth saw goose eggs in the frames of both nines, though Tom sent a pretty, low fly out to center, where it was neatly caught by Ted Puder, who had to jump for it. The Jersey twins struck out in monotonous succession, thus ending the sixth.

“Now for the lucky seventh!” yelled a crowd of Fairview supporters. “Everybody stand up!” and the big crowd arose to get some relief from sitting still so long. [182]

The seventh was destined to be lucky in spite of the efforts of Tom and his men to hold back Fairview.

CHAPTER XXI

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RANDALL IN THE TENTH

Lem Sellig, who was up first for Fairview, had what Tom thought was a wicked look in his eye. Whether Tom lost control or whether Lem surprised himself and his friends by finding the ball, in spite of its puzzling curve was not known, but at any rate he knocked a two bagger, and it was almost a three sacker, for the center fielder dropped the ball, and had some time in finding it in the grass before he threw it in just in time to shut off Lem from going to third. This stroke of luck seemed to give Fairview confidence, and Frank Sullivan almost duplicated Lem’s trick, bringing in the third baseman, and getting to second himself.

“Now we’re going to walk away from ‘em,” declared Lem, as he tallied the first run for his side, and it did look so, for Ned Williams found Tom Parsons for a couple of fouls. But the fatal blow was wanting, and Ned went back to the bench, amid groans. Sullivan stole to third on a ball that managed to get past Dutch at home, and then followed a wild scene when John Allen knocked a pretty fly, bringing in Frank, but getting out himself. This made the score two to three in favor of Randall, and there was a nervous tension when Tom got ready to attend to Herbert Bower, the next man up. [184]

“I’ve got to dispose of him with some style,” thought the Randall twirler, “or our fellows will get rattled. Let’s see if I can’t do it.”

It looked a bit discouraging when his first two deliveries were called balls, but the next three could not have been better, and Bower was struck out.

“All we’ve got to do is hold ‘em down now, and we’ve got the game,” declared Dutch, as he walked with Tom in from the field.

“We’ve got to get some more runs,” insisted the captain.

But they didn’t. Dutch, Phil and Holly went down in one, two, three order. And a zero went up in the seventh frame for Randall.

Tom struck out Sam Soden for a starter in the eighth, and then he lost his balance, or something else happened, for he issued a free pass to first for Simonson, amid a chorus of groans from the Randall lads, and jeers from Fairview, who hurled such encouraging remarks at Tom as these:

“We’ve got him going now!”

“He’s all in!”

“We have his goat!”

“Talk about glass arms!”

Whether it was this jeering, or whether Tom was really tired, did not develop, but, at any rate, Ed Felton, who followed Simonson, placed a magnificent hit just inside the first base line, and with such speed did it go that it sifted down in through the seats of the right field bleachers, and Ed scored the first home run of the game, bringing in Simonson, whose tally tied the score; the homer putting Fairview one run ahead.

“Now we’ve got ‘em! They’re easy fruit!” yelled the Fairview throng, the girls from the college blending their shrill voices with those of their male companions. Tom was rather shaky when he [185]

and Dutch held a little consultation in front of home plate, as Puder walked up with his stick. Puder singled, and Tom was getting worried, but he managed to pull himself together, and struck out Sellig and Sullivan, killing Puder on second, and halting any further scoring by Fairview that inning.

"Maybe you'd better put Rod Evert in the box in my place," suggested Tom to Mr. Leighton, as the Randall nine, much dispirited, came up for their turn at the bat, the score being four to three in favor of Fairview.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the coach. "You'll do all right, Tom. This is only a little slump."

"I *hope* this is the end of it," remarked the pitcher. "We can't stand much more."

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"I'll duplicate Felton's home run," promised Dutch.

"That's the way to talk," declared Ed Kerr, who was not feeling very happy over the showing made by the team of which he was manager.

But alas for Dutch's hope! He didn't get a chance to bat, for Woodhouse struck out, and Molloy and Pete Backus followed.

"If we can hold 'em this inning, and then get two runs, it will do the trick," remarked Holly Cross at the beginning of the ninth.

"If," spoke Tom dubiously, for he was beginning to lose heart. However, he gritted his teeth and, after a few warming-up balls before Ned Williams came up, he pitched to such good advantage that Williams was out in record time. John Allen swiped savagely at the horsehide, but it was not to be, and he walked back to the bench, while Bower came out, a smile of confidence on his face.

"Here's another home run," he prophesied, but Tom, in his heart, decided it was not to be, nor was it, for Bower struck out. This still left the score four to three, in favor of Fairview at the ending of the first half of the ninth inning. Randall needed two runs to win, but one would tie the tally, and give them another chance. It would also afford another opportunity for Fairview.

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The big crowd was on edge. Songs and college cries were being hurled back and forth from grand stand and bleachers.

"The 'Conquer or Die' song, fellows," yelled Bean Perkins, and the strains of "*Aut Vincere Aut Mori!*" sung in Latin, welled sweetly and solemnly over the diamond. Tom Parsons felt the tears coming into his eyes, as he walked in.

"Oh, if we only can win!" he breathed.

He was up first, and he almost trembled as he faced the Fairview pitcher. There was a mist in his eyes, but somehow he managed to see through it the ball that was coming swiftly toward him. It looked good to his practiced eye, and he swung at it with all his force. To his delight there followed that most delightful of sounds, the "ping," as the tough mushroom bat met the ball.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! A pretty hit! A beaut!" Tom heard the crowd yell, as he tossed aside the club, and started for first like a deer.

"Go on! Go on!" yelled Holly Cross. "Keep a-going, Tom!"

Tom kept on, swung wide around first, and then legged it for second. The ball had gone well over the center fielder's head, and he was running back toward the daisies after it. "Go on! Go on!" implored Holly. Tom reached third before the ball was fielded in, and he remained there panting, while Joe Jackson took his place at home plate, swaying his bat to and fro.

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"None gone, Tom on third and Joe at bat," mused Mr. Leighton. "I wish Joe was a better hitter, but maybe he can knock out a bingle that will do the trick."

Joe did, though it was more through an error on the part of the second baseman, who muffed the fly, than any ability on Joe's part, that the Jersey twin got to first.

Tom came in, amid a burst of cheers and yells, scoring the tying run. Would there be a winning one, or would ten innings be necessary?

Jerry Jackson struck out, while his friends groaned, but Joe, with desperate daring, managed to steal second. Then up came Dutch Housenlager, and when he hit the ball a resounding whack the heart of more than one lad was in his throat. But, by a desperate run, the left fielder caught the fly, and Dutch was out, while Joe Jackson was on third. He died there, for Phil, to his great chagrin, struck out. The score stood a tie 4 to 4.

"Ten innings! Ten innings!" yelled the crowd.

Bean Perkins and his fellows were singing all the songs they knew. So were the Fairview cohorts, and the scene was a wild one.

"Hold 'em down, Tom; hold 'em down!" implored the coach as the plucky pitcher went to his box.

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It looked as if he was not going to do it, for he passed Sam Soden to first, and duplicated the trick for Charley Simonson and with two men on bases, not a man down, and Tom as nervous as a cat, it began to look dubious for Randall. The crowd was on edge. So was Tom, with two lively runners on the first and second bags to watch. Several times he threw to first, hoping to catch Simonson napping, but it was not to be.

Suddenly Pete Backus, who was holding down second base, threw up his hand to shield his

eyes, and Tom saw a dazzling streak of light flash across from the grand stand.

"What's the matter, Pete?" asked the pitcher.

"Some girl up there must have bright buttons on, or a hat pin made of diamonds, for they're flashing in my eyes," complained Pete. Then the flash vanished and Tom was about to pitch a ball for Ed Felton, who was up, when, as he gave a comprehensive look at first and second, he again saw the dazzling gleam in Pete's eyes.

"We'll have to stop that!" exclaimed the captain. "I'll ask Kerr or Mr. Leighton to speak to whoever's wearing such bright adornments."

"Funny it should hit me in the eyes all the while," complained Pete, changing his position, but the beam of light followed him.

"Some one's doing that on purpose," declared Tom, and he fairly ran toward the grand stand. But before he got there he saw something happening.

The beam of light came from that section of the stand near where Tom had noticed Langridge and Miss Harrison sitting. Then, as he raced on, he also remembered that Sid sat there too. A terrible thought came to him. Could Sid be trying to disconcert the player who was taking his place, by flashing a mirror in his eyes?

"Of course he wouldn't do such a dirty trick!" said Tom to himself, a moment after he had entertained the thought.

The captain reached the stand, in company with Dutch, who had run back in response to the pitcher's motion, in time to see Sid leap to his feet, reach forward toward Langridge, who sat in front of him, while the deposed second baseman exclaimed:

"You mean sneak!"

"What's the matter?" asked Langridge coolly, as he turned an insolent stare on Sid. "Mad because I'm with Miss Harrison?"

"No, you cur! But I see what you're doing! Hand over that mirror!" and before Langridge could protest Sid had yanked him backward, partly over the seat, and had grasped the right hand of the former Randall student—a hand containing a small, circular mirror.

"You were flashing that in the eyes of our second baseman, you sneak!" cried Sid hotly. "I was watching you! You held it down, where you thought no one would see. You ought to be kicked off the stand!"

"I did not!" declared Langridge brazenly, yet there was fear in his manner, and the mirror was mute evidence. "I was just going to hand it to Miss Harrison," he went on. "To let her see if her hat—"

The girl turned her blue eyes on him, and shrank away from the notice attracted to her escort. Langridge did not complete his lie.

"I saw what you were doing," went on Sid. "Wasn't something flashing in Pete's eyes?" he asked, as Tom and Dutch, with some of the other Randall players, stood on the ground, in front of where the scene had taken place.

"That's what I came in to see about," declared Tom.

"I—I didn't know it was shining in his eyes," stammered Langridge. "Let go of me, Henderson, or I'll make you!"

Sid did not want to make a scene, and released his hold of Langridge. Tom, by a motion, signalled to Sid to say nothing more, but it was principally on the score of not wanting to further subject Miss Harrison to embarrassment, rather than to save Langridge from punishment. Then, too, there was only slim proof against Langridge. Sid grabbed the mirror away from the bully, and the latter dared not protest. There were some hisses, and Miss Harrison blushed painfully. Langridge tried to brazen it out, but, with a muttered excuse that he wanted to get a cigar, he left the stand, and the blue-eyed girl, after a frightened glance around, went and sat with Ruth and Madge. Sid looked as if he wanted to follow her, but he did not dare, and after Tom, Ed Kerr and Mr. Leighton had consulted together for a few minutes, it was agreed to take no action against Langridge, who had sneaked off.

"He did it, all right," decided Tom. "He wanted to rattle Pete and make us lose to Fairview, but we're not going to do it."

"Indeed not," asserted the coach. "Hold 'em down now, Tom. One run will do the trick."

There were two men on bases, and none out when Ed Felton resumed his place at home, and Tom was inclined to shiver when he remembered what Ed had done to the ball before. But the pitcher took a strong brace, and struck out Ed, much to that worthy's surprise.

Then, by some magnificent pitching, in the face of long odds, Tom retired Puder and Lem Sellig with an ease that he himself marveled at. His arm seemed to have gotten back some of its cunning.

A zero went up in the tenth frame for Fairview.

"That looks good to me!" cried Holly Cross, dancing about. "If we can't get in one run now, Tom, we ought to be put out of the league."

"Well, it's up to you, Holly," remarked Tom. "You're up first."

"By Jove, you'll not be ashamed of me!" declared the big center fielder.

He rapped out a nice bingle that took him to second base. Then came Dan Woodhouse, and he struck out, amid groans.

Bricktop walked up with an air of confidence, amid encouraging comments from his chums. The Fairview pitcher was getting a little rattled, and threw so wild that the catcher, though he jumped for the ball, missed it, and had to run back while Holly, who had stolen to third, came in with a rush. There was a mixup at the plate, as Holly slid in, accompanied by a cloud of dust, but the pitcher, who had run up to assist the catcher, and make amends for his wild throw, dropped the ball, and Holly scored the winning run.

There was a moment of silence until the big crowd and the players appreciated what it meant to pull out a victory in the tenth, and that after an exceedingly close game. Then came a burst of cheers, and applause that made the grand stands and bleachers rattle. [194]

"Wow! Wow! Wow!" yelled the exultant Randallites, and they capered about in very joy, like wild Indians, slapping each other on the back, punching and being punched, cheering for themselves and for Fairview by turns.

CHAPTER XXII

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SID DESPAIRS

"Wasn't it great!" demanded Dutch Housenlager, as he waltzed up to Tom, and tried to lead him out into a dance on the diamond. "Immense, eh? Pulling it out of the fire that way?"

"Yes, that's what we did—pulled it out of the fire," agreed Tom, with a smile. "We needed this victory, and I'm glad we won, but we've got to play better—and that includes me—if we're to have the loving cup this year. Our batting and fielding could be improved a whole lot."

"Oh, of course," agreed Dutch, "but aren't you a bit proud of us, captain?"

"Oh, sure—of course," answered the pitcher heartily. "Let joy be unconfined," and with a yell of pure enjoyment he joined in the impromptu dance.

Fairview was glum, but not cast down. They had cheered the winning team, and Ted Puder, the captain, came up to Tom.

"You certainly beat us fair and square," he acknowledged. "I hope you don't think we had anything to do with Langridge using that mirror to dazzle the eyes of your second baseman." [196]

"Never thought of such a thing," declared Tom with emphasis. "The cad worked that trick up all by his lonesome. I guess he thought maybe Sid was playing there, and he has a grudge against Henderson—yet that couldn't have been it either, for Langridge knows Sid is suspended, and anyhow, Sid was sitting directly back of the sneak, where Langridge could have seen him."

"Yes, it's a good thing Sid detected him. Well, we'll beat you next time."

"Forget it," advised Tom with a laugh.

"Come on, cap," called Phil to him a moment later. "Let's look up Sid, and, incidentally, the girls."

"Sure," agreed the pitcher, and a moment later he and Phil were greeting Madge, Ruth and Mabel. But Sid had hurried away.

The little group strolled past the grand stand, Tom and Phil excusing themselves while they went in to get on their street garments, the girls promising to wait for them.

"Wonder where Sid went?" asked Tom.

"Give it up," replied Phil. "Langridge lit out, too; the cad! What a chump he must be to think he could get away with a game like that!"

"Yes, it was almost as good to have Sid discover him trying it, as if our old chum had held down the second bag," declared the captain. "A flash at the right moment would have confused Pete, and might have cost us the game." [197]

"That's right. Come on, hurry up, or the girls will get tired of waiting."

The two went out, in time to see Langridge approaching the three young ladies. The Boxer Hall pitcher was striding over the grass toward Miss Harrison, who stood a little apart from her two friends.

"I'm awfully sorry to have kept you waiting, Miss Mabel," began Langridge. "The truth was, I had an important engagement, that I came near forgetting."

"You haven't kept me waiting," was the cool answer.

"No? Well, I'm glad of it. Now, if you're ready we'll trot along. I met a friend of mine, Mr. Bascome, of Randall, and he will take us back to Fairview in his auto."

"Thank you, I don't care to go," replied Miss Harrison.

"What? Don't you like rides in the gasolene gig?" asked Langridge, with a forced laugh.

"Oh, I didn't exactly mean that," went on Miss Harrison. "It's the company I object to."

"You mean Bascome? Why he's all right. Maybe he's a little too——"

"I mean you!" burst out the girl, flashing a look of scorn on him from her blue eyes. "I don't care to ride with a person who seeks to take unfair advantage of another in a ball game." [198]

"You mean that mirror? That was all an accident—I assure you it was. I didn't intend anything—honestly."

"You will favor me by not speaking to me again!" came in snapping tones from the indignant girl. "I shall refuse to recognize you after this, Mr. Langridge."

"Oh, but I say now——" protested the bully, as he took a step forward. But Mabel linked her arm in that of Ruth, and, as Tom and Phil came along just then, Langridge, who was aware that they had heard the foregoing conversation, slipped hastily away, with a very red face.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," began Tom, unconsciously repeating the remark of Langridge. Miss Harrison seemed a little ill at ease, and Phil blurted out:

"Oh, come on! Let's hurry, or there won't be any ice cream left at Anderson's. It's a hot day and the crowd must be dry as a bone. I know I am. Come on, girls."

They had a merry little time, until it was necessary for the girls to return to Fairview, whither Tom and Phil escorted them.

"Did you say any more to Langridge, old man?" asked Tom of Sid, that night in the room of the "inseparables." [199]

"No, it wasn't necessary."

"You should have heard Miss Harrison lay him out," exulted Phil. "She certainly put it all over him!"

"How?" demanded Sid eagerly, and his chums took turns telling him how the blue-eyed girl had given Langridge his "walking papers" in a manner very distasteful to that individual.

"No! You don't mean it!" exclaimed Sid joyfully. Then, as a look came into his eyes that his chums had not seen there since the first happy days he had experienced with Mabel Harrison, Sid went on:

"Say, what's the date of the Junior racket? I've mislaid my tickets."

"Why?" asked Tom mischievously, though he well knew.

"None of your affair," retorted Sid, but there was no sting in his answer.

"It's next Friday," put in Phil.

Sid tossed aside the things on his desk, and made a great fuss about writing a letter, while Phil and Tom casually looked on, well knowing to whom the epistle was addressed. Sid made several false starts, and destroyed enough paper to have enabled him to compute several problems and tore up a lot of envelopes before he finished something that met with his approval, and then he went out to post it. [200]

"He's asked Miss Harrison to go to the Junior affair with him," said Phil.

"Of course," agreed Tom. "I hope she goes."

Sid lived in an atmosphere of rosy hope for several days, but, when no reply came, he began to get uneasy. He eagerly accepted an invitation extended to him a few days later, to accompany Phil and Tom on a trip to Fairview, Ruth again having asked her brother to call to talk about the proposed trip to Europe. The three chums found the three girls in the reception room, and Miss Harrison showed some embarrassment when Sid entered. With a view to dispelling it Ruth, with a rapid signal to her brother, Tom and Madge, left the room, they following, leaving Miss Harrison and Sid alone there.

"Lovely weather," remarked Sid desperately.

"Very," answered Miss Harrison, uncertain whether to be amused or angry at the trick played on her by her chums.

"Are you going to the Junior dance Friday night?" went on Sid. "I wrote and asked you—you got my letter, didn't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Henderson, and I should have answered before, but I was uncertain——"

"Won't you let me take you?" pleaded Sid.

"I would like—won't you—can you explain a certain matter which I wish to know about?" she asked. "You know what I mean. Believe me, I'm not prudish, or anything like that, but—if you only knew how I feel about it—won't you tell me about that—that item in the paper accusing you?" she stammered. "If you weren't there, why can't you say so?" and she leaned eagerly forward, looking Sid full in the face. [201]

He scarcely seemed to breathe. There was a great struggle going on within him. He looked into the blue eyes of the girl.

"I—I can't tell you—yet," he said brokenly.

"Then I can't go with you to the dance," she replied in a low voice, and she turned and left the room, going back to the den she shared with Ruth and Madge, while Sid went out the front door,

and across the campus; nor would he stay, though Phil and Tom called to him, but walked off, black despair in his heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

[202]

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

Tom and Phil went to the Junior dance, taking Madge and Ruth, and, though they enjoyed it thoroughly, there was a little sorrow in the hearts of the two lads that Sid was not there to share the pleasure with them.

"I wonder why he didn't come?" asked Phil of Ruth, as the four stood chatting about his absence, over an ice, during an intermission.

"You ought to be able to guess," replied his sister.

"Why?" persisted Phil.

"Because a certain person with blue eyes didn't."

"Oh, you mean——" and Phil would have blurted out the name, had not Miss Tyler laid a pretty hand over his mouth.

"Hush," cautioned Madge. "No names out in company, if you please."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom comprehendingly. "How is she?"

"Rather miserable," answered Ruth. "She wouldn't come with us, though we knew you boys wouldn't object."

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"Of course not," spoke Phil quickly.

"And she stayed there in the room, moping."

"Just like——" began Phil, and again the pretty fingers spread themselves across his lips.

"It's too bad," resumed Tom. "If he only would explain then——"

"Then everything would be all right," finished Ruth. "But he won't. Talk about women having a mind of their own, and being stubborn! I know a certain young man very much that way."

"Oh, you mustn't talk so about him," expostulated Phil. "He's all right. There's something queer at the bottom of it, and I shouldn't be surprised to learn that Langridge had had a hand in it."

"By Jove, I never thought of that!" exclaimed Tom. "Maybe you're right. I wonder if we could do anything to help?"

"Better not meddle," cautioned Ruth. "Madge and I tried to use our influence, and were roundly snubbed for our pains. It's too bad, but maybe things will come right after a while. Oh, there's a lovely waltz! Isn't it perfectly grand!" and her eyes sparkled in anticipation as Tom led her out on the floor while the music welled forth in dreamy strains.

Back in the "den of the inseparables" Sid sat in gloomy loneliness, making a pretense of studying.

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"Oh, hang it all!" he cried at length, as he flung the book from him, knocking down the alarm clock in its flight. "What is the use? I might as well give up."

Then, as he noted the cessation of the fussy ticking of the timepiece he crossed to where it lay on the ragged rug, and picked it up.

"Hope it isn't damaged," he murmured contritely. He shook it vigorously, and the ticking resumed. "It's all right," he added, with a breath of relief, "you couldn't hurt it with an axe. Guess I might as well turn in. But I wish——" he paused, shrugged his shoulders helplessly, and did not finish.

There came a knock at the door, and Sid started. He flung open the portal, and Wallops, the messenger, stood in the hall.

"A note for you, Mr. Henderson," he said. "A fellow just brought it."

Sid snatched it eagerly, a hopeful look showing on his face. Then, as he saw the writing, there seemed to come into his eyes a shadow of fear.

"All right, Wallops," he replied kindly, and he closed the door.

"Again," he exclaimed. "Oh, will this never end? Must I carry this secret all through college?" and he tore the note to bits. Then he slipped on another coat, pulled a cap down over his eyes and went out.

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"Why, Sid isn't here!" exclaimed Phil, when he and Tom, bubbling over still, with the spirit of the dance, came back to their apartment, after having escorted the girls home.

"That's right," agreed the pitcher, "and he's not allowed any more passes since that affair with the pocket flask. He's taking chances to slip out. Zane will be almost sure to catch him, and a few turns like that and Sid will be expelled. I wonder what's gotten into him lately?"

"Give it up," responded Phil. "Let's hope that he won't be nabbed."

It was a vain hope, for Sid, coming into college about three o'clock that morning, was detected by the proctor. There was quite a stir over it, and Sid came mighty near expulsion. Only his fine scholarship saved him, but he was warned that another offense would be fatal to his chances.

Sid said nothing to his chums, but maintained a gloomy reserve, which wore off in a few days, but still left a cloud between them.

Meanwhile Tom was kept busy with his studies and his interest in the nine, while Phil was "boning" away, seeking a scholarship prize, and devoting as much time as he could to practice on the diamond. [206]

Sid, barred from participation in regular games, was, however, allowed to practice with the 'varsity, and play on the scrub as suited his fancy, and Tom was glad to have him do either, for he cherished a secret hope that the ban might be removed before the end of the term, and he wanted Sid to keep in form. As for the second baseman he was becoming a "crackerjack" wielder of the stick, and at either right or left hand work was an example to be looked up to by the younger players, and his average something to be sighed after.

It happened one afternoon, a few days prior to an important out-of-town game Tom's nine was to play, that the captain came upon Ed Kerr, the manager, busy figuring, in a corner of the gymnasium, his brow as wrinkled as a washboard.

"What's the row?" asked Tom. "Conic sections or a problem in trig, Ed?"

"It's a problem in finance," was the response. "Ferd Snowden, the treasurer, has just handed me a statement of how the nine's finances are, and, for the life of me I can't see how it happened."

"How what happened?"

"The shortage."

"Shortage?" and there was a frightened note in Tom's voice. [207]

"Yes, shortage. I thought we were running along pretty well, but according to Snowden we're in debt to him about ten dollars, for money he's advanced from his own pocket. He says he can't afford any more, and—well, it means we can't play Richfield Saturday."

"Why not?"

"Because we haven't money enough to take the team out of town, and back again. Besides, Dutch needs a new catching mitt. I don't see how it happened. I thought we were making money."

"So did I. Let's go have a talk with Snowden."

The treasurer of the nine could only confirm his statement. He showed by figures that the amount of money taken in had not met the expenses, so far.

"The crowds haven't been what they ought to have been," Snowden explained. "Randall isn't drawing as it used to."

"We're playing better ball," fired Tom at him.

"That may be. I'm only talking from a money standpoint. We're in debt ten dollars. Not that I mind, for I don't need the money, but I thought Kerr ought to know. I can't advance any more, and the team can't go to Richfield without cash for railroad fare."

"That's right," agreed Tom, scratching his head. "Well, the only thing to do is to call a meeting and ask for subscriptions. The fellows will easily make up the deficit, and give enough over to provide for traveling expenses. Dutch can use his old glove for a few games yet, and we ought to get enough out of this Richfield game to put us on our feet. After that we have a number of contests that will draw big crowds. Then comes the final whack at Boxer Hall, and that is always a money-maker. We'll come out right yet, Ed. Don't worry." [208]

"I'm not, only it looks as if I hadn't managed things right."

"Nonsense! Of course you have. The fellows will go down in their pockets. I'll call a meeting for this afternoon."

CHAPTER XXIV

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PITCHFORK'S TALL HAT

There was a buzz of excitement among the college students when the notice had been read, calling for a meeting of the athletic committee, to straighten out a financial tangle. There were various comments, and, though some remarked that it was "always that way," and that a "few fellows had to be depended on for the money," and like sentiments, the majority of opinion was that the sum needed would quickly be subscribed.

"Why don't they make the ball nine a stock concern?" asked Mort Eddington, whose father was an "operator" in Wall street. "If they sold stock, lots of fellows would be glad to buy."

"Yes, considering that the nine has made a barrel of money every year, it would be a paying proposition," added Holly Cross. "But we don't do business that way, Eddington, as you'll learn when you've been here more than one term. What money we have left over at the end of the season goes to help some college club, or a team that hasn't done so well. We're not stock jobbers in Randall."

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"That's all right. Maybe you'll be glad of some money you could have from selling stock, before you're through," sneered the "operator's" son.

"Oh, I guess not," responded Dutch. "The fellows will toe the mark with the rocks all right."

"My uncle says it's all in how a team is managed," began a voice, and Ford Fenton strolled up. "My uncle says——"

"Get out of here, you shrimp!" cried Holly Cross, making a rush at Ford. "If your uncle heard you, he'd take you out of this college for disgracing him."

"That's right," agreed Dutch, making a playful attempt to trip up Ford, which the much-uncled youth skillfully avoided.

"You're right, just the same," declared Bert Bascome, who came up at that juncture. "The team hasn't been managed right, and I'm going to have something to say about it at the meeting."

The session called by Tom to consider financial matters was well attended. Tom, by general consent, was made chairman.

"You all know what we're here for," began the captain, who was not fond of long speeches. "The nine needs money to help it out of a hole."

"Who got it in the hole?" asked Bascome with a sneer.

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"Bang!" went Tom's gavel.

"You'll have a chance to speak when the time comes," said the pitcher sharply. "I'll be through in a minute."

Bascome sat down, muttering something about "manager" and "money."

"We need cash," went on Tom, "to carry us over a certain period. After that we'll have plenty. We haven't made as much as we expected. Now we'd like subscriptions, and if any fellow feels that he can't afford to give the money outright, don't let that stand in his way. We'll only borrow it, and pay it back at the end of the season. Of course, if any one wants to give it without any strings on it, so much the better. I've got ten dollars that goes that way."

"So have I!"

"Here too!"

"Put me down for fifteen!"

"I've got five that isn't working!"

These were some of the cries that greeted Tom's closing words.

"I'll let the treasurer take it," announced the chairman. "Get busy, Snowden. We've got enough now to take the team out of town."

Phil, who was sitting near Sid, looked at his chum, and remarked:

"You're going to help us out, aren't you, Sid? Seems to me I saw you with a fair-sized roll yesterday."

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"I—I'd like to help, first rate," answered Sid, in some confusion, "only I'm broke now."

Phil did not reply, but there was a queer look on his face. He was wondering what Sid had done with his money. This was the second time he had unexpectedly "gone broke."

Subscriptions were pouring in on Snowden, and it began to look as if Tom's prophecy would hold good, and that the boys only need be told of the needs of the nine to have them attended to. Bert Bascome, who had been whispering with Ford Fenton, and some of his cronies, suddenly arose.

"Mr. Chairman," began Bascome.

"Mr. Bascome," responded Tom.

"I rise to a question of personal privilege," he went on pompously.

"What is it?" asked Tom, trying not to smile.

"I would like to know why it is that the nine hasn't made money enough to carry itself so far this season, when it has played a number of games, and won several?" went on Bascome.

"One reason is that the attendance was not large enough to cover expenses, and leave a sufficiently large sum to be divided between our team and the ones we played," stated the captain, wondering what Bascome was driving at.

"I would like to inquire if it is not because the team was not properly managed?" shot out Bascome. "I believe that if Ford Fenton had been elected we——"

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"Drop it!"

"Dry up!"

"Put him out!"

"Treason!"

"Fresh! Fresh!"

A score of lads were on their feet, shouting, yelling, demanding to be recognized, shaking their fists at Bascome and uttering dire threats.

"Mr. Chairman, may I spake wan wurd!" cried Bricktop Molloy, in his excitement lapsing into a rich brogue.

Tom was banging away with his gavel, but he managed to make his voice heard above the tumult.

"Mr. Bascome has the floor!" he cried.

"Put him out!"

"Who is he, anyhow?"

"Whoever heard of Bascome?"

Again the cries; again the banging of the gavel, and at last Tom succeeded in producing quiet.

"Mr. Bascome has the floor," the chairman announced. "Do I understand that you ask that as a point of information?" and Tom gazed at the wealthy freshman, who, through all the tumult, had maintained his place, sneeringly indifferent to the threats made against him. [214]

"That's what I want to know," he stated.

"I'll let the entire college answer that if necessary," declared Tom. "Mr. Bascome has asked a question——"

"Don't answer him!" yelled Dutch.

Bang! went the gavel. From his corner where he had been seated, doing some figuring, Ed Kerr arose—his face white.

"Mr. Chairman! A question of personal privilege!" he cried.

"Go on!" answered Tom, forgetting his parliamentary language.

"I beg to tender my resignation as manager of the Randall baseball nine!" cried Ed.

"No! No!"

"We won't take it!"

"Make him sit down!"

"Don't listen to him!"

"Let's haze Bascome!"

"Fellows, will you be quiet?" begged Tom. "I won't recognize anyone until you're quiet!" and he banged away.

Gradually there came a hush, while both Bascome and Kerr remained on their feet.

"There is a question before the house," went on the captain, "and until that is settled I can't listen to anything else. Mr. Bascome wants to know whether the present financial trouble of the nine is not due to the manager. How do you answer him?" [215]

"No! No! No!" came in a great chorus.

Tom turned to Ed Kerr.

"Are there any who think otherwise?" asked the chairman.

"Yes," called Bascome, and he was supported by half a dozen, including Ford Fenton. There were groans of protest, but Tom silenced them.

"I think Mr. Bascome has his answer," declared the chairman. "You have an almost overwhelming vote of confidence, Mr. Manager, and I congratulate you. Is there any further business to come before the meeting. Oh, yes, I almost forgot. How are you making out, Mr. Treasurer?"

"Fine!" cried Snowden. "All we need and more, too."

"Good! Then the meeting is adjourned. We don't need any motion," and Tom started to leave the little platform.

"Look here!" blustered Bert Bascome, "I'm a member of the athletic committee, and you can't carry things in this high-handed manner. I move that we go into executive session and consider the election of a new manager. Mr. Kerr has resigned, as I understand it."

"Forget it!" advised Dutch Housenlager, and he stretched out his foot, and skillfully tripped up the noisy objector, who went down in a heap, with Ford Fenton on top of him. [216]

"Here! Quit! I'll have you expelled for that!" spluttered Bascome, rising and making a rush for Dutch. But he was surrounded by a mass of students, who laughed and joked with him, shoving him from side to side until he was so mauled and hauled and mistreated that he was glad to make his escape.

"Little rat!" muttered Holly Cross, as he saw Bascome and Ford going off together. "That's all

they're good for—to make trouble.”

“Yes,” agreed Tom, “Bascome’s been sore ever since he couldn’t have his way about electing Ford Fenton manager. But I guess we’re out of the woods now. Get in good shape for the Richfield game Saturday, fellows.”

The crowd rushed from the gymnasium, laughing and shouting, and refusing to listen to Kerr, who still talked of resigning, though he was finally shown that the objection to him amounted to nothing. It was still light enough for some practice, and most of the lads headed for the diamond. Tom, Phil and Sid walked along together. As they passed under the side window of the East Dormitory, where the freshmen and seniors roomed, Phil spied, hanging from a casement, a tall, silk hat.

“Get on to the tile!” he cried. “Some blooming freshman must have hung it there to air, ready for a shindig to-night. Bet you can’t hit it, Tom. Two out of three. If you do I’ll stand for sodas for the bunch.”

“It’s a go!” agreed the pitcher.

“Here’s a ball,” remarked Sid, handing Tom one. “Let’s see what you can do.”

Tom fingered the horsehide, glanced critically at the hat, which hung on a stick out of the window, and then drew back his arm.

“Here goes!” he cried, and, an instant later the ball was whizzing through the air. Straight as the proverbial arrow it went, and so skillfully had Tom thrown, that the spheroid went right into the hat—and, came out on the other side, through the top of the crown, making a disastrous rent. Then ball and hat came to the ground together.

“Fine shot!” cried Phil admiringly.

“That hat won’t do duty to-night,” observed Sid. “You knocked the top clean out, Tom,” and he ran forward to pick it up. As he did so he was aware of an indignant figure coming from the dormitory. So, in fact, were Phil and Tom. A moment later, as Sid held the ruined silk hat in his hands, Professor Emerson Tines confronted the lads.

“May I ask what you young gentlemen are doing with my hat?” he asked in frigid tones.

“Your—your hat?” stammered Tom.

“My hat,” repeated the stern teacher. “I was a witness to your act of vandalism. You may come with me to Dr. Churchill at once!”

CHAPTER XXV

A PETITION

Phil, Tom and Sid stood staring blankly at one another. Sid still held the broken hat, until Professor Tines came up and took it from him.

“Ruined, utterly ruined!” murmured the teacher. “My best hat!”

“We—I—that is I—didn’t know it was your hat,” stammered Tom. “I threw the ball through it.”

“You didn’t know it was my hat?” asked Professor Tines, as if such ignorance was inexcusable. “Whose did you suppose it was, pray?”

“Some galoot’s—I mean some freshman’s,” stammered Phil. “You see, it was hanging from a window in the freshmen’s dormitory, and—”

“It was not hanging from the window of any student in the first year class,” declared the instructor pompously. “I had sent my silk hat to one of the janitors, who makes a practice of ironing them. He had finished it, and hung it out to air, when you—you vandals came along. I distinctly saw you throw at my hat, sir,” and Professor Tines shook his finger at Tom.

“I—I know it, sir. I admit it,” confessed the captain. “Only—only—”

“We didn’t know it was your hat, sir,” went on Sid. “I’m afraid it’s quite—quite unfit to wear, sir,” and Sid tried to put the flapping piece back into place, for the professor had dropped the tile, and Sid had picked it up.

“Unfit to wear! I should say it was. Fit to wear! Why I intend delivering a lecture on ‘The Art of Repose as an Aid to High Thinking’ and now, sir—now, you young vandals have ruined the hat I was going to wear! It’s infamous—infamous! I shall have you expelled! I shall let your parents know of your shameless conduct! I shall have you dismissed at once!” and the irate professor shook his fist first at Tom, then at Sid and then at Phil. “Your conduct is a disgrace to the school!” he went on. “Here, give me my hat!” and he fairly snatched it from Sid. “Come with me at once to Dr. Churchill. He shall know about this outrage!”

“If you please, Professor Tines, we didn’t know it was your hat,” was about all Phil could think of to say.

“So much the worse. You thought it belonged to some defenseless student, and that you could ruin it with impunity. But I shall soon show you how mistaken you were. Come with me at once!”

and Professor Tines, holding his hat in one hand, seized Tom's coat sleeve in the other, and led him toward the president's office, followed by Phil and Sid.

"I—I have a tall hat, which I'll give you, until you can have this one fixed," spoke Sid, as they walked along.

"Until I get this one fixed? It is beyond fixing!" declared Mr. Tines wrathfully.

Good Dr. Churchill looked pained when the three culprits were ushered into his presence.

"Look here, sir! Look here!" spluttered Professor Tines, his voice fairly trembling as he thrust the battered hat close to the president, who was near-sighted. "Just look at that, sir!"

"Ha! Hum!" murmured the doctor. "Very interesting, I should say. Very interesting."

"Interesting?" and Mr. Tines stood aghast.

"Yes. I presume you have been illustrating to your class the effect of some explosive agent on soft material. I should say it was a very complete and convincing experiment—very complete, convincing and interesting. I congratulate you."

"Congratulate! Interesting experiment!" gasped the irate "Pitchfork."

"Yes. It was very well done. My, my! The crown of the hat is almost completely gone. Almost completely," murmured the doctor, looking interestedly at the dilapidated tile. "What sort of an explosive did you use, Professor Tines? I trust your class took careful notes of it." [222]

"Explosion!" burst out Professor Tines, looking as if he was likely to blow up himself. "That was no explosion, sir! My best hat was ruined by a baseball in the hands of these vandals, sir! I demand their expulsion at once."

"Baseball?" queried Doctor Churchill.

"I threw it, sir," declared Tom quickly. "I'm very sorry. I did not know the hat belonged to Professor Tines, and I will pay for it at once," and the captain made a motion toward his pocket.

"Let me have the whole story," requested the president, and Tom thought there was a twinkle in his eyes. Professor Tines related most of it, in his usual explosive fashion, and the lads could only plead guilty. The owner of the hat ended by a demand for their dismissal, and Dr. Churchill said he would take the matter under advisement, but there was that in his manner which gave the culprits hope, and when he sent for them a little later, it was to pass the sentence that the three of them must go shares in buying a new hat. Tom wanted to stand all the damage, but Dr. Churchill, with a half-laugh, said he must mete out punishment all around.

"I say, will you lend me my share of the money, for a few days?" asked Sid, of Tom, when they were on their way back to the room. [223]

"Sure!" was the answer. "Say, what do you do with all your cash, Sid?" for Mr. Henderson was known to be well off.

"I—er—Oh, I have uses for it," replied Sid, and he hurriedly turned the conversation.

The nine played Richfield, a strong college team, on Saturday, and was nearly beaten, for just when some good hitting was needed, Pete Backus, who was filling Sid's place, went to the bad. Randall did manage to get the lead of a run, and kept it, due mainly to Tom's magnificent pitching, but the final score was nothing to boast of, though Randall came home winners.

"We certainly do miss Sid," remarked Tom, as he was sitting beside Phil, in the train on the way back. "If there's anything that's going to make us win or lose the championship this year it's batting, and that's Sid's strong point. I wish we could get him back on the team."

"Maybe we can."

"How?"

"By getting up a petition, and having all the fellows sign it. Maybe if the faculty understood what it meant they would vote to rescind the order not allowing Sid to take part in games."

"By Jove, it's worth trying!" cried Tom. "We'll do it! I'll go talk with Ed Kerr and Mr. Leighton." [224]

The manager and coach thought the plan a good one, and a few days later a petition was quietly circulated. Nothing was said to Sid about it, for fear he would object. The students were anxious to get their names down, and soon there was an imposing list.

"I want to get the freshmen now," decided Tom, one afternoon, when the petition was nearly ready for presentation. "I'm making a class affair of it, each year's students by themselves, and I let the freshmen go until last. I'll see Bascome, who is the class president, ask him to call a meeting, and have his fellows sign."

Tom sought out Bascome a little later, and explained what was wanted, asking the freshman to call a session of his classmates.

"In other words you want me and my friends to help you out of a hole?" asked Bascome, and he was sneering.

"That's about it," answered Tom, restraining a desire to punch the overbearing freshman. "We want to strengthen the nine, and we can do it if we can get Henderson back on it."

"Then you'll never get him back with my signature nor that of my friends!" cried Bascome. "I'll get even with you fellows now, for the way you've treated me!"

He was sneering openly. Tom looked him full in the face.

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"You sneaking little cad," was what he said, as he turned away.

CHAPTER XXVI

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TOM STOPS A HOT ONE

There was much excitement of a quiet sort when it was known what stand Bascome had taken. He was roundly condemned by the sophomores, juniors and seniors, and even by a number of the freshmen students. But Bascome remained firm, and he carried the class with him. Only a few freshmen put their names down on the petition, and they resigned from the exclusive freshman society to be able to do so.

For there was, that year in Randall, a somewhat bitter feeling on the part of the whole freshman class against the sophomores, on account of some severe hazing in the fall. It had created trouble, had engendered a sense of injury, and there was lacking a proper spirit in the college.

This had its effect, and the freshmen were almost a unit against the nine, which (and this was perhaps unusual) happened to be composed mainly of sophomores that season.

"What do you think of the dirty sneak?" asked Tom of Phil, to whom he narrated the refusal of Bascome.

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"Think of it? I'd be ashamed to properly express myself, Tom. It's rotten, that's what it is. But I guess we've got enough names as it is."

"Hope so, anyhow. I'm going to send it in, at any rate."

The petition was duly delivered to Dr. Churchill, and a faculty meeting was called. A unanimous vote of the corps of instructors was needed to reinstate a student suspended from athletics for a violation of the rules, such as Sid had been accused of, this being one of the fundamental laws of the college since its inception. Now the absence of the names of the majority of the freshman class tended to operate against the petition being accorded an unprejudiced hearing, but what did more to keep Sid out was the vote of Professor Tines.

The latter could not get over the destruction of his silk hat, though a new one had been purchased for him, and when the final vote was taken he barred Sid from getting back on the nine.

"I have reason to believe that Mr. Henderson is inclined to too much horse-play," he said, "as indicated by what he did to my hat. Again, if he were a popular student the freshmen would have joined in the request. They did not, as a class, and so I am constrained to vote as I do."

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None of the faculty—even Professor Tines—knew the real reason why the freshmen names were not down, and no one cared about mentioning it, for it was not a thing for students to discuss with the teachers. Mr. Leighton did his best, in a delicate way, but it was of no use. The petition failed, and not a few members of the faculty were deeply grieved, for they wanted to see a championship nine in Randall. Still they would not argue with Professor Tines.

And the chances of Randall winning the championship and the loving cup seemed to be diminishing from day to day, in spite of the strenuous efforts of Tom, Ed Kerr and Mr. Leighton. There was something lacking. No one could just say what it was, but there was a spirit of uncertainty, and a sense of worriment in the nine, that did not operate for perfect team work.

Tom threatened and pleaded by turns, but his words had little effect. The men showed up well in practice, and played a fast and snappy game with the scrub, but when it came to going out on the diamond there was a lack of batting ability and an absence of team work, that had a bad effect, and several games were won only by narrow margins, while some, that should have been won, were lost.

"We play Boxer Hall, Saturday," observed Tom, in his room with Phil and Sid one evening. "I wonder how we'll make out."

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"It isn't the last game, is it?" inquired Sid.

"No, there's one more, and another with Fairview. But I'm not worrying much about the co-eds. It's Boxer that has me guessing. Oh, Sid, but I wish you were with us."

"So do I," and Sid turned his face aside.

"Can't you get back?" asked Phil. "Can't you go to Dr. Churchill, and explain—about that bottle of liquor—you know."

"No," answered Sid gently, "I can't."

"The nine may lose," declared Tom.

"I'm—I'm just as sorry as you are, Tom," said the second baseman earnestly, "but it's out of the question. I can't explain—just yet."

"Can you ever?" demanded Phil eagerly.

"Perhaps—soon now. I am hoping every day."

"Have you given a—a sort of promise—to some one?" asked Tom gently.

"Yes," replied Sid in a low voice. "It's a promise, and a great deal depends on it—even more than the championship of Randall college." And that was all Sid would say for the time being.

The game with Boxer Hall was a hard one. Tom and his men had to work for everything they got, for Langridge seemed to have improved in his pitching, and the fielding of Randall's enemy was a thing to rejoice the heart of her captain and coach. [230]

The game ran along to the seventh inning with some sensational plays, and the score was 6 to 4 in favor of Boxer. Then Langridge grew a bit wild, and issued several passes until the bases were full, when a three bagger which Holly Cross knocked brought in three runs, and put Randall one ahead. There was wild delight then, and as none were out it looked as if Randall would be good for at least two more runs. But Langridge got control of the ball, and struck out three men, and the next inning Boxer put in a new pitcher—a semi-professional it was whispered, though Tom and his fellows decided to take no notice of the talk.

Then began a desperate effort on the part of Boxer Hall to get in two more runs in the remaining two innings. They adopted unfair tactics, and several times the umpire warned the men on the coaching line that they were violating the rules.

Tom managed to stiffen his work in the eighth, and, though two men got walking papers, no runs came in, for the next three batters went down and out under the influence of Tom's curves. But that inning saw no runs for Randall, either, and when her men came in for their last chance Tom pleaded with them to get at least one more to clinch the victory that was held by such a narrow margin. It was not to be, however, and a zero went up in the Randall space on the score board. [231]

The score was 7 to 6, in favor of Randall, when Boxer Hall came up for the ending of the ninth inning.

"If we can only hold 'em there," thought Tom wearily, for his arm ached. Still he would not give up, though Rod Evert was anxious to fill the box.

Tom struck out the first man, gave the next one a pass, and was hit for a single by the third batter. Then the Randall captain knew he must work hard to win. He struck out the next batter, and as Dave Ogden, who followed, was a notoriously hard hitter, Tom was worried. A three bagger, which was Ogden's specialty, would bring in two runs, and win the game for Boxer.

Dutch signalled for a drop, but Tom gave the negative sign, and indicated that he would pitch an out. As the ball left his fingers he was aware that it had slipped and that Ogden would hit it.

He did. There was a resounding "whack" and the ball, a hot liner, came straight for Tom. The Boxer Hall crowd set up a yell, thinking their man had made good, and that two runs, at least, would come in. For no one expected to see Tom stop the ball. [232]

But he did. It was well over his head, and passing him on the right side. [He leaped into the air, and with his bare hand caught the horsehide.](#) The impact on his unprotected palm was terrific, and he was at once aware that he had split the skin. But though a pain, like a red hot iron, shot down his arm, he held on.



HE LEAPED INTO THE AIR AND WITH HIS BARE HAND CAUGHT THE HORSEHIDE.

"Batter's out!" cried the umpire. Then, amid the wild and frenzied shouting of his chums, Tom dropped the ball, and walked in, his arm hanging limply by his side, while Dutch and Mr. Leighton ran anxiously toward him.

But what did Tom Parsons care for an injured hand? He had saved Randall from defeat, for that ended Boxer's chances, two men died on bases, and the game was over, the score being 7 to 6 in Randall's favor.

CHAPTER XXVII

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GLOOMY DAYS

"Much hurt?" inquired Mr. Leighton anxiously, as he reached Tom's side.

"Oh, nothing to speak of," replied the plucky pitcher carelessly, but when he held up his hand a few drops of blood trickled from it, and there was a thin, red line across the palm.

"You shouldn't have stopped that ball!" exclaimed Dutch, half savagely.

"I shouldn't? Do you think I was going to stand there and let it go by, and lose us the game?" demanded Tom. "I guess not—not for two sore hands!"

"But, it's your pitching hand," expostulated Dutch. "We need you the rest of the season, and the championship is far from won—in fact it's almost as far off as the stars," he added in a low voice, for he, too, had noted the lack of team work in the present game, and some that had preceded.

"Oh, don't be a croaker," advised Tom, trying to speak lightly though he was in considerable pain. "I'll be all right in a week. We haven't any hard game until then, and we'll go in and clean up all the roosts around here before the season closes."

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"I hope so," remarked Mr. Leighton in a low voice. "You had better let the doctor look at that hand, Parsons. No use taking any chances."

The injury was temporarily bandaged and Tom, with a queer feeling about him, that was not at all connected with his wound, changed his uniform for street clothing and returned to Randall with the nine. Dr. Marshall, later, dressed the hurt, and decided that Tom must refrain from playing ball for at least a week—perhaps longer.

"I'll have Evert warming up all this week," decided the coach. "We play the Branchville nine Saturday, and ought to win easily. Then I think you'll be ready for Fairview the following week, and Boxer Hall after that."

"The last two big games," murmured Tom. "We've got to win them both if we want the championship, and I'm afraid——"

"Oh, cheer up!" advised Phil. "I know I played rotten to-day, but I'll do better next time. Please forgive me?" and he assumed a mocking, contrite air, at which Tom could not help laughing.

"Get out!" exclaimed the captain. "You know I wasn't referring to you. But, seriously, Phil, something's got to be done. Think of it! We pulled through by the skin of our teeth to-day——"

"By the skin of your hand, you mean."

"Well, have it that way, but consider. Next Saturday will be an easy contest. Then comes Fairview and Boxer, both after our scalps. As it stands now we have played a number of games besides those with our two big enemies and are tied with Boxer for first place, and the possession of the loving cup. If we lose the Fairview game, and Boxer beats Fairview we will still have a show, by beating Boxer ourselves, but if it goes the other way we're out of it. Our only hope is to do up both Fairview and Boxer, in succession, and how we are going to do it is more than I can tell."

"Oh, we'll do it—somehow," declared Phil.

Matters, as regarded the baseball nine, did not improve much in the next few days, and Tom was filled with gloomy thoughts and dire forebodings. Though he was on hand at every practice the lads missed his sure arm in the pitching box, though Evert did fairly well. The game with Branchville proved fairly easy, though Randall did not shine with any unusual brilliancy.

"Hang it all, something's got to be done!" declared Tom on the night after the game. He was nervous and irritated, for his hand pained him, though it was nearly healed, and he was going to pitch in practice on Monday.

"What can be done?" inquired Phil, who was critically examining a new glove he had purchased.

"Sid, we might as well have it out," went on Tom, and he squared his shoulders as if for a fight, as he confronted the deposed second baseman. "Are you or are you not going to play with us again this season? You know we need you. We want you to help us to bat to win. Are you going to do it?"

"Why, it doesn't depend on me," answered Sid, in apparent surprise. "If the doctor says the word I'll jump right in, and do my best. You know that. It's up to the faculty. If they remove the ban——"

"No, it's not up to the faculty!" declared Tom vigorously. "It's up to you, and you know it. It's up to you to save the Randall 'varsity nine!"

"Up to me?" Sid had arisen from his seat near the window, and stood in the middle of the room.

"Up to you," repeated Tom. "You know, as well as I do, that you weren't guilty when Zane caught you with the liquor. You had that for some one else, and you're trying to shield him. You never use it—you had no use for it, yet you kept still when they accused you, and didn't tell. Now it's time to tell—it's time to say you were innocent—it's time to come out and end this mystery. The team needs you! All you've got to do is to tell the truth, instead of keeping silent, and you know the faculty will exonerate you. Then the ban will be removed, and you can play. That's why I say it's up to you. Isn't it now? Own up, Sid; did you have that liquor for yourself? If you told the truth about it couldn't you get back on the team?"

Tom was fairly panting from the force of his appeal. Sid's face was strangely white, as he turned to look the captain full in the eyes. For a moment he did not reply, and the breathing of the three chums could plainly be heard, for Phil was as much agitated as either of the others.

"Answer me, Sid," pleaded Tom.

"I can't answer everything you ask," spoke Sid, in a low voice. "As I told you before, I gave a promise, and, until I am released from it, I can't speak—my lips are sealed."

"But you didn't have that liquor for yourself," persisted Tom. "Did you, now?"

"I'm not going to answer that," and Sid's hands were gripped on the back of a chair, until his knuckles showed white with the strain.

"Sid Henderson, will you—dare you say that if you told the truth about this miserable business you would not be reinstated and allowed to play?" went on the captain relentlessly. "If you told the whole story, couldn't you get back on the team?"

"I'm not going to tell," said Sid slowly.

"Then you don't want to get back on the team?" fired Tom quickly.

"More than you know—more than you know," was Sid's answer, as he went out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A FRESHMAN PLOT

Tom stood staring at the door which closed after Sid—staring as if he could not believe what he had heard. He was roused from his reverie by Phil's voice.

"I'm afraid you've only made matters worse, Tom."

"Made 'em worse? They can't be any worse," was the testy reply. "Hang it all! We're about as bad off now as we well can be. I wanted to get Sid back on the team, and—and—"

"There's something we can't get at," declared Phil. "It is something pretty strong, or Sid would never keep quiet and see the college lose."

"Not unless he's altogether different from what he was last term," agreed Tom, with a puzzled air. "He once said he hoped he would be able to tell us what his secret was—soon—I only wish the time would come—soon—we need Sid's stick work on the team. I wonder if it has anything to do with a girl—Miss Harrison?"

"She's only one factor in the game. I fancy that was what Sid meant when he said he wanted to get back on the team more than we realized—he meant that it was so Miss Harrison would be friends with him again, for the same thing that caused the disagreement between them, got Sid into trouble with the proctor. And, if what Ruth says is true, Miss Harrison cares a lot for Sid."

"Oh, you can't tell much about girls," retorted Tom, with an air of a youth who was past-master in the art of knowing the feminine mind. "Of course that's not saying that Ruth doesn't mean what she says," he added hastily, for Phil was her brother. "But look at how Miss Harrison went with Langridge."

"Only a couple of times, and I fancy she didn't know his true character. She gave him his quietus soon enough after the trick he tried to play with the mirror."

"That's so. Well, I wish this tangle would be straightened out somehow. It's getting on my nerves."

"A baseball 'varsity captain shouldn't have nerves."

"I know it, but I can't help it. Hello, some one's coming. Maybe it's Sid."

"No, it's Dutch Housenlager, by his tread," and Phil's guess was right.

"Glad I found somebody in," remarked Dutch, as he was about to throw himself with considerable force on the old sofa. Tom grabbed the catcher, and shunted him off to one side so violently that Dutch sat down on the floor, with a jar that shook the room.

"Here, what's that for?" he demanded, somewhat dazed.

"It was to save our sofa," Tom explained. "You were coming down on it as if you were making a flying tackle. It would have been broken like a half-sawed-through goal post if you had landed. I side-tracked you, that's all."

"Oh," answered Dutch, as he slowly arose. "Next time I wish you'd serve notice on me when you're going to do a thing like that, and I'll wear my football suit," and he rubbed his back gingerly.

"Would you mind translating your remark about being glad you found somebody in?" requested Phil.

"With pleasure, son. I've been to about sixteen different domiciles this evening, and every one was vacant. I've got something to talk about. Where's Sid?"

"He went out a while ago," answered Tom, uneasily.

"Seems to me you fellows aren't as chummy as you once were," remarked Dutch, taking a seat in the old armchair, after a questioning look at Tom, who nodded a permission.

"Oh, yes, we are," exclaimed Phil quickly. "Isn't it fierce that Sid's off the team?"

"Rotten—simply rotten," agreed Dutch. "Just when we need him most. Why didn't you chaps keep him in the straight and narrow path that leads to baseball victories?"

"We tried," came quickly from Phil. "But Sid—"

"Oh, it'll be all right," interrupted Tom. "I think things will straighten themselves out." In his heart he did not believe this, but he did not want Dutch to go away with the idea that there was a cloud hanging over the "inseparables." That would never do. "I have an idea that the faculty will relent at the last minute," went on the captain. "Especially when they know that the championship depends on it. Then they'll let Sid play. If they don't we'll get up another petition, and make Bascome and his crowd sign, or we'll run 'em out of college."

"Speaking of the freshmen brings me to what I came here for," declared Dutch, and Tom gave a sigh of relief, that their visitor was away from the delicate subject. "What are we going to do to fool the first years, and keep 'em away from our spring dinner?" demanded Dutch. "That's what I called about. The dinner is to be held next week, a few days before our game with Fairview, and, naturally, the freshies will try to break it up."

"I've been so busy with getting ready for the exams and baseball, that I haven't given the dinner much thought," declared Tom. "Of course we've got to have it, and we must fool the freshies."

"Sure," agreed Phil. "Let's go have a talk with Holly Cross. He may be able to suggest something."

"Come on!" called Dutch. "We'll call on Holly."

As the three strolled down the corridor, out on the campus, and in the direction of Holly's room, the genial center fielder having an apartment in one of the college club houses, Dutch nudged his companions.

"Look," he remarked, "there go Ford Fenton and Bert Bascome, with several freshies. I don't like to see one of the sophs mixing it up so close with the first years."

"Me either," agreed Tom. "Ford ought to stick to his own class. The trouble is few of our fellows like him, on account of his ways and his 'uncle,' whereas the freshmen will stand for them. That's why Ford hangs out in their camp. But with our annual spring dinner coming off, I don't like it."

"Oh, Ford wouldn't dare betray us," was Phil's opinion. They kept on across the campus, and were soon in Holly's room, where plans for the dinner were eagerly discussed. [244]

If they could have seen what took place a little later in the room of Bert Bascome, the four sophomores would have had more cause than ever to regret the intimacy between Ford Fenton and some of the first-year crowd.

"It's your best chance to get even with them for making fun of you, Ford," Bascome was urging the lad whose uncle had once been a coach at Randall. "It will serve them right."

"But I hate to give their plans away," objected Ford. "I'm a sophomore, and——"

"They don't treat you as one," urged Henry Delfield, Bascome's crony. "It will be a fine chance to get back at them."

"Suppose they find out that I told?" asked Ford.

"They never will. We'll see to that," promised Bert eagerly. "All we want you to do is to tell us where the dinner is going to be held. We'll do the rest. There'll be a fight, of course, when we arrive, to break it up, and, just so Parsons, Clinton, Henderson and that crowd won't be suspicious, you can pitch into me—make believe knock me down, you know, and all that. Then they won't have any suspicion of you."

"Think not?" inquired Ford. [245]

"Sure not. All we want is a tip, and when you've given it you'll be in a position to laugh at those fellows who are laughing at you so often."

"That's right, they do make a lot of fun of me," said Ford weakly. "All right, I'll let you know, as soon as I find out where the dinner's going to be held. But don't squeal on me," and the prospective traitor looked apprehensively at the plotting freshmen.

"Not for worlds," Bascome assured him solemnly, and Ford left, promising to deliver his classmates into the hands of their traditional enemies.

CHAPTER XXIX

 [246]

THE SOPHOMORE DINNER

When Phil, Tom and Dutch Housenlager came from Holly's room that evening, they were just in time to see Ford Fenton emerge from his plotting conference with Bascome and his cronies.

"I don't like that," exclaimed Phil. "Ford has been in with those fellows for some time."

"Probably trying to think up some scheme so he can get to be baseball manager next year," suggested Tom.

"No!" cried Phil. "By Jove, I believe I have it. Come on back to Holly's room for a few minutes," and he took hold of his chums and fairly led them away, much to their mystification. There was another conference, which lasted a long time, and for a day or two thereafter much activity in the ranks of the sophomores.

The dinner was to be a "swell" affair, to quote Holly Cross. An elaborate menu had been decided on, and there were to be several "stunts" more or less elaborate on the part of the "talented" members of the class. The affair was to be held in a hall in Haddonfield, and the great object of the second-year fellows, of course, was to prevent the time and place of the dinner becoming known to their enemies, the freshmen. [247]

"Do you s'pose they'll bite?" asked Tom, an evening or two later, as he, together with Phil and Sid and Holly, were in the room of the "inseparables."

"It depends on us," answered Holly, who was the president of the sophomores. "I think they'll trail along when they see us go out."

"If they don't have some of their number trail after the main bunch," spoke Phil.

"We'll have to take our chances; that's all," came from Sid. "Well, are we all ready?"

"Pretty nearly," answered Holly. "I want to wait until it's a little darker. Then we'll slip off. I hope the chap is there with the auto."

"He promised to be," said Tom, and they sat about, waiting impatiently for the hour of action to arrive. It came finally, ticked off by the impatient little clock, and four figures stole from the sophomore dormitory, and hurried across the campus.

"There they come," said Tom, in a low voice, a moment later. "They're trailing us all right. See 'em sneaking along on the other side?"

"Sure," spoke Phil. It was just light enough to discern a number of hazy figures creeping along a boxwood hedge. [248]

"See anything of that traitor, Fenton?" asked Holly, in a low voice.

"No, he's with the other crowd," answered Tom. "He's in fear of his life that we'll find him out."

"As if we hadn't already," added Sid.

Hurrying along, the four lads entered a trolley that was headed for Haddonfield. They looked back, as they were on the platform, and saw the shadowy figures leap into an auto which they knew belonged to Bert Bascome.

"They're coming," spoke Sid.

"And we'll be ready for 'em," added Tom.

A little later Tom and his chums were in the town and they hurried to a building, containing several halls or meeting rooms, where the students frequently held dinners, or gave dances and other affairs.

"Did you see anything of them since we arrived?" asked Holly of Tom as they scurried into the structure.

"No, but they'll be on hand. Ford has tipped them off all right; the little puppy! Say, what ought we to do to him? Tar and feathers, or give him the silence?"

"We can settle that later," remarked Phil. "Just now let's see how we make out against the freshies. It's tough to have to acknowledge that there's a traitor in the class." [249]

"It sure is. Come on, now I hope everything is here."

A man came out of a room as the four sophomores knocked on the door.

"All arranged?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Yes. Now I hope you young gentlemen don't have too much of a fight. Don't break the furniture."

"Not any more than we can help," promised Sid.

"When the other fellows come—I mean the freshmen, let 'em right up," instructed Holly. "We'll be ready for 'em. Are the rear stairs clear?"

"Yes, you can slip out that way, and I put double locks on the door you'll go out of."

"And a spring lock on the one they'll enter by?" asked Tom.

"Yes, just as you told me. Now don't do too much damage," and the man, the proprietor of the place, seemed somewhat apprehensive.

"Oh, we'll pay for everything," agreed Holly. "Well, we're ready any time Bascome and his crowd are."

"I'm glad the sophs didn't think of a game like this to play on us when we tried to break up their dinner last year," observed Sid, as the four entered the room. [250]

The place presented a curious sight. There was a table set as if for a banquet, with plates, knives and forks, glasses, and with the usual candles burning in silver candelabras. At the head of the banquet board was a stuffed figure, representing a Randall college student, with the college colors in gay ribbons pinned on one side of his caricature of a face, while the sophomore hues adorned the other side.

"Got the camera and flash powder?" asked Holly.

"Right here," answered Sid, who, because of his knowledge in that line, had been selected for this post of honor.

"They'll be here pretty soon now," prophesied Tom. "Bascome has his crowd in waiting somewhere, and he just lingered around college until he saw us start. Then they'll delay until they think we're all here, and they'll rush in, and make a rough house."

"That is, they *think* they will," corrected Phil, with a grin. "I rather think they'll be surprised some."

The four moved about the room, completing their arrangements, while Sid busied himself with a large camera, which was focused on the door leading into the banquet hall, and got ready a flashlight powder. [251]

"I think I hear them coming," spoke Tom in a whisper, about half an hour later. "Get ready, Sid."

"I'm all ready."

They listened. Out in the corridor there were shuffling noises, as if several persons were trying to walk quietly. There was a brushing against the door, and a cautious whisper.

Suddenly the knob of the portal was tried, and a voice in the hall cried:

"Give up, sophs! We've got you!"

Several bodies flung themselves against the door, and to the surprise of the freshmen, who were headed by Bascome and Delfield, they found that the portal was not locked. It opened easily—so easily, in fact, that several of the lads fell to the floor, and the others rushed over them. There was a scene of confusion, and this probably prevented the attacking freshmen from seeing that only four sophomores were present. The first year lads caught sight of the table, with its glistening array of silver and glass, and they took it for granted that they were in the banquet place of their enemies.

"Come on, fellows! We've got 'em!" yelled Bascome, scrambling to his feet. "Upset things, and then capture Holly Cross. There he is!"

With a yell his cronies sprang to obey the sporty freshman. They fairly tumbled over each other until they filled the room. Then, with a bang, the door by which they had entered slammed shut behind them, fastening with a strong spring lock on the outside. [252]

"All ready with the camera, Sid!" cried Holly.

"All ready," answered Sid.

Then, for the first time the freshmen seemed to realize that only a small number of sophomores were present—four, who were ensconced behind a table, and near an open door.

"Welcome to our banquet, freshies!" cried Tom.

Holly Cross caught up the effigy of a sophomore and tossed it at Bascome. The freshman leader, taken by surprise, clasped the figure in his arms, and Phil yelled:

"Let 'em have it, Sid!"

There was a blinding flash, and a dull boom, as the flashlight powder exploded, and it was followed by a gasp of fear from the freshmen. Then Holly switched on the electric lights, which had been turned off, and addressed the huddled group of freshmen.

"Gentlemen, I hope you enjoy your call," he said. "As for us, we have to leave you, as we are already a little late for the banquet. This is only a sample of what we will have, and as a sort of memento of this auspicious occasion, let me inform you that we have a flashlight photograph of you in your most interesting poses. Bascome, smile a little, if you please—that's it—look pleasant. That will do. You may lay aside the rag doll now." [253]

With a strong expression the freshman president cast aside the effigy, and yelled:

"Fellows, we're stung! But we can prevent these four from going to the banquet, anyhow! Get at them!"

He leaped across the table, followed by several of his fellows.

"Too late! Sorry to leave you!" cried Tom, as he and his chums glided through the open doorway behind them, Sid taking the camera with him.

The door was hastily pulled shut, and bolted, barred and locked, just as the group of infuriated freshmen threw themselves against it.

"Trapped!" Tom heard Bascome shout from the other side of the portal. "Try the other door!"

"That's locked, too," came the despairing cry. "We're caught!"

"That's it!" cried Phil exultantly. "Ta-ta, freshies! Next time you listen to a traitor, take care to lay better plans. We're off to our annual feed. When you get out come along, and we'll give you the leavings. You can have Fenton, too," and the four who had successfully turned the trick on their class enemies, hastened off, leaped into a waiting auto, and were soon at the banquet hall, where their fellows were anxiously expecting them. [254]

CHAPTER XXX

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TOM'S LAST APPEAL

"Did it work?"

"Were they surprised?"

"Did you get their picture?"

"How was it?"

A dozen other questions, besides these, were asked of Tom and his chums, as they entered the hall where the real sophomore banquet was about to take place. Around them eagerly thronged their classmates, all anxious to know how the trick had developed, for, it is needless to say that Ford Fenton's treachery was discovered, and plans laid to offset it, with what effect the reader has learned.

"It worked like a charm," responded Holly Cross.

"And I think I have a fine picture of them rushing in, and Bascome hugging the dummy," added Sid. "Now I'll take a flash of this banquet, and we'll post 'em all over college, with a notice saying: 'Gaze on this picture—then on that!' It will be great!" and he proceeded to arrange his camera to take a different view of the banquet scene.

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"Where's Fenton?" inquired Tom, looking around.

"He didn't come," replied Dutch Housenlager. "We've been waiting for him."

"Nasty scandal to get out about Randall," commented Phil.

"Oh, we'll take care that it doesn't get out," responded Holly. "Ford will keep still, and I'll make a school-honor matter of it for the others. Only Fenton had better go back to his friends," he added significantly.

I presume my readers have already guessed how the affair came about. Holly and his chums suspected, after seeing Fenton so chummy with Bascome and his crowd, that there might be at least a "leak" in regard to the time and place of the sophomore dinner. To forestall any such event, a ruse was adopted. It was arranged to hold the real dinner in a seldom-used hall, but to go ahead with arrangements as if one was going to take place in the usual building. To give color to this, Holly, Tom, Sid and Phil pretended to sneak off, as if to avoid the freshmen, but, in reality, to lead them on. Bascome and his followers trailed after, were drawn into the hall where the "fake" dinner table was set, and trapped, as told. They were locked in, and it was some time before they could summon help to open the doors.

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Meanwhile the real banquet came off most successfully. Later the picture Sid had taken, of Bascome and the freshmen, rushing pell-mell into the supposed dining hall, was developed and printed, while its companion-piece was hung up with it, showing the triumphant sophomores gathered at the board, making merry. It made a great hit, and the freshmen did not hear the last of their defeat for many moons.

As for Fenton, he was made aware, that very night, of the fact that his indiscrete conduct, to give it the mildest term, was common knowledge. He withdrew from college, fearing the just wrath of his classmates, but, lest the scandal might stand against the fair name of Randall, he was induced to come back. He was promised that no punishment would be meted out to him, and none was, in the common acceptance of that term. But his life was made miserable in more ways than one.

The spring term was drawing to a close. With all the excitement attending the annual examinations there was mingled with it the anxiety about the baseball team, and Randall's chances for winning the championship, and the gold loving cup. The latter was placed on view in one of the Haddonfield stores, and daily a crowd of persons, including many students, could be seen in front of the place.

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"I wonder if we'll get it?" asked Tom of Phil, a few days before the final game with Fairview.

"How are you on pitching?" asked Phil, for Tom had done little more than light practice since his accident.

"All right, I think. My hand is in fair shape."

"Pity you're not a southpaw, or else it's too bad you caught that ball," said Phil.

"Nonsense. I can pitch all right, and I would have felt like leaving the team, if I had let that liner get past me, hot as it was. No, I'm not worrying from my end, though perhaps I should. It's our batting I'm alarmed about. Hang it all, if only Sid——"

"There's no use going over that again," and Phil spoke quietly.

"No, I presume not. Well, we've just got to win from Fairview."

"Suppose it would do any good to tackle Sid again?"

"I don't know. I'll try, if I get a chance. I wish I knew his secret."

The chance came sooner than Tom or Phil expected it would. It was the evening of the day before the final game with Fairview. There had been hard practice in the afternoon, and though Tom found himself in good shape, and noted an improvement in his fielding forces, the batting was weak. He was tired, and not a little discouraged. His one thought was:

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"If I could only get Sid to play, it would strengthen the whole team. He would stiffen the rest of 'em up, and stiffening is all that some of them need. Oh—well, what's the use."

Tom and Phil were alone in the room, discussing plans for the game the next day, when Sid entered. One look at his face showed that he was moody and out of sorts. He had been off on a tramp, after biology specimens, and with scarcely a word to his chums he began changing his field clothes for other garments.

"Going out this evening?" asked Phil.

"No. Guess not," was the rather short answer. "I've got to do some studying. What have you fellows got on the carpet?"

"Rest," answered Tom, and after supper he returned to the apartment, and stretched out on the creaking sofa, while Phil occupied the easy chair. Sid was at his desk writing, when a knock came at the door.

The deposed second baseman started, and half arose. Then he sat down again.

"Well, aren't some of you going to answer it?" asked Tom. "I'm too tired to move."

"Same here," added Phil, but, as he was nearer the portal than Sid, he got up, with much groaning, and opened the door. Wallops stood there.

"A message for Mr. Henderson," he announced, and he handed Phil a letter.

"Here! Give it to me!" cried Sid, almost snatching it from Phil's fingers.

"I was just going to, old man," was the gentle answer, and it seemed as if Sid was afraid his chum would see the writing on the envelope.

Sid tore open the epistle, read it at a glance, and tore it up, scattering the fragments in his waste paper basket. Then he strode over to his closet, and got out his coat and cap.

"Going out?" asked Phil, politely interested.

"Yes—I've got to," muttered Sid.

Tom slowly arose from the old sofa, the boards on the back and front creaking dismally with the strain.

"Sid," spoke Tom, and there was that in his voice which made Phil and Sid both look at the captain. "Sid, I'm going to make a last appeal to you."

"No—don't," almost begged the second baseman, and he put up his arm, as though to ward off a blow. "Don't, Tom, I—I can't stand it."

"You've got to!" insisted Tom, almost fiercely. "I've stood this long enough. It's not fair to yourself—not fair to the nine."

"I don't know what you mean," and Sid tried to speak calmly.

"Yes, you do," and by this time Tom was on his feet, and had walked over toward the door. "Yes, you do know. You received a note just now. There's no use in me pretending I don't know what it is, for I do."

Sid started.

"I mean," went on Tom, "that I know what it portends. I don't know who it's from, and I don't care; neither do I know what's in it. But I do know that it calls you out——"

"Yes, I've got to go," murmured Sid, as though it was a summons from fate, and he could not avoid it.

"You've got to do nothing of the sort!" cried Tom. "Don't go!"

"I've got to, I tell you!"

"To that gambling hall? To lose your money again? Haven't you manhood enough to say 'no'? Can't you stay away? Oh, Sid, why do you go? Why don't you be fair to yourself—fair to the nine? We need you!"

Tom held out his hands appealingly. There was a mist before his eyes, and, he fancied, something glistened in those of his chum. Phil stood, a silent spectator of the little scene, and the clock ticked on relentlessly.

"Don't you want to help us win?" asked Tom.

"You know I do!" exclaimed Sid brokenly.

"Then do it!" cried Tom, in ringing tones. "Break off this miserable life! Give up this gambling!"

"I'm not gambling!" cried Sid, and he shrank back, as though Tom had struck him.

"Dare you deny that you're going from here to the gambling den in Dartwell?" asked Tom, with flashing eyes.

Sid was silent.

"You don't dare deny it," went on the captain. "Now, Sid, I've made my last appeal. From now on I'm going to act. I'm captain of the nine, and what I say goes. I say you sha'n't go out to that gambling hall to-night!" and, before either of his chums were aware of his action, Tom had sprung forward, locked the door, and taken out the key. "There! Let's see you go out now!" cried Tom, as he planted himself in front of the portal and folded his arms, a picture of defiance.

Sid acted as if stunned for a moment. Then, fairly springing forward, he cried:

"Stand aside, Tom! I've got to go out now! You don't understand. Stand aside and let me pass!"

"I'll not! You sha'n't make a beast of yourself any longer!"

"Stand aside or I'll tear you away from that door and burst it open!" and Sid fairly hissed out the words.

Tom never moved. Calmly he faced his chum. Though his face was stern, there was a look of deep sorrow on it. As for Phil he knew not what to do or say.

"Once more," asked Sid, and his voice was calmer, "will you stand aside, or have I got to force you?"

"You're not going out of here to-night," repeated Tom. "This has got to end. I'm going to find out your secret—the secret you are keeping in spite of your better self. We'll get at the bottom of this—we'll restore you to yourself, Sid—to the nine that needs you. We'll have the ban removed!"

Once more he held out his hands appealingly.

"I ask you for the last time, will you stand back?" came from Sid, in steely tones.

"No!" cried Tom resolutely.

"Then I'll make you!" and Sid approached closer. He made a grab for Tom's outstretched right hand, and wrenched it cruelly. In spite of himself Tom gave a cry of pain, for the injury was tender yet.

This seemed to break the spell. Phil sprang forward.

"Sid—Tom!" he cried. "What are you doing?"

They seemed to realize, then, that they had nearly come to blows. With a sob, almost of despair, Sid released his hold of Tom's hand, and staggered back. At the same time the captain, reaching in his pocket for the key, inserted it in the door, and shot back the lock. [264]

"You may go," he said gently.

Sid, with never a word, but with a look of anguish on his face, as if he was torn between two fates, passed out.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BAN LIFTED

"I never knew that clock ticked so loud," remarked Tom, after a silence that seemed interminable. "Listen to it."

"It does make an infernal racket," responded Phil, and his voice sounded strange to him. So great had been the strain engendered by the dramatic departure of Sid, that both Tom and Phil felt the awkwardness of speaking of commonplace matters after it. "Guess we'll get a new ticker," suggested Phil, for want of something better to say.

"No," answered Tom slowly. "Old things are best after all—even if they don't keep just the right time. I'm attached to that clock."

Somehow Tom felt that the simile might apply to Sid, but he did not mention it.

"Is your hand—did he hurt it—I mean is it all right?" stammered Phil.

"Oh, yes," replied Tom, with a glance at it. "Sid gave it a wrench, but I guess it will be all right to-morrow. I can't understand him, can you?" [266]

"No, and I've given up trying."

"No, don't do that!" begged Tom. "We've just got to save Sid."

"But if he won't let us?"

"We must do it in spite of himself. I will try to think of a way," and Tom threw himself back on the sofa, and turned his face to the wall. Phil walked softly across the room, and sat down in the big chair. Somehow it seemed as if their chum had gone, never to return. For more than an hour the two sat there, neither speaking, and the clock ticked on relentlessly.

"Well," remarked Tom at length, with a sigh, "guess I'll turn in."

Sid was in his bed when the two chums awoke in the morning, though neither Phil nor Tom had heard him come in. He did not refer to the happening of the previous night, but after chapel, which was made particularly solemn by a short sermon by the doctor on the prodigal son, Sid drew away from his chums, who started for their classes.

"Where you going?" asked Tom, for Sid and he had the same studies this morning period.

"Up to see Moses," was the answer, "Moses" being the students' pet name for Dr. Churchill. "Zane caught me again last night. I was out after hours without a permit. I'm in for it I guess," and Sid laughed recklessly. [267]

"Why, old man——" began Tom, and then he stopped. He did not know what to say. Then he felt it would be better to say nothing, and he hurried on to the lecture, anxious to have it over with, and get out on the diamond with his men, for the final game with Fairview was to come off that afternoon.

Tom and Phil did not see Sid again until after the game, and then they felt in no condition to dwell upon his trouble, for Randall had been beaten by Fairview.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten battle of the diamond. It opened well for Randall, for Tom felt a fierce anger at fate in general, that nerved him to pitch as he had seldom pitched before. Then things began to go backward, for his hand was in no condition to stand the fierce work necessary. Mr. Leighton saw this, and deciding to save Tom for the Boxer Hall game, took him out of the box, and put in Evert. After that it was all over but the shouting, and Fairview piled up eleven runs against Randall's five. It was a miserable and dispirited lot of players that filed back to Randall that evening, nor could the sympathy of Ruth and Madge take any of the sting out of it for Tom.

"It isn't so bad," remarked Phil, in a consoling sort of voice. "We still have a chance."

"A mighty slim chance," grumbled Tom. "Almost none at all. Oh, if old Sid had only been with us!"

"There's no use talking about that now," went on Phil. "We simply must devote all our energies to the Boxer Hall game."

"No use thinking of that unless Fairview loses to them," came from Tom, gloomily.

"Oh, cheer up!" urged Phil. "You can't win the championship by feeling that way," but his words did little to dispel the gloom in the heart of the captain.

For the next few days there was hard practice. Tom's hand received special attention, and it was hoped that he could last the entire Boxer game. The batting improved very much, and the 'varsity nine was as much on edge as it was possible for it to be. Meanwhile there was anxiety over the outcome of the Fairview-Boxer game.

For some time past the Randall players had been reckoning percentages. It must be remembered that the games described in detail in this volume were not the only ones played by the rival colleges in the league. There were many more contests than those set down here, but space will not permit their description.

Sufficient to say that, reckoning in some forfeited contests, and computing the standings on the basis of games won and lost, it developed that if Boxer Hall beat Fairview it would make a tie for first place between Boxer and Randall, and all would then depend on the final contest between those two latter teams.

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Therefore it was with no small jubilation that the news was received, a week later, that Boxer had downed Fairview.

"Now for *our* chance to win!" cried Tom, brightening up a little. "All we have to do is to wallop Boxer, and the loving cup is ours. But Oh, Phil! if we only had Sid!"

"That's right. Have you noticed how queer he's been acting of late?"

"Oh, it's the same old story. I'm done now. I made my last appeal. By the way, I didn't hear what happened the time he was last caught by Zane. What was the verdict?"

"It hasn't been announced yet. Faculty held a meeting but deferred action. It means expulsion, of course. Poor old Sid!"

"Well, he brought it on himself."

"How do you know?" asked Phil sharply. "Maybe there's something we don't understand."

"And we never will," added Tom bitterly. "I consider that Sid has done as much as any one to defeat the team if we lose the last game."

"Oh, don't think that. How's your hand?"

"Fine! I can last all right. It's the batting I'm worried about. Langridge will do his worst, and we must look for a fierce game. We've got to practice until the gong rings."

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Tom worked his men to the limit, with Coach Leighton to help him. Matters seemed a little brighter, and in spite of his words Tom had a forlorn hope that, after all, the faculty might relent, and allow Sid to play.

But this hope was dashed to the ground the night before the game. Then Sid came into the room, despondency showing on his face and in every motion. He began hauling his things out of the closet and bureau, and packing them in his trunk.

"What's up, old man?" asked Phil in great surprise.

"I'm leaving."

"Leaving?" burst out Tom.

"Yes. Expelled. Faculty just had a meeting on my case, and it's all off. I'm done!"

"Look here!" cried Tom. "Are you going to let it go this far, Sid? Aren't you going to speak—going to tell your secret, and exonerate yourself?"

"I can't," answered Sid simply, and his tone was so miserable that his chums forebore to question him further. His trunk was soon packed, and he left the room. Neither Phil nor Tom felt like talking and went to bed early. Sid did not return that night, and the two ball players were out early, for practice on the diamond, in anticipation of the great and deciding game which was to take place that afternoon on the Boxer Hall grounds.

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A little before noon, when the team had gone to the gymnasium for a light dinner, and to have some last secret instruction from the coach and Tom, Sid Henderson crossed the college campus. With him was an individual whom, had Phil or Tom seen, they would have at once recognized as the sporty youth who had met Sid the day of the island picnic. But there was a great change noticed in the young man. He no longer wore the "loud" suit and the brilliant tie; he no longer smoked a cigarette, and there was a chastened air about him.

"Don't you feel a bit nervous about it, Guy?" asked Sid.

"Not a bit, old man. It's a bitter dose to swallow, but I need it, I guess. I wish I could do more for you. Are you sure it isn't too late?"

"I hope not. The team hasn't gone yet. There's just a chance."

"Well, I can't thank you enough for all you've done for me. No one else would have done as much. No one else would have kept his promise in the face of such odds. It wasn't right for me to ask you."

"We agreed not to talk about that, you know, Guy."

"I can't help mentioning it. Lead on. I'll explain to Dr. Churchill, and all the rest of them."

The two disappeared into the doctor's residence, and, presently there might have been seen wending their way thither the various members of the Randall college faculty.

What took place occurred behind closed doors, and what that was, only was known afterward when Sid made his explanation. Sufficient, for the present, to say that the meeting was a protracted one, much to the restlessness of several of the younger professors who wanted to go to Boxer Hall to witness the championship struggle.

"Well, then, are we all agreed?" asked Dr. Churchill, as he smiled kindly on Sid, and regarded with a pitying glance the youth whom the second baseman had addressed as Guy.

"I think so," answered Professor Tines. "I seldom like to reverse myself, but I feel that it is warranted on this occasion. I will vote to remove the ban that has been on Mr. Henderson, and restore him to his full college rights and privileges."

"I think we all feel the same way," spoke Professor Bogardus, the science teacher, "and I am glad that I can change my vote."

"I think we all are," went on Dr. Churchill. "Mr. Henderson, I congratulate you, in the name of the college, for bearing up as you did, in the face of heavy odds. You are now a Sophomore in good standing, and—"

"May I play on the team?" burst out Sid.

"You may," answered the genial old doctor, his eyes twinkling, "and I'll be there to see you win, at least for the last part of the game. The ban is removed, Mr. Henderson."

"Thank you, all," spoke Sid feelingly to the assembled professors. Then, turning to his companion, he added: "Come on, Guy. I'm going to get in the last game, after all."

"No, I'll not come. You've had enough of me. I'm going back to mother. She—she needs me now," and the former sportily-attired lad turned away.

Sid hurried over to the gymnasium. His heart was beating in wild exultation. At last he was eligible to play on the nine! He could help them to win, for that Randall would lose never entered his head.

He reached the gymnasium. It seemed strangely deserted and quiet for a championship day. Sid felt a sense as if an icy hand was clutching his heart.

"Where—where's the ball nine?" he asked one of the janitors.

"The ball nine?"

"Yes."

Sid thought the man would never answer.

"Oh, the ball nine has gone over an hour," was the reply. "They went to Boxer Hall in a big automobile—a rubberneck they calls 'em."

"Gone! Over an hour!" gasped Sid. "Can I get there in time—in time to play? I must! I will! It's my last chance! Oh, I must get there!" and he started on a run for the trolley line that led to Boxer Hall.

CHAPTER XXXII

A PERILOUS CROSSING

Sid hurried on, his thoughts in a wild tumult. In his pocket was a note from Dr. Churchill, restoring him to all his rights and privileges. Sid had asked for it, lest Boxer Hall protest his entrance into the game at the last minute, for Sid was fully determined to play, and help his team to win. He knew he was in good form, for he had not neglected practice.

"If I can catch the next car," he thought, "I'll be in time." Then, as he caught sight of something yellow through the trees on the banks of Sunny river, along which the electric line extended, he exclaimed:

"There's a car, now! I'll have to sprint for it. Glad I didn't stop to get my suit. I can borrow one from a sub when I get there, I guess." He broke into a run, but noted, curiously, that the car did not seem to be moving very fast. Then, as he made the turn in the road, he saw that it was standing still, and that a number of the passengers were walking about, idly. "Must have had a fuse blow out, or a hot box, and they're waiting to cool it," he mused. "Lucky for me, as the electrics don't run very often from now on."

Sid dropped into a walk, and was soon at the stalled car.

"What's the matter?" asked the second baseman of the motorman, who was sitting on a grassy bank, idly chopping at a stone with his controller handle.

"Power's off."

"For long?" asked Sid, his heart thumping under his ribs.

"Hard to say. It's been off nearly an hour now, and the conductor just telephoned in, and they said it might be an hour more."

"An hour more! Then I can't get to Boxer Hall in time for the game."

The motorman looked quizzically at Sid.

"Not unless you walk, or hire an auto," he remarked, and fell again to hammering the stone. The other passengers were fretting, complaining, or accepting the situation philosophically, as befitted their natures. Sid made up his mind quickly.

"I can walk to Fordham junction, and take the train," he decided. "From Bendleton, which is the nearest railroad station to Boxer Hall, it's only two miles. Maybe I can run it in time, or perhaps I'll meet some one who will give me a lift. Anyway, that's my best chance. I'll do it," and, with a final glance at the stalled car, hoping he might see the flashing up of the lights on it, which would tell of the power being turned on, Sid turned and made off toward the distant railroad station.

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As the janitor had informed Sid, Tom and the other ball players, including the substitutes, had made an early start in a large automobile, carrying twenty passengers. It was of the type known as a "rubber-neck," from the fact that they are used in big cities to take visitors to the scenes of interest, there to "rubber," or stretch their necks in gazing aloft.

"See anything of Sid, as you came away?" asked Holly Cross, who sat beside Tom and Phil, as the auto swayed along.

"No," answered Tom briefly. "I fancy he's left for good. Poor old Sid! Isn't it a shame that he went to pieces as he did? If we only had him now our chances would be brighter."

"Would you play him if he came along?" asked Phil.

"Of course—provided I could—that he was in good standing so Boxer Hall couldn't protest. But what's the use of talking?"

"Is he in good form, captain?" asked Bricktop.

"Sid never goes stale," answered Tom. "Besides, with his ability to slice a ball to right or left field in a pinch, hitting right and left handed as he does, it would be just great for us to-day."

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"Still worrying?" asked Phil.

"Of course. So would you, if you were in my place. Don't you know what this game means to us?"

"Sure we do, me lad," answered Bricktop, kindly. "But say this over to yourself a few times and you'll feel better. 'Tis a proverb of me old Irish ancestors. 'Soft an' aisy goes far in a day,' that's it. 'Soft and aisy goes far in a day.' Remember that, Tommy, me lad, and take it 'aisy' as the good Irish say. We'll win—never fear—we'll win."

There was talk and laughter, serious conversation and much chaffing as the auto rumbled along. They had started early and thought they would have plenty of time, but something went wrong with the steering gear once, and a second time the water in the radiator needed replenishing, so that with the delays it left the players with no more than time to get to Boxer Hall in season for the game, and left hardly any time for practice.

"Hadn't you better hit up the pace a little, my friend," suggested Mr. Leighton to the chauffeur.

"I will, yes, sir," was the answer, and the big car did make better time, for it was on a good road. The team fell to laughing and joking again, but suddenly stopped, as the auto once more came to a halt just before crossing Pendleton river, a stream somewhat larger than Sunny river, and intercepting the main road between the two colleges.

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"What's up now?" asked Tom.

"The drawbridge is open," replied the chauffeur.

The players stood up and looked across the river. The draw, which was necessary on account of a number of sailboats on the stream, was swung, making an impassable gap, for the stream at that point was swift and deep. Some men were seen on the middle of the bridge.

"What's the matter? Why don't you swing shut that bridge?" yelled Phil.

"Can't," answered one of the men.

"Why not?"

"The machinery that operates the draw is broken. We swung the bridge open to let a boat pass, and now we can't close it again. We've sent for some mechanics to repair it."

"How long will it take?" yelled Tom.

"Oh, not long. Two or three hours, maybe."

"Two or three hours! Great smokestacks!" howled Tom. "That will be too late for us. We can't get to the game on time!"

"Of course not!" agreed Holly Cross. "And Boxer Hall will be just mean enough to call a forfeit, and claim the championship!"

"Say, you've got to swing this bridge shut, and let us pass!" sung out Phil.

"Can't!" yelled the men who were on the bridge, marooned as it were. "We've tried, but it won't budge."

"What's to be done?" asked Jerry Jackson.

"Yes, what's to be done?" echoed his twin brother.

"Guess we'll have to swim for it," suggested Dutch Housenlager. "That is, unless Grasshopper Backus can jump over with us on his back, one at a time."

But, though they could joke over the situation, they all knew that it was serious. The time was drawing close, and they were still some distance from Boxer Hall. Further inquiry of the men on the bridge did not help matters, nor did the fuming and fretting of Tom and his chums.

"Can't you suggest a plan?" asked Mr. Leighton of the chauffeur.

"Well, there's another bridge about five miles below here."

"That's too far. Ten miles out of our way. Time we went there, and got back it would be too late. Boxer Hall would claim the game. Can nothing be done?" and the coach looked at the swiftly swirling river. At that moment a man driving a mule hitched to a buckboard came along. He took in the situation at a glance.

"Stuck, eh?" he remarked sympathetically.

"That's what," replied Bricktop Molloy. "Maybe ye happen t' be a fairy, Mr. Man, an' can help us across."

"Why don't you try the ford?" asked the man.

"Ford? We didn't know there was one," said Tom.

"Sure there is. About half a mile below here. It's where the river is shallow, and many's the time I've driven across before this bridge was built. The water's a leetle high now, but I guess your ark could make it. Will it go in water?"

"If it's not too deep, and there's good bottom," was the chauffeur's answer.

"Oh, it's good bottom, but, as I say, it's a trifle deep."

"Try it, anyhow," suggested Tom. "It's our only chance. Go ahead."

This was the sentiment of all, and the players getting into their seats again, which they had left to gaze at the river, the auto was backed up, and headed for the ford, the man with the buckboard going in advance to show the way.

As he had said, the water was rather high, and it seemed to swirl along dangerously fast. He would not venture in with his mule, but, after a look at it the chauffeur said he would try it.

"I'll be all right," he announced, "if the water doesn't come up high enough to short-circuit the batteries or the magneto."

"Let her go!" cried Tom.

Backing up, to get a good start down the slope that led to the ford, the chauffeur turned on full speed. Into the river went the big auto, with its heavy load. The water splashed up in a spray as the front wheels, with the big tires, struck the limpid surface. A moment later the entire machine was in the water, submerged to the hubs.

"It's all right! Go on! Go on!" urged the man with the mule. "It won't be much deeper than that."

"If it is we're done for," remarked the chauffeur in a low voice.

It was a perilous passage, but the Randall nine was too anxious over the consequences of delay to mind that much. The man in charge of the auto was rather white-faced, but he gripped the steering wheel, and kept on high speed, though he throttled down the engine a trifle as he neared the middle of the river. The big machine careened dangerously, and several clung instinctively to the sides.

"Can you make it?" asked Mr. Leighton anxiously.

"I don't know," replied the chauffeur, as he peered at a bit of smooth water directly ahead. It looked to be deep, and he was contemplating turning to one side, though their guide had warned him to steer straight for the other side.

"Keep on! Keep on!" cried the man with the mule encouragingly. "Straight ahead, and you'll be safe!"

The chauffeur yanked the gasoline lever over the ratchet, opening the throttle wider, and the car shot forward at increased speed. It swayed, and seemed about to topple over, righted itself, almost like a thing alive, and then, with a crunching of gravel, was out of the stream, and climbing the slope that led from the ford to the road.

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"By Jove! I'm glad we're over that!" exclaimed Tom, with a sigh of relief. "Speed her up now, and get us to Boxer Hall!"

Half an hour later the players were on the diamond, being received by a crowd of their friends who had preceded them to the game earlier in the day, for the last game of the season was a gala affair, and the Randall lads usually came over to Boxer Hall early in the morning.

"Now for a battle to the death," said Tom grimly, as he led his men out to practice.

CHAPTER XXXIII

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THE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

From grand stands and bleachers came cheers, yells, songs and cries of many kinds. There was a record-breaking crowd, every seat seeming to be filled when the two nines, in their natty uniforms, began their warming-up work. In the bleachers were many townspeople, both Randall and Boxer Hall adherents. It seemed as if the unprotected seats, shimmering in the hot sun, were composed of mats of straw hats, with colored bands for ornaments.

In the grand stands there was a conglomeration of many colors, formed by the hats of girls, and the gay banners they carried, the yellow and maroon of Randall mingling with the red and green of Boxer Hall, a combination lately adopted.

"Great crowd," commented Phil to Tom.

"Yes. But say, look at Langridge send 'em in!" for the rival pitcher was warming-up with Stoddard, his catcher.

"Ruth and Madge are here," went on Phil.

"Are they? I wonder if Miss Harrison will come?"

"Guess so. S'pose Sid will be on hand?"

"I doubt it. But come on, let's have a talk with Leighton and Kerr. They may want to say something."

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The practice went on, the usual conferences took place between captain and captain, manager and manager. Boxer Hall, as the home team, had the privilege of batting last. Batting orders were submitted for inspection, and the umpire took several new balls from his valise, and stripped from them the foil covering. With the exception of Pete Backus in place of Sid, the Randall team was the same that had played the 'varsity games all season, though the batting order was different, Holly Cross leading off, he having improved greatly in stick work. There was no change in the Boxer team, from when she had last played Tom's men.

The gong rang sharply. The buzzing talk and laughter on the grand stands ceased, as the umpire announced the batteries. There was a moment of consultation among the two nines, and then Stoddard, who was Boxer's captain that year, motioned to his players to take the field. He donned his mask and protector, and adjusted his big glove. Langridge, with a cynical smile on his face, walked to the pitcher's box. He threw four preliminary balls to Stoddard, who then signified that he was ready.

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"Play ball!" called the umpire, and Holly Cross stepped up to the plate.

Langridge "wound up" and sent in a swift one. Holly did not offer to strike at it.

"Strike wan!" howled the umpire, who was a bit Irish, throwing one arm up in the air. There was an indrawing of breath on the part of the Randall players.

"It was a mile outside," complained Tom.

"Hush!" cautioned Mr. Leighton.

Holly struck at the next one, and missed. The following was a foul, and this gave his friends some encouragement.

"Lambaste the next one!" yelled Bean Perkins from amid his throng of singers and shouters. But Holly struck out. Nor did any better luck attend Dan Woodhouse, who fanned. There was a wicked look in the eyes of Bricktop, as he walked to the plate, and perhaps for that reason Langridge walked him. He seemed to know he would have "easy fruit" in Pete Backus, who was taking Sid's place, and he did, for he easily struck him out, and Bricktop died on second, which he had stolen. No runs for Randall that inning.

It was not without a nervous tremor that Tom walked to the box, to see what he could do against Boxer. He wondered how his hand was going to stand the strain, though it seemed to have healed perfectly.

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After exchanging the regulation number of practice balls with Dutch Housenlager, Tom was ready for Ralling, who was first up at the bat for Boxer Hall.

Dutch signalled for a puzzling drop, and Tom delivered it, but Ralling took a quick step forward, and, before the curve "broke" he got his bat on it, and sent a pretty single just over Bricktop's head, though the plucky shortstop leaped high to get it. Ralling was safe on first.

McGherity fanned twice, but the third time he, too, found the ball, and rapped out a two bagger, bringing in Ralling, who had managed to steal to second, though Tom tried desperately to throw him out. Roy Conklin was up next, and struck out, and then came Arthur Flood's turn. How it happened Tom couldn't tell, but the ball twisted in his hands, and instead of an out curve it went over the plate straight, and at slow speed.

Flood hit it a mighty "poke" and away the horsehide spheroid sailed, well over the head of Holly Cross in center field. But Holly pluckily raced after it, and, though McGherity came in with a run, Flood found it expedient to linger on third. By this time all Boxer Hall was in a frenzy of delight, for they were two runs to the good, and only one out. But there were two, a moment later, for Flood, taking chances, was caught napping on the third bag, and put out by a quick throw. George Stoddard fanned, and that ended the inning, with the score 2 to 0, in favor of Boxer Hall.

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Randall could not score in the next inning though Tom knocked a two bagger. He stole third, and then had to stay there and watch the Jackson twins and Dutch Housenlager ingloriously fan the air. It was bitterness as of gall and wormwood, but Tom tried not to show it, as he took his place in the box for the ending of the second inning.

Things looked a little brighter when Pinkey Davenport laid down a little bingle, almost in front of Tom, who tossed it to Phil, on first, and there was one down, with scarcely an effort. Then Langridge sent a neat little fly to Pete, on second base, and Bert Hutchin fanned, making three out in such quick succession that the wild cheering of Boxer Hall was checked, and Bean Perkins and his cohorts had a chance to let loose.

"Now, Randall, do 'em up! Wallop 'em!" shouted a tall dignified man, accompanied by two pretty girls who sat well down in front on the center grand stand. "Eat 'em alive! Eat 'em alive!"

"Oh, papa!" cried one pretty girl, clasping his left arm.

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"Oh, papa!" exclaimed the other pretty girl, seizing his right arm.

"That's all right, my dears," he answered. "Don't you suppose I want to see my old college win? And they will, too! Those boys have grit!"

"Yes, but they're short one of their best players," said a man next to the "old grad," and he told about Sid, for that was common knowledge now.

A goose egg went up in the Boxer frame that inning, and Tom looked happier. But, try as his men did in their share of the third, nothing resulted, though Woodhouse laid out a pretty liner, which was caught, after a run, by Sam Burton. Then came the heart-breaking last of the third, when three runs were added to Boxer's score.

"Go on back home!" yelled some Boxer enthusiast at the Randall team. "You can't play ball! Go back!"

"Not until we have your scalps!" declared Bean Perkins vindictively.

Seated together on the middle grand stand, Madge Tyler, Mabel Harrison and Ruth Clinton looked at each other.

"Looks pretty bad, doesn't it, Ruth?" asked Madge.

"Don't talk," said Ruth in a low voice, as she saw her brother's team coming in. "I'm—I'm just *praying* for them, Madge."

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A ray of light came to Randall in this inning for, though Pete Backus struck out, Tom laid down a pretty two bagger and came home on what was intended as a sacrifice hit by Joe Jackson, only it was fumbled and Joe got to first. Then Jerry fanned and Dutch got out on an almost impossible foul that Stoddard grabbed, banging up against the grand stand to do it.

"One to five," remarked Tom musingly, as he went to his box, for the ending of the fourth. "Well, we can't be whitewashed, anyhow, but I guess it's all up with us."

It seemed so, for in that inning Boxer added two runs to her credit, even if again Tom did strike out Langridge. The score was 7 to 1 against Randall now. In the fifth inning Tom's side gathered in one run, Phil making it on a sacrifice by Holly Cross, and Boxer further sweetened her score by another tally. In the beginning of the sixth Randall had the joy of seeing another single mark go up in her frame.

"We've got three runs," Tom remarked to Phil, as he went to his box. "One more in each inning will look pretty, but it will hardly do the work," and he spoke bitterly.

"Hard luck, old man, but maybe it will turn," came from Phil.

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But, alas for hopes! Many things happened in the last half of the sixth, and when they were done occurring there were four runs chalked up for Boxer. Tom rather lost control of himself, and had walked two men, while there was ragged field work to account for the rest of the disaster. And now the score stood 12 to 3 in favor of Boxer Hall. It seemed like a farce, and even Boxer Hall was tired of cheering herself. Tom saw the championship slipping away after all his hard work. Even Bricktop Molloy, usually cheerful in the face of heavy odds, did not smile, and Mr. Leighton looked gloomy.

"Well, let the slaughter go on," remarked Tom, as he came in with his men, to see what the seventh inning held in store for them.

"I guess you'd better let Evert pitch the rest of the game, Mr. Leighton," said Tom, as he sat

down on the bench beside the coach. "He can't do any worse than I've done."

"Nonsense! Things may take a turn even yet, though I admit they look rather bad for us. I hope ___"

But Mr. Leighton did not finish. There seemed to be some dispute with the man on guard at the players' gate.

"No, you can't go in," said the official. "How do I know you are a member of the Randall team?" [292]

"Why, of course I am!" cried a voice, and, at the sound of it, Tom looked up quickly.

"Sid Henderson!" exclaimed the captain.

"Oh, Tom! Tom!" cried Sid. "Am I in time?" and he pushed past the gate tender.

"In time? Yes, to see us walloped," answered the captain bitterly.

"In time? What do you mean?" and Mr. Leighton caught at a strange note in Sid's voice.

"To play the game!"

"Play the game?" Tom had leaped to his feet.

"Yes. It's all right. Here's a note from Dr. Churchill. The ban is removed. I can play—I can play!"

Tom ran over, and threw his arms around Sid. The game came to a sudden stop. The note was examined. Mr. Leighton told the umpire to make the announcement that Sid Henderson would bat for Pete Backus that inning, and take his place in the game after that.

"I protest!" cried Langridge, coming up with an ugly look on his face.

There was a conference of the officials, but in the end they had to admit that Sid was eligible, and the game started again. But with what a different feeling among the Randall players! It was as if new life had been infused into them. Bean Perkins started the song, "We're Going to Wallop 'em Now!" and it was roared out from several hundred lusty throats. [293]

Nor was it unjustified; for with a grim viciousness, after Holly Cross had struck out, Dan Woodhouse rapped out a three bagger the moment he came up to the bat, and Bricktop followed with a two-sack ball, bringing in Kindlings, while Sid, with a happy look on his face, looked grimly at Langridge, as if telling him to do his worst. The stands were still trembling under the stamping that had followed Dan's arrival home with a run, and when Sid swung at the ball, and duplicated Dan's trick, bringing in Bricktop, there was a wild riot of yells. They were kept up even when Tom sacrificed to bring Sid home, and then Joe Jackson got to first on a fly that McGherity muffed. Jerry, by hitting out a pretty liner, enabled his brother to get to third, while Jerry was held on first. Up came Dutch and he clouted the ball to such good purpose that he got to third, and the Jersey twins scored. Then poor Dutch died on third for Phil fanned out. But nothing could dampen the enthusiasm of the Randallites then, for they had secured five runs, and the score stood only 12 to 8 against them now.

"Oh, we can catch up!" yelled Bean Perkins. "Now for the 'Conquer or Die' song, fellows," and the strangely beautiful and solemn strains of the Latin melody floated over the field. [294]

Tom's men began to play like fiends. They seemed to be all over the field, and, though Tom was hit for a single, not another man got to first.

"Oh, if we can only hold 'em down, and bring in a few more runs we've got 'em!" panted Tom, as he came to the bench in the beginning of the eighth, and sat down beside Sid. "But say, old man, how did it happen that the doctor let you play at the last minute?" he asked, while the others waited for Sid's answer.

"I'll tell you later," the second baseman promised. "Gee, but I had a time getting here! Trolley wasn't running, and I had to come by train. Thought I'd have a long walk, but I met a fellow in an auto and he gave me a lift. Then, just as I got here I heard that the trolleys started running about five minutes after I left the stalled car. But, Tom, are we going to win?"

"We sure are," declared the captain, clapping Sid on the back.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BATTING TO WIN

But, though things had started off with a rush in the seventh, they went slower for Randall in the eighth, and one run was all that could be gathered in. Holly Cross got to first, and managed to steal second and third, while Kindlings Woodhouse and Bricktop ingloriously fanned. Sid laid out a beautiful three-bagger, bringing in Holly with the run. Then Tom was walked, much to his surprise, with Sid on third, and Joe Jackson got a pass, thus filling the bases. Randall was wild, for it looked as if a big play would be pulled off, but Jerry Jackson fanned, and the three men expired on the bags.

"Hold 'em down, fellows! Hold 'em down!" pleaded Tom. "We only need four runs to win the game, if we can keep 'em from scoring in their next two whacks."

"If," remarked Phil cynically. "Ever see a white black-bird, Tom?"

"Oh, we'll do it!" declared Sid savagely.

Tom did manage to retire Boxer without a run, surpassing himself by the excellence of his curves. He was more like himself now. [296]

Then came the memorable ninth inning, which, when Dutch started it off by fanning out, looked as if the end had come. It looked even more so when Phil Clinton also whacked only the air and there was a curious hush over the big crowd as Holly Cross walked to the plate.

"Now, Holly!" yelled Bean. "Another like you gave us before. There's only two out!"

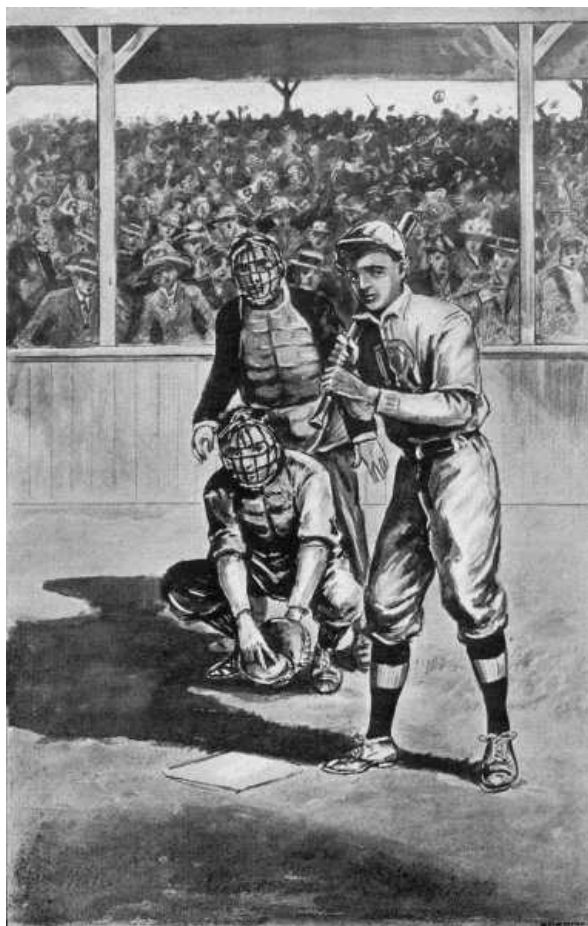
It looked rather hopeless, with two out, but Holly slammed out a single bagger. Dan Woodhouse followed, and hit well, Holly getting to third in the confusion. Then came Bricktop, his red hair all awry.

"For the love of Cæsar hit it on the nose, old man!" pleaded Tom.

"I'll do it for your sake, me lad," answered Bricktop calmly, and he proceeded to swing on the ball. He knocked a hot little liner to Langridge, and there was a groan as the pitcher, seemingly, caught it, but it bounded out of his hands, rolled between his legs and when he had picked it up Bricktop was at first, where he was called safe, though the Boxer players protested it. Holly had started for home, but when he saw Langridge stop the ball he ran back, and it was well he did so, for he was now safe there, as was Dan Woodhouse on second.

The bases were full, there were two out, and it needed four runs to win the game when Sid Henderson came up to the bat. He was as cool as if he was the first man up in a small game, and not one on whom a championship depended. [297]

"Oh, Sid, old man, bat! bat! bat!" pleaded Tom in a low voice. "[Bat to win! It all depends on you, now!](#)"



["BAT TO WIN! IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOU!"](#)

Sid did not reply. He was watching Langridge narrowly, for he knew that pitcher's tricks of old. Sid did not strike at the first ball, for it was away to one side, but the umpire called a strike on him and there was a howl of protest. It was quickly hushed. Langridge "wound up" again, and sent in a swift one.

With an intaking of his breath Sid swung at it. Almost before he connected his bat with the horsehide he was aware that he would make a good strike. There was a sweetness to the resonant vibration of the stick, as he cast it from him, and sprinted for first. He could not see where the ball had gone, though he had had a momentary glimpse of it going over center field, but he trusted to Tom, who was in the coaching box at first, urging him on.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"Pretty hit!"

"What a soaker!"

"Run! Run! Leg it, you old sock doger!" yelled the man with the two pretty daughters, as he recklessly swung his silk hat in the air. [298]

"A home run! A home run!" cried Phil, capering about, and hugging the Jersey twins, one in each arm.

Upward and outward sped the ball, away, far away over the center fielder's head. He ran back for it, became confused and began wildly searching around in the deep grass of far outfield.

"Come on in! Come on in, everybody!" Tom was yelling, and swinging his arms like the sails of an old windmill.

Holly raced over home plate, followed by Kindlings. Bricktop was racing in from third, followed by Sid, who had made such a magnificent hit. Bricktop tallied the tying run, and Sid was now running up from third, running as he had never run before, for he felt that it all depended on him now. The fielder had the ball by this time, and had thrown it to the second baseman, who swung about and relayed it home, but it was just a second too late, and Sid crossed the rubber on a grand slide. Four runs in succession! Oh, how the Randallites did yell! How they howled! How they stamped until the grand stands trembled, while as for the members of the team they fairly smothered Sid!

But the game was not over yet. Tom Parsons was up next, and, though as nervous as a girl, he managed to make a single off Langridge, much to the latter's disgust, for he was being hooted and howled at almost to the limit. Then Joe Jackson was struck out, and that ended Randall's chances. But the score was 13 to 12 in her favor, and if they could retire Boxer Hall without a run, the championship was theirs. [299]

Tom did it. How, is Randall history now, and any "old grad" will gladly relate it to you. How two men were struck out in almost less time than it takes to tell it, and how Tom caught an almost impossible fly by leaping high in the air as it was sailing over his head, and downed his third man. And that was the end. Randall had won the championship.

Oh, what a scene there was on the diamond then! Of course, Boxer cheered her rival, and then, hardly waiting for the answering compliment from Tom's men, they filed to their dressing rooms.

"Oh, Sid, it was great! Great!" cried Tom, hugging his chum. "Simply great, old man!"

"Up with him!" commanded Phil, and Sid was hoisted to the shoulders of his fellows, and carted around, much to his embarrassment.

"A bully game! Whoop-de-doodle-de!" cried the man with the pretty daughters.

"Oh, papa!" they cried protestingly, blushing at the notice attracted to them.

"Let me alone!" he retorted. "Didn't my old college win? Wow! Wow! Wow!" and he began to dance, while his daughters blushed more deeply. But who cared? [300]

The diamond was overrun with spectators, anxious to shake hands with the victorious players, especially with Sid, who had batted the way to victory.

Three pretty girls made their way through the press.

"Are congratulations in order?" asked one.

"Of course, Miss Tyler," answered Phil.

"Sure," added Tom, clasping the hands Ruth Clinton held out to him. Sid stepped to one side, as Mabel Harrison came up. He was rather pale under his tan.

"Come on, let's all go off and have some cream," proposed Phil. "Come along, Sid, you and Miss Harrison——"

He paused in confusion, for he had, for the moment, forgotten the cloud between the two. Mabel Harrison blushed, and was about to turn away, but Sid stepped forward.

"I will only be too happy," he said, "if Miss Harrison will——"

"You know—you know——" she stammered in confusion. The six were somewhat by themselves now, for the crowd had surged away.

"It's all right!" exclaimed Sid, and there was a joyous look on his face. "I can, and I'm going, to explain everything, now. You needn't hesitate about coming with me, Miss Harrison. See this," and he held out a duplicate of the newspaper clipping that had been fraught with such results. "I don't wonder you fellows thought I was going the pace," continued Sid, "nor do I blame you, Miss Harrison, for not believing in me. This is the first chance I've had to explain. I was in that gambling raid told of here." [301]

"You were?" and the girl recoiled a pace.

"Yes," resumed Sid, with a little smile, "I went there to rescue my cousin. His name is Guy Norton, and he is the same flashily-dressed young man you saw me with at the picnic. Guy's father died a short time ago, leaving him a fortune, which he proceeded to get rid of as quickly as possible. He took to gambling, and fast company, though his widowed mother never knew it. She supposed him attending to business in Dartwell, but, instead, Guy was dissipating. His sister, Clara, knew of it, however, and wrote to me to try to save her brother. She came to Dartwell to help look after him, and boarded with him. I had considerable control over Guy, for we used to be little chaps together, and I once saved him from drowning, so he would generally do as I said. So

I promised his sister I would save him, and gave my word not to tell anything about it, as she wanted to keep all knowledge from her mother, who had a weak heart, and who, she knew, would die if she ever knew her son was a gambler.

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"My first service was to take Guy out of a gambling hall, his sister having written me a hasty note to the effect that he had gone there with a large sum of money."

"That piece of paper, with the word 'trouble' on it must have been from her note," remarked Phil. "We picked it up in the room, after you went out so quickly that rainy night, Sid."

"Yes," assented the victorious second baseman, "Guy was in trouble, sure enough. I went to Dartwell, and managed to get my cousin to leave the place, just before the raid. As we went out, however, the police came in, and Guy and I were caught. He fought the officers, and called out my name, in asking me to help rescue him. Instead I advised him to submit. He was taken away, but I easily proved that I had nothing to do with the gambling, and I was allowed to go. I went to Guy's boarding place, and, from his sister, got money enough to pay his fine, together with some I had. In some way my name got in the papers. Guy might have recklessly given it instead of his own, thinking to keep the knowledge from his mother.

"My cousin was released the next morning, but he made me promise never to tell of his scrape. That was what sealed my lips. He promised to reform, if I kept silent, and I did, though it was hard—terribly hard," and Sid looked at Miss Harrison, in whose blue eyes there were traces of tears.

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"As I knew Guy's mother had a weak heart, and that the least shock might be fatal, I dared not even ask her advice. Clara and I decided to fight it out alone. She arranged to send me word by a messenger, whenever her brother went off with his gay companions, and I promised to go and bring him away, no matter what the hour.

"I did go, many times, to your wonderment, Tom and Phil, and once I had to cancel a promise I made to take Miss Harrison to an affair. But I could not break my word. On one occasion Guy, who was not himself, recklessly came to the college seeking me. He had a bottle of liquor with him, and I took it away from him, hurrying him back to Dartwell. But Mr. Zane caught me, and, as I was on my honor to Guy and his sister to keep silent, I could not explain. I took my punishment, being barred from the team, and kept still, though it was hard—very hard."

"You were a hero!" exclaimed Mabel Harrison, her blue eyes bright with admiration.

"Oh, no, hardly that, I guess," answered Sid, but he smiled gratefully. "Well," he resumed, "so it went on. I dared not tell, for I had given my word, though I was sorely tempted that day he came for me at the picnic, and nearly disgraced me. But Guy would not release me, and his sister pleaded for just a little longer try at saving him, and I consented. I paid his gambling debts many times, and, often, it left me temporarily without money.

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"Things looked very black, Guy would not heed my requests to stop gambling, and I did not care what happened. I even went to Bascome's dinner, thinking to get away from my troubles. Then, when everything seemed to go by the board, and I had been expelled for being caught out late, when I had gone one night to get Guy away from reckless companions, he suddenly reformed. He met some girl, I believe, who had a hand in it. At any rate he turned over a new leaf, gave up his gambling, and, what relieved me, confessed everything to his mother.

"She was much affected, but she forgave him, and is to take him abroad this week, to straighten him out. That was the end of my thralldom. To-day Guy went with me to Dr. Churchill, made a clean breast of it, told what I had done, and why, and before the assembled members of the faculty, proved my innocence. It was just in time to allow the lifting of the expulsion ban, and permit me to play—only I had a task to get here in time——"

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"But you did, old man!" cried Tom, seizing his chum's hand—only one, however, for, somehow Mabel Harrison had the other. "You were in time to help us bat to win! Sid, can you forgive us?"

"Forgive? There's nothing to forgive," declared Sid, and his eyes were moist. "I don't blame you in the least for thinking I was doing the very things I was trying to save my cousin from. Many a time I went broke on his account, but I didn't mind, for he was worth saving, for the sake of his mother and sister, if not for himself. He's all right now, I believe, and thoroughly ashamed of himself."

"Thanks to you," put in Madge Tyler.

"Oh, I think you were perfectly splendid, Mr. Henderson!" cried Ruth Clinton, with shining eyes.

Mabel Harrison did not say what she thought, but the look from her blue eyes was enough for Sid. He held her hand, and—Oh, well, what's the use of telling on a chap, anyhow? You'd have done the same, I guess, if you had been there.

There was a little pause after Sid had finished his story, and all about sounded the victorious yells and songs of the exulting Randallites.

"Well, are you ready for those plates of cream, now?" asked Phil. "Talking is dry work. So that was your secret, Sid?"

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"That was it, and hard enough it was to keep, too, at times, let me tell you," and the second baseman sighed.

A little later a jolly party sat in an ice-cream parlor, and their merry laughter and jests brought

smiles to more than one countenance, as the other guests looked on and listened.

"Why do you suppose Mr. Langridge sent that false clipping from the newspaper to you—I mean the one about Sid?" asked Ruth of Mabel.

"Oh, I—I don't know—exactly," answered the blue-eyed girl, but I suspect that she did know, but did not want to say, for she was done with Langridge forever.

"Now for college, and a procession in honor of our victory, the loving cup, and Sid Henderson—with bonfires and feasting on the side," remarked Captain Tom, a little later, when reluctant good-bys had been said to the girls. And the celebration in Randall that night was marked for years afterward in prominent letters in the college annals. Dr. Churchill made a thrilling speech, and even Professor Tines condescended to smile. The loving cup was carried at the head of a triumphant procession, the light from many gala-fires glinting from its polished surface.

"Well, it's all over," remarked Tom, several hours later when he, Phil and Sid were together in their room. "My, but it has been a baseball season, though!" [307]

"A great one," commented Phil. "We've got a corking good team. I only hope we have as good a one when it comes time to kick the pigskin."

"Oh, I guess we will," spoke Sid slowly. They did, as will be related in the next volume of this series, to be called "The Winning Touchdown," a tale of college football in which we shall meet all our old friends again.

"Well," went on Sid, after a pause, "I don't know what you fellows are going to do, but I'm going to turn in. I'm dead tired after my long tramp," and he began to get ready for bed, while Tom and Phil, sitting by the open windows, listened to the shouts of the revelers out on the campus, for many had not yet had enough of the joys of victory. Then, as the captain threw himself on the old couch, and Phil curled up in the easy chair, the fussy alarm clock went off with a whirr, the bell jangling discordantly.

"Time to get up, Sid, instead of going to bed," remarked Phil with a laugh, as he silenced the racket, and then the three chums—the inseparables—stood and looked at each other, while the clock resumed its interrupted ticking, and the shouts of the celebrators came in faintly on the night wind. [308]

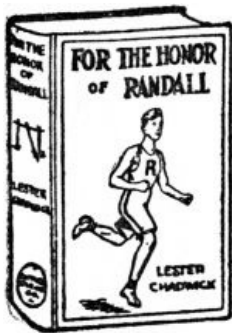
THE END

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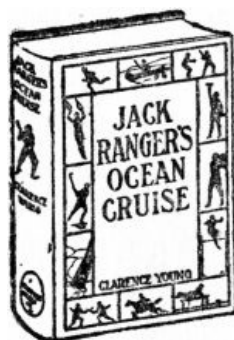
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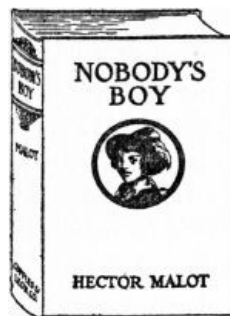
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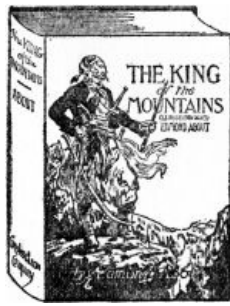
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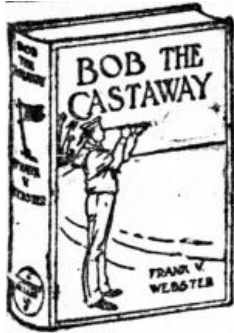


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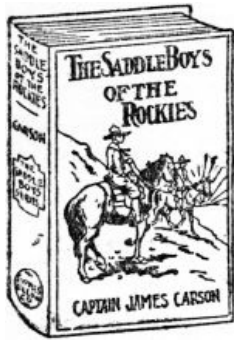
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