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Title: On Your Mark! A Story of College Life and Athletics

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Release date: March 15, 2014 [EBook #45140]

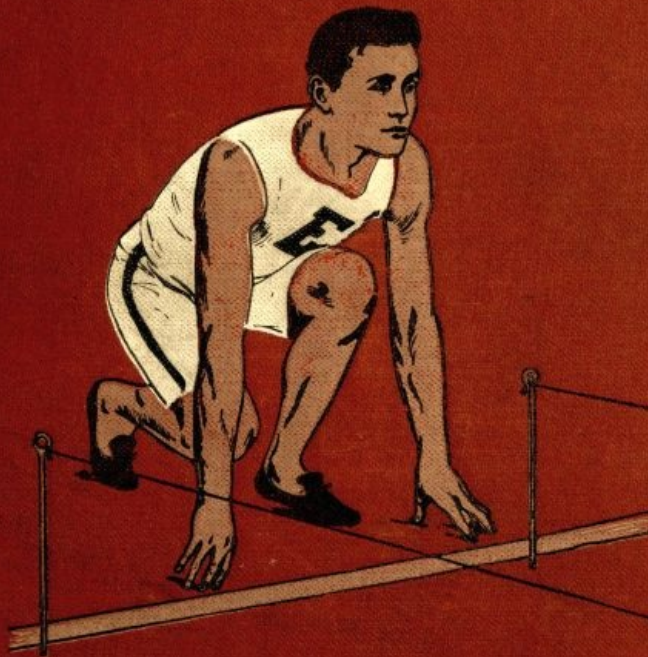
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ON YOUR MARK

RALPH H. BARBOUR



ON YOUR MARK!

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"Fooling?" Burley echoed. "Why, no, I ain't fooling."

ON YOUR MARK!

A Story of College
Life and Athletics

BY

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

AUTHOR OF BEHIND THE LINE, WEATHERBY'S INNING, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY C. M. RELYEA



New York
D. Appleton and Company
1908

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Published September, 1904

TO
BERT AND LILA
IN MEMORY OF
"THE BIG HOUSE"

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ON YOUR MARK

[1]

CHAPTER I

THE WINNER OF THE MILE

"All out for the mile!"

Myer, clerk of the course, stuck his head inside the dressing-tent and bawled the command in a voice already made hoarse by his afternoon's duties. In response a dozen or so fellows gathered their blankets or dressing-gowns about them and tumbled out into the dusk of a mid-October evening. Because of the fact that on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons the athletic field was required for the football contests it was necessary to hold the Fall Handicap Meeting on one of the other days of the week. This year it was on Friday, October 17th, and because the Erskine College faculty does not permit athletic contests of any sort to begin before four o'clock on any day save Saturday, the mile run, the last event on the program, was not reached until almost six o'clock; and in the middle of October in the latitude of Centerport it is almost dark at that time.

It was cold, too. A steady north wind blew down the home-stretch and made the waiting contestants dance nimbly about on their spiked shoes and rub their bare legs. That wind had helped the sprinters, hurdlers, and jumpers very considerably, since it had blown against their backs on the straightaway and the runway, enabling them to equal the Erskine record in two cases and break it in a third. It was Stearns, '04, the track-team captain and crack sprinter who, starting from scratch, had performed the latter feat. Until to-day the Erskine record for the 220-yards dash had been twenty-two seconds flat; this afternoon, with the wind behind him all the way, Stearns had clipped a fifth of a second from the former time, to the delight of the shivering audience, who had cheered the announcement of the result loudly, glad to be able to warm themselves with enthusiasm on any pretext.

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But if the north wind had been kind to the sprinters, the middle- and long-distance men had derived no benefit from it; for while it aided them on the home-stretch, it held them back on the opposite side of the field. The spectators had already begun to stream away toward college when Myer at length succeeded in getting the last of the milers placed upon their marks. The two-mile event had been tame, with Conroy, '04, jogging over the line a good twenty yards ahead of the second man, and there was no reason to expect anything more exciting in the mile. Rindgely and Hooker were both on scratch and surely capable of beating out any of the ambitious freshmen, who, with a leavening of other class men, were sprinkled around the turn as far as the 200 yards. To be sure, Rindgely and Hooker might fight it out, but it was more probable that they had already tossed a coin between themselves to see who was to have first prize and who second. So the audience, by this time pretty well chilled, went off in search of more comfortable places than Erskine Field; or at least most of them did; a handful joined the groups of officials along the track, and jumped and stamped about in an attempt to get the blood back into toes and fingers.

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Clarke Mason was one of those electing to stay. Possibly the fact that he had had the forethought to stop in his room on his way to the field and don a comfortable white sweater may have had something to do with his decision. At least it is safe to say that the mere fact of his being managing editor of the Erskine Purple was not accountable, for the Purple had a small but assiduous corps of reporters in its employment, one of whom, looking very blue about the nose, Clarke spoke to on his way across to where Stearns, having got back into his street clothes, was talking to Kernahan, the trainer.

"Well, who's going to win this, Billy?" asked Clarke. (The track trainer was "Billy" to only a select few, and many a student, seeking to ingratiate himself with the little Irishman, had had his head almost snapped off for too familiar use of that first name.) Kernahan looked over the contestants and nodded to the men on scratch.

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"One of them," he answered.

"Then you have no infant prodigies for this event in the freshman candidates?"

"I don't know of any. Two or three of them may turn out fast, but I guess they can't hurry Hooker or Rindgely much."

"Who's the chap you've got by himself over there on the turn?" asked Stearns.

"That's—I don't mind his name; he's a freshman from Hillton; he wanted more handicap, but I couldn't give it to him, not with those legs of his. He's built for a runner, anyhow."

"He surely is," answered Stearns, "as far as legs are concerned. But legs aren't everything. Hello! you haven't given that little black-haired sophomore much of a show; thirty yards won't help him much in the mile."

"Track, there!" cried a voice.

The three moved back on to the turf, Kernahan, who was timer, pulling out his watch. The dozen or so milers who had been summoned from the tent had had their ranks increased by several others. Hooker and Rindgely had the scratch to themselves, but the thirty yards held three men scarcely less speedy, and from that point onward around the turn as far as the middle of the back-stretch the others were scattered in little groups of twos and threes. Only the freshman with the long legs was alone. He had been given a handicap of 120 yards, and was jogging back and forth across the track with the bottom of his drab dressing-gown flapping around his slender ankles. Ahead of him in the gathering twilight six other runners, in two groups, were fidgeting about in the cold. Across the field floated the command to get ready. He tossed his wrap aside, revealing a lithe figure of little above medium height with long legs in which the muscles played prettily as he leaned forward with outstretched arm. At the report of the pistol he sprang away with long easy strides that seemed to eat up the distance. At the beginning of the home-stretch he had caught up the nearest bunch of runners, and at the mark he was speeding close behind the foremost men and taking the pace from the leader. It had cost him something to gain the position, and to the watchers about the finish it seemed that he was already spent.

"Your long-legged freshman's done for, I guess," said Clarke.

"Yes, he's too ambitious. Has a pretty stride, though, hasn't he, Billy?" Walter Stearns followed the freshman runner with his gaze while he began the turn. Kernahan too was watching him, and with something like interest. But all he said was:

"Stride's pretty good; feet drag a good deal, though."

"Who's that closing up?" asked Stearns. "Oh, it's the sophomore chap with the black hair. He's an idiot, that's what he is. Look! he's trying to pass Long-legs. There he goes! Long-legs has sense, anyhow. Sophomore's taken the lead, and look at the pace he's making! Long-legs is dropping back; none but a fool would try to keep up to that."

They were at the turn now, and the gathering darkness made it difficult to determine who was who. So the watchers gave their attention to the scratch-men and one or two stragglers who were bunched together half-way down the back-stretch. Rindgely and Hooker were close together, the latter putting his toes down squarely into the former's prints. Both were running easily and with the consciousness of plenty of power in reserve. When the turn was begun they had gained slightly on the others near them and were about 120 yards behind the first bunch. The black-haired sophomore was still setting the pace when he crossed the mark again. Behind him at short intervals sped four others, and last in the group came the freshman with the long legs. The half-hundred spectators that remained were clustered close to the track near the finish and, in spite of chattering teeth, were displaying some enthusiasm. A junior named Harris who was running third was encouraged lustily, but most of the applause was reserved for the two cracks, Rindgely and Hooker; they were well known and well liked; besides, they were pretty certain to win, and it is always satisfactory to back the victor.

"What's this, the third lap?" Clarke asked, thumping his bare hands together. "Well, I'm going back; better come along, Walt. You'll freeze here. If we're going to have this sort of weather in October, I'd like to know what's going to happen to us in December."

"Well, I guess I'll go along," Stearns said. "It surely is cold, and we know how this is going to end. There go Rindgely and Hooker now; watch 'em overhaul the bunch. If you see Ames, Billy, tell him I said he was to look me up to-night, will you?"

"All right," answered the trainer. "But you'd better see this out; there's something in the way of a finish coming pretty quick."

"Why, what's up?" asked the track-team captain, turning quickly to observe the runners.

"Well, I don't know for sure," answered Kernahan, cautiously, "but the scratch-men aren't going to get their mugs without a fight for them, I'm thinking."

"Who's in the running?" Stearns asked, eagerly. Once more the first men were coming down the home-stretch. But now the order was changed. The black-haired sophomore was not in sight, but in his place sped Hooker, an easy, confident smile on his face. On his heels was Rindgely. Then came the junior, Harris, and beside him, fighting for the pole, was a little plump senior. Behind this pair and about five yards distant was the long-legged freshman. His head was held well, but his breathing was loud and tortured. Stearns looked each man over searchingly. Then he turned to the trainer.

"Last lap! Last lap!" was the cry.

"Say, Billy, you don't mean Harris?" shouted Stearns when he could make himself heard.

Kernahan shook his head.

"Then who?"

"Keep your eyes on Ware," said the trainer.

"Ware? Who the dickens is Ware?" asked Stearns. But the trainer was scattering the spectators from beside the finish, and so paid no heed. The stragglers were passing now and the crowd was speeding them along with announcements that the last lap had begun and with mildly ironical injunctions to "move up head" or "cut across the field." Then all eyes were turned to the back-stretch, where the five leaders, survivors of a field of some fifteen, were racing along, dim whitish forms in the evening twilight. Hooker was setting a hot pace now, and the gaps were lengthening. But as the last turn was reached the figures changed their positions; some one dropped back; some one else moved suddenly to the front. But it was all a blur and the identity of the runners could be only surmised.

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"That's Rindgely taking the lead, I guess," said Stearns. "That means that Hooker's to sprint the last fifty yards or so and get first. But I'd like to know who Ware is. Do you know?"

Clarke shook his head.

"Search me," he answered. "Maybe it's the long-legged chap. He's still in the bunch, I think."

"Yes, but he was just about done up when the last lap was finished. Did you notice? He was gasping. Where's Billy?"

"Over there at the mark. He's holding a watch; if you speak to him now he'll jump down your throat. Here they come. Let's move over here where we can see."

"Well, whoever's in the lead is making a mighty painful pace for the finish of the mile," exclaimed the captain. "Seems to me he's 'way ahead, too!"

"It isn't Rindgely," said Clarke, decisively. "It must be——"

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"Come on, Freshman!" cried a mighty voice at Clarke's elbow, and a big broad-shouldered youth crashed by, sending the editor of the Purple reeling on to the cinders, from where he was pulled back by Stearns. Clarke glared around in search of the cause of his ignominious performance, and saw him standing, a whole head above the crowd, a few paces away at the edge of the track. He seemed to be quite unconscious of Clarke's anger. Leaning out over the cinders, he was waving a big hand and bellowing in a voice that drowned all other cries:

"Come on, Freshman! Dig your spurs in! *Whoo-ee!*"

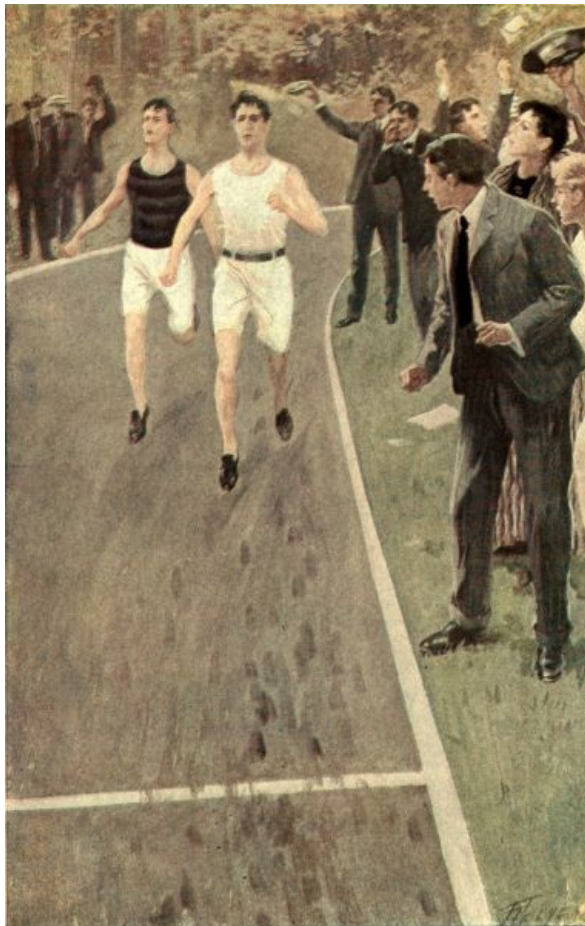
Clarke's anger gave way to excitement. Down the home-stretch came the runners, sprinting for the mark. Stearns was shouting unintelligible things at his side and apparently trying to climb his back in order to see the finish. The throng was yelling for Hooker, for Rindgely, for Harris.

And then, suddenly, comparative silence fell. Twenty yards away the runners became recognizable. The crowd stared in wonderment. Well in the lead and increasing that lead with every long, perfect stride came an unknown, a youth with pale cheeks disked with crimson, a youth of medium height with lithe body and long legs that were working like parts of machinery. Back of him ran Hooker; beyond, dim figures told of a struggle between Rindgely and the junior for third place. It was the stentorian voice of the big fellow at the edge of the track that broke the momentary silence of surprise.

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"Pull up, Freshman, it's all yours!" it shouted.

Then confusion reigned. The little throng raced along the track toward the finish. Hooker's friends urged him to win, while others applauded the unknown. And in a second it was all over, mile race and fall meeting. [A white-clad form sped across the finish six](#) yards in the lead, tossed his arms in air, swerved to the left, and pitched blindly into the throng.



[A white-clad form sped across the finish.](#)

“What’s the matter with Seven?” shrieked a small youth at Stearns’s elbow. The track-team captain turned.

“Who was that fellow that won?” he demanded.

“Ware,” was the jubilant reply. “Ware, ’07!”

CHAPTER II

A VISITING CARD

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When Allan Ware recovered enough to take an interest in things he found himself lying in the dressing-tent with some one—it afterward proved to be Harris—striving to draw a coat from under him. No one was paying any special attention to him, and the tent was filled with the hard breathing of the runners, who were now only intent upon getting into their clothes. Allan took a deep breath and obligingly rolled over so that Harris could have his coat. Then he sat up.

He had not fainted at the end of the race; it is very seldom that a runner loses consciousness, no matter how hard or prolonged the struggle has been. The collapse is produced by oppression of the chest, less frequently of the heart in particular, and the consequent difficulty of breathing is the most painful feature of it. Allan had been dimly aware from the moment he pitched into the throng until now of what had passed, but his interest in events had been slight; he knew that arms had reached out and saved him from falling and that some one—a very strong some one, evidently—had picked him up like a feather and carried him the short distance to the tent. Allan wondered, now that he could breathe again without exertion, who the fellow had been.

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Every one was intent upon dressing and no one looked as though expecting thanks. Rindgely, still blowing like a porpoise, was balancing himself on one leg and trying to thrust the other into his trousers, while he explained to Hooker that the track was like mush and no one should be expected to run on it. Hooker, looking amused, grunted as he pulled his shirt over his head. Allan scrambled to his feet and began to dress. He couldn’t help wondering what the others thought of his victory; it seemed rather important to him, but he had never won a race before, although he had taken part in a good many, and so it probably appeared more wonderful than it really was. The trainer stuck his head in at the door.

“Hurry up, now,” he commanded. “Get up to the gym, and don’t be afraid of the water when you get there.”

This familiar formula met with the usual groans and hoots, and Kernahan grinned about the tent. Starting to withdraw his bullet-shaped head with its scant adornment of carrot hair, the trainer’s eyes fell on Allan. He picked his way over the tangle of legs.

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"Well, are you done up?" he asked. Allan shook his head.

"That's the boy, then!" continued Billy, heartily. "You'd better come out Monday and we'll see what you can do. Did you ever run much?"

"Some," answered Allan, "at school."

"Well, you see me Monday."

When the trainer had gone, Hooker called across:

"Say, Ware, you're done for now."

"How's that?" asked Allan.

"Why, when Billy takes a fancy to you, he just merely works you to death. You weigh when you get over to gym and then weigh again, say, three weeks from now. You won't know yourself."

A laugh went up. Rindgely chimed in with:

"You'll find your work different from winning a mile with a couple of hundred yards handicap."

Allan had only had one hundred and twenty, but he didn't think it worth while correcting Rindgely, who was evidently rather sore over his defeat. Harris unexpectedly took up for him.

"He didn't have that much handicap, Larry; and if he had, it wouldn't have made any difference to you, you old ice-wagon. What was the matter with you, anyhow?"

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Rindgely entered into elaborate explanations, which concerned the state of the track, the injustice of the handicapping, and many other things, and Harris laughed them to scorn.

"Oh, you're just lazy," he jibed. "Your name's Lazy Larry."

A howl of delight went up, and Allan looked to see Rindgely become angry. But, after a moment of indecision, he added his chuckle to the general hilarity. Allan turned to Harris.

"I was rather done up after the run," he said, "and some fellow must have lugged me over here. Did you happen to see who he was?"

"Yes; one of your class, a whopping big fellow named Burley. Know him, don't you?"

Allan shook his head thoughtfully.

"Well, you will when you see him."

Harris picked up his togs and hurried off. Allan would have liked to walk back with him to the gym, but he thought the junior might think him "fresh" if he offered his company, and so he started back alone. It was almost dark now, and the lights in the college yard and in the village were twinkling brightly when he reached the corner of Poplar Street and turned down that elm-roofed thoroughfare toward his room. Poplar Street ends at Main Street in a little triangular grass-grown space known as College Park, and Allan's room was in the rambling corner house that faces the park and trails its length along Main Street. Allan thought his address sounded rather well: "1 College Park" had an aristocratic sound that pleased him. And since he had been unable to secure accommodations in one of the dormitories, he considered himself lucky to have found such comfortable quarters as Mrs. Purdy's house afforded.

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His room was large, with two windows in front reaching to the floor and four others arranged in couples along the side, and affording a clear view of the college yard, from McLean Hall to the library. The fact that former denizens had left comfortable window-seats at each side casement was a never-failing source of satisfaction to the new occupant of what the landlady called the "parlor study." In Allan's case, it was study and bedroom too. Next year Allan meant to room in the Yard, and for the present he was very well satisfied.

His occupancy of less than a month had not staled the pleasure derived from knowing himself sole owner of all the apartment's array of brand-new furniture, carpeting, and draperies. To-night, after he had lighted all four of the burners in the gilded chandelier above the table, he paused with the charred match in hand and looked about him with satisfaction.

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The carpet was beautifully crimson, the draperies at the windows were equally resplendent, if more variegated in hue, the big study-table shone richly and reflected the light in its polished top, and the more familiar objects on the mantel and on the dark walls, accumulations of his school years, seemed to return his gaze with friendly interest. To-night, with the knowledge of his victory on the track adding new glamour to the scene, it seemed to Allan that his first year of college life was destined to be very happy and splendid.

He stayed only long enough to change collar and cuffs, and then, with a boy's cheerful disregard of economy, left the four lights flaring and hurried across Main Street to Brown Hall and dinner.

The afternoon's work had put a sharp edge on his appetite, and, having nodded to one or two acquaintances, he lost no time in addressing himself to the agreeable task of causing the total disappearance of a plate of soup. His preoccupation gives us an excellent opportunity to make a critical survey of him without laying ourselves open to the charge of impoliteness.

Allan Ware was eighteen years old, a straight, lithe lad, with rather rebellious brown hair and a face still showing the summer's tan. His features were not perfect by any means, but they were all good, and if you would not have thought of calling the face handsome, you would nevertheless have liked it on the instant. There was a clearness and steadiness about the brown eyes, a gentleness about the mouth, and a firmness about the chin which all combined to render the

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countenance attractive and singularly wholesome. It was a face with which one would never think of associating meanness. And yet to jump to the conclusion that Allan had never done a mean act would have been rash; he was only an average boy, and as human as any of them.

Allan had come up to Erskine from Hillton without heralding; he was not a star football player, a brilliant baseball man, nor a famous athlete; he had always run in the distances at the preparatory school principally because he liked running and not because he believed himself cut out for a record breaker. His afternoon's performance had been as much of a surprise to him as to any. At Hillton he had been rather popular among his set, but he had never attempted to become a leader. His classmates had gone to other colleges—many to Harvard and Yale, a few to Columbia and Princeton, only one to Erskine. Allan had chosen the latter college to please his mother; his own inclinations had been toward Yale, for Allan had lived all his life in New Haven, and was blue all through. [19]

But Allan's grandfather had gone to Erskine—his name was one of those engraved on the twin tablets in the chapel transept, tablets sacred to the memories of those sons of Erskine who had given their lives in the struggle for the preservation of the Union—and Allan's father had gone there, too. Allan couldn't remember very much about his father—the latter had died when the boy was ten years old—but he sympathized with his mother's wish that he also should receive his education under the elms of Centerport.

His family was not any too well supplied with wealth, but his mother's tastes were simple and her wants few, and there had always been enough money forthcoming for the needs of his sister Dorothy, two years his junior, and for himself. If there had been any sacrifices at home, he had never known of them. At Hillton he had had about everything he wanted—his tastes were never extravagant—and the subject of money had never occupied his thoughts. At eighteen, if one is normal, there are heaps of things far more interesting than money. One of them is dinner.

Allan was much interested in dinner to-night. He even found it necessary to indulge in a couple of "extras," in order to satisfy a very healthy appetite. For these he signed with an impressive flourish. When the last spoonful of ice-cream had disappeared he pushed back his chair and went out. In the coat-room he found a dark-complexioned and heavily built youth in the act of drawing on a pair of overshoes. [20]

"Couldn't find my boots," explained Hal Smiths, "so I put these over my slippers. Wait a minute and I'll go along."

They left the hall together and walked briskly toward Main Street. Allan and Hal Smiths had never been particularly intimate at Hillton, but as they were the only two fellows from that school in the freshman class, they had naturally enough felt drawn toward each other since they had reached Erskine. During the last week, however, Hal had been making friends fast, and as a consequence Allan had seen less of him. Hal had quite a reputation, gained during his last year at Hillton, as a full-back, and he was generally conceded to be certain of making the freshman football team, if not the varsity second. To-night Hal was full of football matters, and Allan let him talk on uninterruptedly until they had reached the corner. There:

"Come on down and play some pool," suggested Hal.

But Allan shook his head. He liked pool, but with a condition in mathematics to work off it behooved him to do some studying. [21]

"I'll play some other night," he said. And then: "Say, Hal," he asked, "do you know a chap in our class named Burley?"

"Pete Burley? Yes; what about him?"

"Oh, nothing. What's he like?"

"Like an elephant," answered Hal, disgustedly. "A big brute of a chap from Texas or Montana or somewhere out that way." Hal's ideas of the West were rather vague. "Met him the other day; struck me as a big idiot. Well, see you to-morrow."

Hal swung off down Main Street and Allan turned toward his room, feeling quite virtuous for that he had resisted temptation in the shape of pool and was going home to toil. When he opened his door a sheet of paper torn from a blue-book fluttered to the floor. There was a pin in it and it had evidently been impaled on the door. Allan held it to the light and saw in big round, boyish characters the inscription:

"PETE BURLEY."

CHAPTER III

ON THE CINDERS

On the following Monday, Allan set out after his three-o'clock recitation for Erskine Field. He stopped at his room long enough to leave his books and get his mail—the Sunday letter from home usually put in its appearance on Monday afternoon—and then went on out Poplar Street.

It was a fine, mild afternoon, with the sunlight sifting down through the branches of the giant elms which line the way, and a suggestion of Indian summer in the air. If he hadn't been so busy

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[20]

[21]

[22]

with his letter he could have found plenty to interest him on the walk to the field, but, as it was, he was deeply concerned with the news from home.

There was talk, his mother wrote, of closing down the Gold Beetle mine out in Colorado, from which distant enterprise the greater part of her income had long been derived in the shape of dividends on a large amount of stock; the gold-bearing ore had given out and the directors were to consider the course to pursue at a meeting in December. Meanwhile, his mother explained, the work had stopped, and so had the dividends, and she didn't like to consider what would happen if this source of income was shut off for all time. Allan tried to feel regretful over the matter, since his mother was clearly worried—more worried than she was willing to show, had he but known it—but the Gold Beetle was a long way off, it always had supplied them with money, and the idea that it was now to cease doing so seemed something quite preposterous. The Gold Beetle represented the family fortune, about all that remained after his father's affairs had been settled. [23]

Allan found other news more to his liking: Dorothy was getting on nicely at her new boarding-school and had survived the initial period of tragic homesickness; one of Allan's friends at Hillton, now a Yale freshman, had called at the house a few days before; and Edith Cinnamon had presented the household with a litter of three lovely kittens. Edith Cinnamon was the cat, Allan's particular pet, and the news of the interesting event remained in his mind after the reprehensible conduct of the Gold Beetle mine had departed from it. Mines stand merely for money, but kittens are pets, and Allan loved pets. A wonderful idea struck him: why not have his mother send him one of the kittens? He resolved to confer with Mrs. Purdy on his return; surely she would have no objections to his obtaining a room-mate to share the "parlor study" with him! [24]

When he had changed his clothes for a running costume in the locker house and reached the track he found fully half a score of fellows before him. There was Hooker jogging around the back-stretch; nearer at hand was Harris practising starts; in a group at the finish of the hurdles he saw Stearns, the track-team captain, Rindgely, several fellows whose faces he knew but whose names were unknown to him, and Billy Kernahan. He drew aside to let a file of runners by and then approached the group. Rindgely nodded to him slightly, not with any suggestion of unfriendliness, but rather in the manner of one who has never been properly introduced. Billy accompanied his salutation with a critical survey of the half-clothed figure confronting him.

"How are you feeling to-day?" he asked.

"Fine, thanks!" answered Allan.

"That's the boy! We'll try you at three-quarters of a mile after a while. You'd better get warmed up, and then try half a dozen starts."

While the trainer was speaking, Allan was aware of the fact that Walter Stearns was observing him with evident interest. When Billy ceased, Stearns said something to him in low tones, and the next moment Allan found himself being introduced to the track-team captain. Stearns was rather under than above medium height, with small features and alert eyes of a steel-gray shade that contrasted oddly with his black hair. Below his white trunks his legs were thin and muscular, and under the faded purple sweater his chest proved itself broad and deep. He spoke rapidly, as though his tongue had learned the secret of his legs and was given to dashes rather than to sustained efforts. [25]

"Glad to know you, Ware," he said, as he shook hands. "Glad you're coming out to help us."

"I don't believe I'll be much help," answered Allan.

"Oh, yes; bound to. I saw you run in the handicaps. That was a mighty pretty race you made. By the way, do you know Mr. Long? And this is Mr. Monroe. And Mr. Mason. Keep in with Mason. He's office-boy on the Purple and writes criticisms of the track team."

Allan shook hands with the three, while the group laughed at Stearns's fling at the managing editor of the college weekly. Long was a startlingly tall fellow, with a crooked nose and twinkling, yellowish eyes, and Monroe was short and thick-set, and looked ill-tempered. Mason, Allan recognized as one of a half-dozen men whom he had seen about college and as to whose identity he had been curious. Mason was the sort of fellow that attracts attention: tall, broad-shouldered, with shrewd, kindly eyes behind glasses and a firm mouth under a straight and sensitive nose. He looked very much the gentleman, and Allan was glad to make his acquaintance. He was in the dark as to what position Mason really occupied on the Purple, and so the point of Stearns's joke was lost on him. But he smiled, nevertheless, having learned that it is sometimes well to assume knowledge when one hasn't it. [26]

"See you again," said Stearns. The others nodded with various degrees of friendliness and Allan took himself off. The track was in good condition to-day and held the spikes firmly. Allan jogged up and down the stretch a few times, trying his muscles, which on Saturday had felt a bit stiff after the mile run, and lifting his knees high. Then he started around the track. Half-way around he drew up behind Hooker.

"Hello!" said the latter. "Nice day, isn't it?"

Allan agreed that it was, and the two went on together to the turn. There Hooker turned up the straightaway.

"Going to try starts?" he asked. "Let's go up to the end there."

Allan couldn't see the necessity for becoming proficient in the crouching start until Hooker explained as they returned from a brief dash, in which the younger lad had been left woefully far behind. [27]

"Sometimes," said Hooker, "you'll want the pole at the start, and if you're placed two or three places away from it, you won't get it from a stand, you see. But if you use the crouch and get away quick, you have a pretty good show of getting ahead of the men who have the inside of you. Let's try it again. You give the signal this time."

After ten minutes of it, Allan picked up his sweater and followed Hooker down the track to report to Kernahan. The football men had taken possession of the gridiron by this time, Long and others were practising at the high jump, and altogether the field looked very busy.

"You and Ware try three laps," said the trainer to Hooker. "Watch your form, now, and never mind about your time. I'll attend to that for you. Take turn about at the pacing; you take the first lap, Hooker. Want to get into this, Larry?"

Rindgely nodded and peeled off his sweater. The others had to trot about for a minute or two while Rindgely stretched his muscles. Then the three got on to the mark, Billy gave the word, and they started off at an easy pace, Hooker in the lead, Allan next, and Rindgely in the rear. All three hugged the rim of the track and settled down into their pace. On the back-stretch they had to slow down once to avoid a group of football substitutes who were crossing the cinders, and once Rindgely was forced to leap over a ball that came bouncing out onto the track, and was much incensed about it. Hooker's pace was wonderfully steady, but Allan thought it rather slow. At the mark Billy told them to "hit it up a bit now," and Hooker slowed down, letting Allan into the lead.

Allan increased the pace considerably. This time there were no interruptions, and they neared the end of the second lap fresh and untired. Kernahan glanced up from his watch as they sped by.

"All right!" he shouted. "Get up there, Larry, and hold that pace."

Rindgely took the lead. As they commenced the turn Allan's gaze, wandering a second from the front, lighted upon a tall, wide-shouldered and somewhat uncouth figure at the edge of the track. Strange to say, the figure nodded its head at him and waved a hand, and as Allan went by there came a stentorian cry of encouragement that might have been heard half across the field:

"Chase 'em down, Freshman! Give 'em fits!"

Allan bit his lips angrily as he sped on. What business had that big chump yelling at him like that when he didn't even know him? Pretty fresh, that's what it was! Allan hadn't made the acquaintances of so many fellows but that he could remember them, and he was quite sure that he had never met the big chap who had yelled. But at the same time there had been something familiar about the fellow's voice—too familiar, thought Allan with a grudging smile—and he wondered who he might be and why he had singled him out for his unwelcome attentions. Then the incident passed for the time out of his mind, for the last turn was almost at hand and Rindgely was increasing the pace.

Allan began to feel it at the turn, and when they swung into the home-stretch and the pace, instead of settling down to a steady finish, grew faster and faster, he came to the unwelcome conclusion that he was not in the same class with the other two. Rindgely, in spite of all Allan could do, lengthened the space between them. Hooker, seeing that Allan was out of it, passed him fifty yards from the mark and strove to overhaul the leader. But Rindgely was never headed, and finished several yards in front of Hooker and at least thirty ahead of Allan. When they turned and jogged back to the trainer, the latter was slipping his watch into his pocket.

"What's the good of doing that, Larry?" he asked, disgustedly. "That wasn't a race."

"Oh, I just wanted to liven it up a bit," answered Rindgely, grinning. "What time did I make, Billy?"

"I didn't take you," answered the trainer, shortly. "That's enough for to-day."

Allan turned away with the others, but Billy called him back.

"What was the matter?" he asked. "Pace too hot for you?"

"I suppose so; I couldn't stand that spurt."

"Well, that was some of Larry's nonsense; he'd no business cutting up tricks." He was silent a moment, looking across to where the second eleven was trying vainly to keep the varsity from pushing over her goal-line. Then, "Ever try the two miles?" he asked. Allan shook his head.

"I don't believe I'd be any good at it," he answered. "Not that I'm any good at the mile, either," he added, somewhat discouraged at the outcome of the trial.

"What's the best you ever did at the mile?"

"About four minutes forty-five seconds."

"You did it inside of forty, Friday."

"I did?" Allan looked his surprise. "Oh, but I ran a hundred and twenty yards short."

"I allowed for that," answered Billy, quietly. "Now, look here, Ware; you've got it in you all right, but you don't make the most of yourself. You let your feet drag back badly, and you've been trying after too long a stride. You make that shorter by six inches and you'll cut off another second after a while. And to-morrow I'll show you what I mean about the stride. There's plenty of time before the dual meet in the spring, and by then we'll have you doing things right. The only thing is," he added, thoughtfully, "whether you wouldn't do better at the two miles. What do you think?"

"I really don't know," answered Allan, doubtfully, "but I'd like to try it."

"Well, there's lots of time. The indoor meet in Boston comes along in February; we'll have you in shape for that, and you can go in for the mile and the two miles. Meanwhile, you'd better come out with the other men while the decent weather lasts."

"Do you think I can make the team?" Allan asked, hopefully.

"Easy; but they don't take new men on till after the trials in the spring."

"Oh!" said Allan, a trifle disappointed.

"Don't let that bother you," advised the trainer. "You're as good as on it now. You make the most of the fall training, Ware, and keep fit during the winter. I'd go in for hockey or something. Ever play hockey?"

"Yes, but I can't skate well enough."

"Well, get plenty of outdoor exercise of some sort this winter; don't let the weather keep you indoors."

"All right, I'll remember." Allan's gaze wandered toward the locker building. Half-way across the field a big figure was ambling toward the gate, hands in pockets. Allan turned quickly to the trainer. "Do you know who that fellow is?" Kernahan's gaze followed his. After a moment:

"That's a freshman named Burley. Know him?"

"No; I just wondered who he was," Allan replied.

"And I don't want to know him," he muttered, irritably, as he trotted off to the locker house.

But Fate seldom consults our inclinations.

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CHAPTER IV

HAL HAS AN IDEA

[33]

It seemed to Allan during the next few days that the bulky form of Peter Burley was bent upon haunting him. On Tuesday morning, in English, he was aware of Burley's presence a few rows behind him; when he looked around, it was to encounter the big fellow's smiling regard. There was really nothing offensive in that smile; it was merely one of intense friendliness, quite unconventional in its intensity, but it irritated Allan greatly. Why couldn't Burley let him alone? Just because he had kept him from falling and lugged him to the dressing-tent, he seemed to have an idea that Allan was his especial property. And then the cheek of scrawling his silly name on a fellow's door! And yelling like a three-ply idiot at the track!

Perhaps the fact that Burley, whoever and whatever he was, was markedly popular rather increased Allan's prejudice. Wherever Burley sat in class there was invariably a good deal of subdued noise and laughter, and when he left the hall it was always as the center of a small circle of fellows, above which Burley towered head and shoulders. Secretly, Allan envied Burley's success with his fellows, but in conversation with Smiths he dubbed Burley a mountebank. Hal was visibly impressed with the word and used it unflinchingly the rest of the year.

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Wednesday, Burley was again on the field, but this time he made no remarks as Allan passed him on the track; merely smiled and nodded with his offensive familiarity and then turned his attention to the football practise. As usual, he was the center of a group, and after Allan had passed the turn he heard their laughter and wondered if Burley had selected him as a butt for his silly jokes. After that Allan saw him at least once a day until on the following Wednesday night, when the freshman election took place in Grace Hall, and Burley leaped into even greater, and to Allan more offensive, prominence.

There were two leading candidates for the presidency, and, contrary to the usual custom, the opposing forces had failed to arrange a compromise and a distribution of offices. The contest was prolonged and exciting. On the ninth ballot, Mordaunt, a St. Mathias fellow, won amidst the howls of the opposition. The rival candidate was elected secretary, but promptly and somewhat heatedly declined. New nominations were called for, and Burley was proposed simultaneously from two sides of the room. His name met with loud applause. Burley, sitting unconcernedly near the door, grinned his appreciation of the joke. Two other names were offered, and then the balloting began. On the first ballot, Peter Burley, of Blackwater, Col., was elected.

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Burley tried to get on to his feet to refuse the honor, but owing to the fact that three companions held him down while the chairman rapped wildly for order, he failed to gain recognition. The next moment the election was made unanimous. Allan grunted his disapproval. Hal said it didn't much matter who was secretary; anybody could be that.

Hal accompanied Allan back to the latter's room and stayed until late, talking most of the time about his chances of making the varsity squad, what he was going to do if he didn't, and how he didn't give a rap anyway.

"Of course, I can make the freshman team all right, but what's that? They have only four outside games scheduled, and two of those don't amount to anything; just high schools. The only game they go away for is the one with Dexter. And this thing of working hard for a month to play the Robinson freshmen isn't what it's cracked up to be."

"Who will win?" asked Allan, suppressing a yawn.

"That's the trouble. It's more'n likely that Robinson will. We've got a lot of good men—fast backs and a mighty brainy little quarter—but we haven't got any support for our center. Cheesman's a wonder, but he can't do much with guards like Murray and Kirk beside him. Why, Kirk doesn't weigh a hundred and seventy, and Murray's only a hundred and eighty-something. Poor is going to issue another call for candidates; he's going to ask every man of a hundred and seventy-five or over to come out. Say!"

Hal sat up suddenly in the Morris chair and looked like a Great Discoverer.

"Say what?" murmured Allan, drowsily.

"What's the matter with that man Burley?"

"A good deal, I should say, if you ask me," answered Allan.

"I mean for a guard," said Smiths, impatiently.

"He probably never saw a football," objected Allan. "They don't play it out West, do they?"

"Don't they, though! Look at Michigan and Wisconsin and—and the rest of them!"

"I refuse."

"Why, Burley's just the man! He must weigh two hundred if he weighs a pound!"

"Looks as though he might weigh a ton. But if he doesn't know the game——"

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"How do you know he doesn't?"

"I don't. But if he did know it, wouldn't he have been out before this?"

Smiths was silenced for a moment.

"Well, even if he doesn't know it, he can be taught, I guess. And we've got a whole lot of science now; what we need is beef."

"Burley looks more like an ass than a cow," said Allan, disagreeably. Smiths stared.

"Say, what's he done to you, anyway? You seem to be beastly sore on him."

"I've told you what he's done."

"Oh, that! Besides, he lugged you off the track; that's nothing to get mad about, is it?"

"I suppose not; I'm not mad about that—or anything else. He just—just makes me tired."

"Well, I'll bet he's our man." Smiths jumped up and seized his cap. "I'll run over and tell Poor."

"What, at this time of night?"

"Pshaw! it's only eleven-thirty. He'll be glad to know about it."

"He'll probably pitch you down-stairs, and serve you right."

"Not much he won't. Good night."

"Good night," answered Allan. "I've got some surgeon's plaster, if you need it."

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Hal Smiths slammed the door and took the front porch in one leap. Then the gate crashed. Allan listened intently.

"That's funny!" he muttered. "He must have missed the lamp-post!"

He took up a book, found a pencil, and opened the table-drawer in search of a pad. As he did so, his eyes fell on a folded sheet of lined paper. He read the penciled words on it—"Peter Burley"—and, refolding it after a moment of indecision, tucked it back in a corner of the drawer, frowning deeply the while.

Allan didn't see Hal the next day; neither was the objectionable Burley visible on the field in the afternoon when Allan ran his first practise over the mile. Kernahan didn't hold the watch on him, the distance was unfamiliar to him, and he lost all idea of his time after the fourth lap, and ended pretty well tuckered out.

"All right," said the trainer, when it was over. "You ran it a bit too fast at the start. But you'll get onto it after a while."

On Friday Allan saw Hal only for an instant and had no chance to question him as to the result of his midnight visit to the freshman football captain. Consequently, it was not until Saturday that he learned of Burley's appearance on the field as a candidate for admission into the freshman team. There was no track work that afternoon, since the Erskine varsity played State University. Allan went out to the field alone and watched the game from the season-ticket holders' stand, and cheered quite madly when the Erskine quarter-back, availing himself for the first time of the new rules, seemed to pass the ball to a trio of plunging backs, and after an instant of delay set off almost alone around State's left end with the pigskin cuddled in his arm, and flew down the field for over seventy yards to a touch-down.

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That settled the score for the first half, and the teams trotted off with honors even. There was a good deal of dissatisfaction expressed in Allan's neighborhood over the playing of the home team, and much gloomy prophecy was indulged in in regard to the outcome of the final and most important game of the season—that with Erskine's old-time rival, Robinson University.

About the middle of the intermission, Allan heard his name called, and looked down to see a

small, sandy-haired fellow waving a note-book at him. Allan waved back, and the owner of the note-book—the latter his never-absent badge of office—climbed up the seats and was duly pummeled and laid hold of on his way. Tommy Sweet was a Hillton fellow, and considering that he had been a class ahead of Allan at that school, the two had been quite friendly there until Sweet had gone up to Erskine. So far Allan had not seen much of him, for Tommy was “on the Purple,” as he liked to put it, and was an extremely busy youth. Tommy’s friends declared he would find something to do if he was strapped in bed.

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The key-note of Tommy was eagerness. His wide-open blue eyes were always staring about the world in search for something to engage his attention, and his ridiculously small mouth was forever pursed into something between a grin and an exclamation-point. His hair was just the color of tow, and the freckles which covered every available portion of his face were several shades darker, but harmonized perfectly. He was tireless in the search for news for the Purple, and when it came to activity would have made the proverbial ant or beaver look like a sluggard. Tommy thought sleep a criminal waste of time, and even begrudged the moments spent in eating.

Tommy was only perfectly happy when doing four things at once; less than four left him dull and dissatisfied. Clarke Mason once said: “I’ll bet some day Tommy will commit second-degree murder so they’ll give him hard labor for life.” For the rest he was a cheerful, likable fellow, aggressively honest and painfully conscientious.

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“What did you think of that run of Cutler’s?” he asked, breathlessly, as he sank onto the seat at Allan’s side. “Peach, wasn’t it? It’ll show up great in the diagram I’m making; see!” He opened his note-book and exhibited a puzzling maze of lines and dots, figures and letters. “That’s the first half. Everything’s there—runs, kicks, plunges, penalties, the whole show.”

“What’s it for?” asked Allan. “Anything to do with geometry?”

“Why, no; it’s— Oh, quit your kidding! It’s to go with my report of the game. It shows how the gains were made and who made ’em. And I’ve introduced something new in diagrams, too. See these figures along the edge here—4:17, 4:22, and so on?”

“Well, I see something there, I think,” answered Allan, cautiously.

“Those signify the time each play was made,” said Tommy, triumphantly. “That’s never been done before, you know.”

“I see. But it must keep you pretty busy. Do you have to write the game up, too?”

“Oh, yes.” Tommy showed three or four pages of awful-looking scrawls from a fountain-pen. “That’s done in a sort of shorthand, and I write it out full length at the office. Say, where did you tell me your room was? I meant to put it down, but forgot it. Purdy’s? Oh, yes; I know where that is. I want to come around some evening, if I can ever find the time. How are you getting on? Anything I can do for you? Any fellows you’d like to meet? No? Well, let me know if I can do anything for you. Very glad to, you know. That was quite a race you made the other day. Billy seems to have taken a fancy to you, doesn’t he? He’s all right, Allan; you shine up to him and—Hello! there’s a fellow I want to see. Come and see me, will you? Twenty-two Sesson, you know. So long, old chap!”

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Tommy hurried pell-mell down the stand, shaking off detaining hands, and disappeared into the throng. Allan took a long breath; he felt as though a small hurricane had been playing with him. The teams came onto the field again and the second half began. It proved uninteresting, and only the superior weight of the Erskine eleven won them the game finally by the close margin of a safety. Allan followed the throng out of the enclosure and across toward the locker house and the gate. But half-way there the crowd divided, and Allan presently found himself looking on at the practise of the freshman teams. The first team had the ball on the second’s five-yard line and was trying very hard to put it over to an accompaniment of command and entreaty from the coaches.

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“Third down and two to go!” some one shouted. A shrill voice called a jumble of figures and a tandem slid forward at a tangent, and for an instant confusion reigned. Then suddenly a roar of laughter went up, the line of watchers broke forward, and Allan found himself directly in the path of what at first glance looked like an avalanche of canvas and leather. Springing back, he escaped being borne along by the group of struggling players, in the center of which, rising like a city sky-scraper out of a huddle of shanties, stood forth, calm and determined, the countenance of Peter Burley.

In his arms, struggling but helpless, was the first eleven’s left half-back, and to his back and legs and, in short, to every portion of his anatomy, hung the enemy, for all the world like bees on a nest in swarming time. Behind them the second eleven pushed and shoved, and relentlessly the whole mass moved down the field. And somewhere, drowned by the laughter of the spectators and the despairing shrieks of “Down! Down!” from the abducted half-back, sounded feebly the referee’s whistle.

One by one the impeditive players dropped away, and Burley’s triumphant advance toward the enemy’s goal was stopped by the referee and two coaches. Burley set down the half-back, in whose arms the pigskin was still clutched, but did not release his grasp until his obligations were hurriedly but clearly explained to him. Then he patted the half-back on the shoulder in a paternal manner and retraced his steps to the enthusiastic applause of the convulsed throng. The second team hugged as much of him as they could encompass and he smiled cheerfully, but was evidently still somewhat perplexed. The ball went to the second on her eight yards and the game continued, Burley, at right guard, looming head and shoulders above his companions.

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Allan watched the game for a few moments longer, and then continued his journey. Somehow

the calm, inscrutable manner in which the big freshman had strode down the field in unquestioning obedience to what he had supposed to be his duty appealed to Allan. It had been awfully funny, and Allan smiled as he recalled it. But the incident had held for him something more than humor, just what he hardly knew; but whatever it was, and even though he would have found it difficult to give a name to it, it completely changed his feeling toward Burley. By the time he had reached Mrs. Purdy's front gate, he was wondering whether Burley still desired his acquaintance.

CHAPTER V

"MR. PETER BURLEY, BLACKWATER, COL."

[45]

Hal Smiths dropped in after dinner that evening and Allan brought the conversation around to the subject of Burley, whose performance during practise had been the chief topic at the dinner-table.

"Why, Poor was awfully pleased at my suggestion," said Hal, "after I found him. It was after twelve then, and I'd chased half over college looking for him. He said he wasn't very good at persuasion and thought Burley would require lots of it; so he asked me to see him. Poor's a pretty good little chap, so I went. Burley was awfully decent. Said he had never played and had never even seen the game until he came here; said he hadn't been able to find out what it was all about, but that if we wanted him to try it, why, of course, he would. Said he thought it looked like pretty good fun, and got me to sort of explain it a bit. One thing he wanted to know," laughed Hal, "was whether you could hit a man if he didn't have the ball."

"Well, he played it for all it was worth this afternoon," said Allan, smiling. "You heard about it, didn't you?"

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"No; what was it? I sat on the side line all afternoon, and waited to get a whack at State University. What did Burley do?"

So Allan told him, and Hal laughed until the tears came.

"Oh, he's a genius, he is!" he said.

After a minute of chuckling, he went on:

"Look here, Allan, I think you'd rather like him if you got to know him. He's—he's rather a decent sort, after all. I didn't take to him at first, of course, but—and I don't say now that he's the sort of chap you'd want to ask home and introduce to your people; he's kind of free and easy, and you couldn't be sure he wouldn't drink the catsup out of the bottle or slap your governor on the back—but he's—well, there's something about him you can't help liking," he ended, with an apologetic tone.

"Maybe I would," answered Allan, pleasantly. Hal looked surprised.

"He's given up the class secretaryship, you know," he announced.

"Why?"

"I don't know for sure, but Poor says he told him it was because he didn't think he'd be here much after the holidays."

"Where's he going?" asked Allan.

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"Don't know. Funny idea, to come to college for half a year. Maybe——"

There were footsteps on the porch, the front portal opened with a crash, and an imperative knock sounded on the room door. Allan jumped to his feet. Could it be fire? he wondered, shooting a bewildered glance at Hal. He hurried to the door just as the hammering began again, more violently than before. Hal raised himself uneasily from the Morris chair, prepared for the worst. Allan called, "*Come in!*" and the door was flung open.

Entered Tommy Sweet!

"You thundering idiot!" bawled Hal. "I thought it was at least the Dean! You can make more—Hello, Burley! Glad to see you."

"This is Mr. Burley, Allan," Tommy was saying. "Brought him around 'cause I wanted you to know each other. Mr. Ware—Mr. Burley."

Allan felt his hand enveloped in something large and warm and vise-like. He felt his fingers crushed together, thought he could hear the bones breaking—and still managed to smile painfully, but politely, the while. Then Burley had dropped his hand and was saying:

"I've wanted to know you ever since I saw you win that running race the other day. Came around here and left a card on you, but I guess you didn't find it."

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Allan murmured his appreciation, but remained silent as to the "card."

"I told Sweet here that you'd win that race. Offered to bet him anything he liked. He wouldn't bet, though." Peter Burley took the chair proffered by Hal and carefully lowered himself into it.

"They told me you carried me over to the tent," said Allan. "Much obliged, I'm sure."

"Welcome," answered the other, heartily. "You didn't weigh anything to mention."

"Not as heavy as the freshman team, eh?" asked Tommy. Burley looked apologetically around the circle.

"I suppose every one's heard of that fool thing?" he asked.

"Just about every one, I guess," laughed Tommy.

"That comes of trying to do something you don't know how to do. This fellow Smiths here came around to my shack the other day and said the class wanted me to play football because I weigh some. Well, ginger! I didn't know anything about the thing, and I told him so. But he would have it that I must play. And look what happens! I make a measly show of myself right out there on the range in front of the whole outfit!"

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"No harm done," said Hal. "You did what you tried to."

"No, I didn't. There was a little cuss there in a Derby hat wouldn't let me. I was going to take that half-backed fellow down to the other end and throw him over the line. That's what I was going to do. They didn't tell me I had to slap him on the chest and butt him with my head."

"But, you see," explained Allan, "he called 'Down' just when you began to lug him off."

"That's what they said. I was supposed to let go of him when he said that, but I just thought he was throwing up the sponge and wanted me to let him down. If I'd known he could have spoiled it by yelling 'Down,' I'd have held his mouth shut."

This summoned laughter, and Burley glanced around at the others in wide surprise. Allan felt surprise, too. Was Burley really quite so unsophisticated as he seemed, he wondered, or— His glance met Burley's. The big fellow's right eyelid dropped slowly in a portentous wink. Allan smiled. His question was answered. While the others entered into an explanation and discussion of the rules and ethics of football, Allan studied the Westerner.

Peter Burley looked to be, and was, twenty years of age. In form he was remarkably large; he was an inch over six feet tall, and weighed 203 pounds. Nowhere about him was there evidence of unnecessary fat, but he was deep of chest and wide of shoulder and hips. His hands and feet were large, and the latter were encased in enormously heavy shoes.

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When it came to features, Burley was undeniably good-looking in a certain breezy, unconventional way. (Allan soon found that Burley's breeziness and absence of convention were not confined to his looks.) Burley's hair was brown, of no particular shade, and his eyes matched his hair. His nose was big and straight and his mouth well shaped. His cheeks were deeply tanned, but showed little color beneath. His usual expression was one of careless, whimsical good nature, but there was an earnest and kindly gleam in the brown eyes that lent character to the face. He talked with a drawl, and pronounced many words in a way quite novel to Allan. But—and this Allan discovered later—when occasion required, he was capable of delivering his remarks in a sharp, incisive way that made the words sound like rifle-shots. At the present moment he was talking with almost exaggerated deliberateness.

"Sweet says you and he went to a preparatory school together," he said, turning to Allan. "I wish my old man had sent me to one of those things. What was your school like?"

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Allan told him of Hillton, and Tommy and Hal chimed in from time to time and helped him along. It was a large subject and one they liked, and half an hour passed before they had finished. Burley listened with evident interest, and only interrupted occasionally to ask a question.

"How'd you happen to come to Erskine?" asked Tommy, when the subject had been exhausted. Burley took one big knee into his hands and considered the question for a moment in silence.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said at last. "You see, I had a go at the university over in Boulder; that's near Denver," he explained, parenthetically. "But we didn't get on very well together, the faculty and me, and I was always turning up at the ranch. Well, the old man got tired of seeing me around so much; said he'd paid for my keep at the university, and I'd ought to stay there and get even with the game. But, ginger! the corral wasn't big enough. Every time I'd try to be good, something would come along and happen, and—first thing I knew, I'd be roaming at large again. So the old man said he guessed what I needed was to get far enough away from home so I wouldn't back-trail so often; said there wasn't much doing when I went to college Monday morning and showed up for feed Thursday night. First he tried taking my railroad pass away; but when I couldn't scare up the money, I rode home on a freight. I got to know the train crews on the D. & R. G. pretty well long toward spring. When vacation came, we all agreed to call it off—the faculty and the old man and me. So I went up to Rico and fooled around a mine there all summer. When—"

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"What was the name of the mine?" asked Allan, eagerly.

"This one was the Indian Girl. There's lots of 'em thereabouts. The old man—"

"Say, is the 'old man' your father?" asked Tommy.

"Yes; why?"

"Nothing, only I should think he'd lick you if he heard you calling him that."

"Oh, he doesn't mind. Besides, he isn't really old; only about forty. He calls me Kid, too," he added, smiling broadly. "Well, in the summer he wanted to know where I'd rather go to college—Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania; he said he didn't care so long as it was far enough away to keep me from diggin' out for home every week and presenting myself with vacations not down

on the calendar. Well, there was a fellow up at the mine named Thompson; he was superintendent. I was helping him—or thought I was—and so we got to be pretty good friends. He was a nice little fellow, about as high as a sage-bush, and as plucky as a bulldog. Well, he went to college here about ten years ago, and he used to tell me a good deal about the place. So, when the old man said, ‘Which is it?’ I told him Erskine. He said he’d never heard tell of it, but so long as it was about two thousand miles from Blackwater he guessed it would do. And that’s how. Now you talk.”

“That’s the first time I ever heard of choosing a college because it was a long way from home,” laughed Hal. “I’d like to meet that father of yours.”

“Better go back with me Christmas,” said Burley. Hal stared at him doubtfully, undecided whether to laugh or not. “Of course,” continued Burley, carelessly, “we haven’t got much out there. It’s pretty much all alfalfa and sage-bush around Blackwater. But the hills aren’t far, and there’s good hunting up toward Routt. You fellows all better come; the old man would be pleased to have you.”

Hal stared wide-eyed.

“Aren’t you fooling?” he gasped.

“Fooling?” Burley echoed. “Why, no, I ain’t fooling. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing; but of course we couldn’t do it, you know; at least, I’m plumb sure I couldn’t.” Hal looked doubtfully at the others. [54]

“Nor I,” said Allan. “I only wish I could.”

“Same here,” said Tommy, wistfully. “I’d give a heap to have the chance.”

“Sorry,” answered Burley. “Perhaps in the summer, or some other time, when you haven’t got anything better. I suppose your folks want you at home Christmas?”

“Y-yes,” replied Hal, “but it isn’t altogether that; there’s the expense, you see.”

“Oh, it wouldn’t cost you anything much,” said Burley. “It’s all on me. You’d better say you’ll come.”

Hal’s eyes opened wider than before.

“You mean you’d pay our fares—all our fares—out to Colorado and back?” he asked.

“Sure. We’d only have about a week out there, but we could do a lot of damage in a week.”

Hal was silent from amazement. Allan stammered his thanks. Tommy merely sat and stared at Burley, as though fascinated. The latter translated silence into assent.

“Well, we’ll call it fixed, eh?” he asked, heartily.

“Thunder, no!” exploded Hal. “We couldn’t do that, Burley. We’re awfully much obliged, but, of course, if we went out there to visit you, we’d pay our own way. And I don’t believe any of us could do that—this Christmas, at least.” [55]

“Oh, be good!” said Burley. “Now, look here; I’d let you do that much for me.”

“But we couldn’t,” said Allan.

“Well, you would if you could, of course; wouldn’t you, now?”

“Why—er—I suppose we would,” Allan faltered.

“Well, there you are!” said Burley, triumphantly. “That settles it.”

It took the others some time to prove to him that it didn’t settle it, and Burley listened with polite, but disapproving, attention. When the argument was concluded, he shook his head sorrowfully.

“You’re a lot of Indians!” he said. “You’re not doing the square thing by me, and I’m going to pull my freight.” He drew himself out of the chair and rescued his big felt hat from beneath it. There was a general pushing back of chairs. “You and Mr. Ware must come around to my tepee some night soon,” Burley told Hal, “and we’ll have another pow-wow. Seems like I’d done all the chinning to-night.” He shook hands with Allan, who strove to bear the pain with fortitude and only grimaced once, and said in quite a matter-of-fact way, “I guess you and I are going to be partners. Good night.” [56]

Allan muttered that he hoped so, and after the three visitors had taken their departures he examined his hand under the light to see if bruises or dislocations were visible.

“I wonder,” he asked himself, with a rueful smile, “if he shakes hands very often with his partners?”

CHAPTER VI

“RIGHT GUARD BACK!”

November started in with an Indian summer, but by the middle of the month the spell had

broken, and a week of hard, driving rain succeeded the bright weather. Until then Allan had spent almost every afternoon on the cinder-track, running the half mile at good speed, doing the mile and a half inside his time, occasionally practising sprinting, and, once a week, jogging around until he had left nine laps behind him and had covered a quarter of a mile over his distance.

For by this time Kernahan had decided that the two-mile event was what he was cut out for, but promised him, nevertheless, that at the indoor athletic meeting, in February, he should be allowed to try both the mile and the two miles. The trainer's instruction had already bettered Allan's form; his stride had lost in length and gained in speed and grace until it became a subject for admiring comment among the fellows.

The Purple, in an article on Fall Work of the Track Team Candidates, hailed "Ware '07" as "a most promising runner, and one who has improved rapidly in form since the Fall Handicaps until at present he easily leads the distance men in that feature. It is Mr. Kernahan's intention," concluded the Purple, "to develop Ware as a two-miler, since this year, as in several years past, there is a dearth of first-class material for this distance."

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But the rains put an end to the track work, as they put an end to all outdoor activities save football, and training was practically dropped by the candidates. On three occasions, when the clouds temporarily ceased emptying themselves onto a sodden earth, the middle and long distance candidates were sent on cross-country jogs and straggled home at dusk, very wet and muddy, and much out of temper. A week before Thanksgiving the sky became less gloomy and a sharp frost froze the earth till it rang like metal underfoot.

It was on one such day, a Saturday, that the Robinson freshman football team came to town and, headed by a brass band, marched out to the field to do battle with the Erskine youngsters. The varsity team had journeyed from home to play Artmouth, and consequently the freshman contest drew the entire college and town, and enthusiasm reigned supreme in spite of the fact that a Robinson victory was acknowledged to be a foregone conclusion.

Allan and Tommy Sweet watched the game from the side lines; Tommy, with note-book in hand, darting hither and thither from one point of vantage to another, and Allan vainly striving to keep up with him. The latter had gained admission beyond the ropes by posing as Tommy's assistant; the assistance rendered consisted principally of listening to Tommy's breathless comment on the game.

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"Oh, rotten!" Tommy would snarl. "Two yards more!... Oh; perfectly rotten!... See that pass? See it? What? Eh, what?... Now, watch this! Watch— What'd I say? Good work, Seven!... Now, that's playing!... Third down and one to— What's that? Lost it? Lost nothing! Why, look where the ball is! How can they have lost— Hey! how's that for off-side? Just watch that Robinson left end; look! See that?... Three yards right through the center! What was Burley doing?... Well, here goes for a touch-down. There's no help now!... Another yard!... Two more!... Did they make it? Did they?... *Hi-i-i! Our ball!*"

It was a very pretty game, after all, and when the first half ended with the score only 5 to 0, in the visitors' favor, Erskine's hope revived, and during the intermission there was much talk of tying the score, while some few extremely optimistic watchers hinted at an Erskine victory. Considering the fact that the purple-clad team was twelve pounds lighter than its opponent, this was a good deal to expect, and Tommy, a fair example of conservative opinion, declared that the best he looked for was to have the second half end with the score as it then stood. But a good many guesses went wrong that afternoon.

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Erskine had played on the defensive during the first half, and when, after receiving Robinson's kick-off, she punted the ball without trying to run it back, it seemed that she was continuing her former tactics. The punt was a good one and was caught on Robinson's thirty-yard line. The Brown accepted the challenge and returned the kick. It went to Erskine's forty-five yards. Again Poor punted, and the ball sailed down to the Brown's fifteen yards, where it was gathered into a half-back's arms. Erskine had gained largely in the two exchanges of punts, and her supporters cheered loudly, while Robinson, realizing discretion to be the better part of valor, refrained from further kicking and ran the ball back ten yards before she was downed.

And then, as in the first period of play, she began to advance the pigskin by fierce plunges at the Erskine line. But now there was a perceptible difference in results, a difference recognized by the spectators after the first two attacks. Robinson wasn't making much headway. Twice she barely made her distance; the third time she failed by six inches and, amidst cheering plainly heard on the campus, Erskine took the ball on her opponent's twenty-five yards. The first plunge netted a bare yard, yet it carried the ball out of the checker-board, and a line-man dropped back. Tommy set up a shout.

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"It's Burley! They're going to play him back of the line!"

There was no doubt about it's being Burley. He loomed far above the rest of the backs, and even when, his hands on the full-back's hips, he doubled himself up for the charge, he was still the biggest object on the field. The stands danced with delight.

So far there had been no hint of the big right guard taking part in the tandem attacks; in fact, his presence on the team was doubtful until the last moment, for Burley's development as a football player had been discouragingly slow, in spite of his weight and strength and cheerful willingness. Even yet he possessed only a partial understanding of the game. He did what he was told to do, and did it as hard as he knew how; that constituted the extent of his science. The

stands composed themselves, and breathless suspense reigned. Poor's shrill pipe was heard reeling off the signals, and then—

Then the advance began.

Robinson had played hard every moment of the first thirty-five minutes, and she had played on the offensive. Erskine had played hard too, but her playing had been defensive. To attack is more tiring than to repel attack, and now what difference there was in condition was in Erskine's favor. Her defensive tactics were suddenly abandoned, and from that moment to the final whistle she forced the fighting every instant of the time.

Peter Burley was, to use Tommy's broken, breathless words, "simply great." He knew little or nothing about line-plunging. He didn't do any of the things coaches instruct backs to do. He merely waded into and through the opponents, without bothering his head with the niceties of play. If the hole was there, well and good; he went through it and emerged on the other side with half the Robinson team clinging to him. If the hole wasn't there, well and good again; he went through just the same, only he didn't go so far. But there was always a good gain—sometimes a yard, sometimes two, sometimes three or four.

When the whistle blew, Burley climbed to his feet and ambled back to his position, unruffled and unheeding of the bruises that fell to his share. Nine plunges brought the ball to Robinson's five yards. There the Brown line held for an instant. The first down netted a bare yard, the second brought scarcely as much. The cheering, which had been continuous from the first attack, died down, and a great silence fell. Tommy was nibbling the corner off his note-book, and Allan, kneeling beside him, was nervously biting his lip. Poor drew Burley and the backs aside for a whispered consultation. Then the players took their positions again, and—

Presto! Erskine had scored!

Without signals, the tandem had plunged onto the Robinson left tackle, Burley's leather head-guard had been seen for an instant tossing high above a struggling mass, and then had disappeared, and chaos had reigned until the referee's whistle commanded a cessation of hostilities. When the piled-up mass was removed, Burley was found serenely hugging the ball to his chest a yard over the line.

While the stands cavorted and cheered, Poor kicked the goal. Erskine was already victorious, and Robinson's youngsters seemed to realize the fact. For, though they fought valiantly and doggedly for twenty minutes longer, it was evident that they no longer looked for victory. With every repulse their defense grew perceptibly weaker, while their rivals, as though they had husbanded their strength until now, made each attack fiercer than the one before, until in the last ten minutes of the contest they simply drove the Brown before them at will. Long before the game was at an end the stands began to empty; there was small pleasure in seeing a defeated enemy humbled. When the final whistle blew, the score stood 17 to 5, and Peter Burley, breathing hard through bleeding and swollen lips, said "he guessed he was ready to have his oats and be bedded down."

CHAPTER VII

"THE RANCH"

It is human nature to dwell at length upon our successes and dismiss our failures with a word. The writer has given a chapter to the freshman game, but he is going to tell the story of the varsity contest, which occurred a week later, in a paragraph.

Robinson won in a clean, hard-fought game—11 to 0. Her rival never approached a score in either half, but by the grimmest sort of defensive work she managed to keep the final figures down to half of what they might have been had she gone to pieces for an instant. Hal played a brilliant game at full-back in that contest, and proved his right to the position. Thus the football season at Erskine ended in decisive defeat. It was an honorable defeat, to be sure; but, since at Erskine, as at other colleges in this country, they play more for the sake of winning than for love of the game, there were doleful faces a-plenty, and on Sunday the college had the appearance of a place smitten with the plague.

But Monday morning came and brought recitations and lectures, just as though there was no such thing as football, and the college settled back into the usual routine. At noon the sting of defeat was forgotten. At night, fellows were cheerfully discussing the chances for the next year. If we take defeat too hard, at least we recover quickly; there is hope for us in that.

Allan, for all that he was quite as patriotic as any, felt the defeat of the varsity team less than he did the cessation of track work. The latter left him at first feeling like a fish out of water. Tommy Sweet suggested that he might rig up a treadmill in his room and run to his heart's content, like a squirrel in a wire cage. But Tommy wouldn't promise to feed him all the peanuts he could eat, and so Allan refused to try the scheme. Instead, he spent much of his time out-of-doors and took long walks and runs out along the river or struck off westward to Millport.

On many of these excursions he was accompanied by Peter Burley. Peter—or more properly Pete, since that was the name he declared to be the proper one—Pete couldn't be persuaded to

do any running, but he was willing to walk any distance and in any direction, seeming to care very little whether he ever got back to Centerport or didn't. And as his long legs took him over the ground about as fast as Allan could jog, the latter never suffered for want of exercise while in Pete's company.

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The friendship between the two had grown rapidly, until now Pete's prophecy that they were to be "partners" had come true. The more Allan saw of the older boy the more he found to like, but just what the qualities were which drew him to Pete he would have found it hard to tell. The latter's never-failing good-nature was undoubtedly one of them, but that alone was not accountable. Perhaps Pete would have experienced quite as much difficulty had he been called upon to say why he had been attracted by Allan the first time he had seen him, or why he had perseveringly sought his friendship ever since. The two were radically dissimilar, but even that isn't sufficient to explain why each was attracted toward the other. Come to think of it, however, I don't believe either Allan or Pete troubled himself about the problem, and so why should we?

Pete's sudden leap into fame consequent upon his work against Robinson in the freshman game had left him unaffected. He had become a college hero in an hour, but none could see that it ever made any difference to him. He brushed congratulation aside good-naturedly and ridiculed praise.

"Stop your fool talk!" he would say. "I didn't rope any steers. It was that little jack-rabbit, Poor, that whooped things up and won the game. I didn't do a thing but shove 'em round some." And when it was hinted that the shoving around was what brought victory, "Get out!" he would growl. "Science is what does the business, and I don't know the first thing about the game."

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And so, while Peter was worshiped by the freshman class and very generally respected by the others, he wasn't at all the popular conception of a college hero. And there were three fellows, at least, who liked him all the better for it.

Those three were Allan, Tommy, and Hal. Since that first meeting in Allan's room, the four had been much together. Tommy showed up at the gatherings less frequently than any one of the others, for Tommy, in his own words, "had a lot of mighty difficult stunts to do."

Sometimes the quartet met in Allan's room, sometimes in Hal's, less frequently in Tommy's—for Tommy lived up two flights of stairs in McLean Hall, and Pete had a horror of climbing stairs. The only climbing he liked, he said, was climbing into a saddle. That was why he often found fault with his own apartments.

These were on the second floor of a plain clap-boarded building at the corner of Town Lane and Center Street, with the railroad but a few hundred feet distant and the fire-house next door. Pete declared he liked the noise, and could never study so well as when the switch-engine was shunting cars to and fro at the end of the lane or the fire-bell was clanging an infrequent alarm. As few ever saw him studying, the statement sounded plausible.

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The ground floor of the building was occupied by a dealer in harness and leather; the third floor consisted of an empty loft. Across the lane—and the lane wasn't wide enough to boast of—was a livery stable. On the opposite corner was a carriage repair-shop and warehouse. A few doors below was a wheelwright's. The upper floors of the neighboring structures were occupied by carpenters, plumbers, roofers, and masons.

Through Pete's windows, which were invariably open, be the weather what it might, floated in a strange and penetrating aroma—a mingled bouquet of coal-smoke from the railroad, of the odor of pine-shavings from the carpenter shops, of the pungent smell of leather from below, and of the fragrance from the stable across the street. Pete said it was healthful and satisfying. None disputed the latter quality. Pete's rooms—there were two of them—were quite as unique as his surroundings.

Picture a bare, plank-ceiled loft, some forty feet long by twenty feet broad, divided in the exact center by a partition of half-inch matched boards and lighted by five windows. Imagine the walls and ceiling painted a pea-green, mentally hang two big oil-lamps—one in the middle of each room—from the latter, and spread half a dozen skins—bear, coyote, antelope, and cougar—over the discolored floor, and you have Pete's apartments. There was a door in the partition, but as it wouldn't close, owing to inequalities in the casing, it was always open.

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The furniture, of which there was very little, represented Centerport's best: there was a "golden-oak" bureau, a "Flemish-oak" easy chair, a "Chippendale" card-table—I am employing the dealer's language—an iron bedstead, a "mahogany" study table, a sprinkling of brightly upholstered, straight-backed chairs, and a few other pieces, equally highly polished and equally disturbing to the esthetic eye.

The walls were almost, but not quite, bare. Pete didn't care for pictures, but on nails driven at haphazard hung a silver-mounted bridle, a rawhide lariat, a villainous-looking pair of Mexican wheel-spurs, a leather-banded sombrero, a cartridge-belt and holster, the latter holding a revolver, a leather quirt, and an Indian war-drum, while over the bedstead in the back room the head of a grizzly bear perpetually resented intrusion with snarling lips. The head of a mountain-sheep held a place of honor in the other apartment, and underneath it hung a Navajo Indian blanket, almost worth its weight in gold.

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There were only two objects that might have been set down in an inventory as pictures: one was an advertising calendar and the other a photograph of Pete's mother, who had died soon after Pete's advent in the world. The photograph shared the top of the dazzling yellow bureau with Pete's brushes and shaving utensils.

In a corner of the front room was a trunk, covered with a yellow and red saddle-blanket. Against it leaned two guns—a battered Winchester carbine and a handsome two-barreled 12-gauge shot-gun. In another corner, as though thrown there the moment before, lay a brown leather stock saddle, with big hooded stirrups. The card-table held Pete's smoking things—two corn-cob pipes, a small sack of granulated tobacco, and an ash-tray. The tobacco usually distributed itself over the table and the ashes always blew onto the floor.

In bright weather, the sunlight streamed in through three of the five windows and crossed the rooms in golden shafts, wherein the dust atoms danced and swirled. With the sunlight came the sounds of the neighborhood—the clang of the blacksmith's sledge against the anvil, the screech of the carpenter's plane, the steady *tap, tap, tap* of the harness-maker's hammer, the stamping of horses' hoofs, the clamor of passing trains, and the chatter of the loiterers below the windows. Pete called the front room the "corral," the rear room the "stable," the whole the "Ranch."

If I have risked tiring the reader with too long a description of Pete's dwelling-place, it is because, in spite of their strange furnishings and hideous green walls, the rooms were far more homelike than many a smart suite in Grace Hall, and, to quote Tommy again, were "Pete through and through." Further, while Allan's, Hal's, and Tommy's rooms sometimes served as meeting-places for the four, the chambers over the harness-shop were their favorite resort. There was an undeniable charm about them; and if you could prevail upon Pete to close a few of the windows in cold weather, and if you didn't mind sitting upon the tables and the trunk, you could be very comfy at the Ranch.

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CHAPTER VIII

PETE'S CLUB TABLE

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On the Monday night succeeding the Robinson game the quartet was assembled in Pete's study. Allan had the easy chair, Hal and Tommy shared the big table, and Pete sat on the trunk. The windows were closed, for the night was cold, and the big hanging lamp diffused light, warmth, and a strong odor of kerosene through the apartment. This odor Pete was heroically striving to mitigate with the fumes of a cob pipe. Hal had tried the other pipe, but had soon given it up, avowing discontentedly that Pete ought to keep some real tobacco on hand for guests who weren't used to chopped hay. The bell in College Hall had just struck nine, and Tommy, for the fourth time, had slid from the table, pleading press of business, and had been pulled back by Hal.

"Forget your old business, Tommy," said Hal.

"Don't let him sneak," said Pete. "We're going to open a can of corn in a minute."

"That's all very well," Tommy protested, "but I've got things to do. You lazy chaps, who never study—"

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Dismal groans from the opposition.

"Can afford to loaf; but I want to tell you—"

"Of course you do, Tommy," Allan interrupted, soothingly, "but we don't want you to. Be calm, precious youth; the Purp" (college slang for the Purple) "will come out just the same, whether you continue to adorn that desk for another ten minutes or not."

"Why don't you fellows let a couple of weeks go by without putting out a paper?" asked Pete. "No one would notice it, and think what a high old time you could all have being useful for once."

"Wish we could," sighed Tommy.

"Tommy, you're a wicked liar!" said Hal. "You don't wish anything of the sort. If you missed an issue of that old sheet, you'd commit suicide in some awful manner; maybe you'd come down here and die of smells."

"If you'd only put something in it," said Pete, "something a fellow could read and enjoy—a murder now and then, or a lynching. Couldn't you run a story with lots of blood? It's such a dismal paper, Tommy."

"You fellows might jump into the river," suggested Tommy, scathingly. "We'd print your obits."

"Our which?" Hal asked.

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"Obits—obituaries," he explained in a superior manner.

"Would you put 'em on the fir?" asked Peter.

"On the fir? What's the fir?"

"Fir—first page." Pete mimicked Tommy's tone.

"No," said Tommy, when the laughter had stopped, "not important enough."

"Crushed and lifeless!" murmured Allan.

"Tommy," asked Pete, severely, "do you mean that I'm not enough of a heavy-weight to be dishonored by having my name on the front page of that old up-country weekly of yours?"

"The front page is for important news," said Tommy, with a wicked smile.

"Such as measles in the grammar school and the election of Greaves as president of the Chess Club," explained Hal.

"Now, I'll tell you what I'll do with you, Thomas," said Pete. "I'll bet you anything from an old hat to a quarter section of land that I can get my name and a half a column of talkee-talkee on the first page of the Erskine Purple any time I want to. Now, what say, Thomas?"

"I'll bet you can't," laughed the other.

"What'll you bet? Money talks, my son."

"Oh, most anything. If you want your name on the front page of the Purple, you'll have to do some tall stunts."

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"Of course, that's what I mean: kill the Dean, or blow up College Hall, or have a fit in chapel."

"Or subscribe for the paper," added Allan.

"Come, Tommy, speak up. What will you bet?"

"Oh, get out, you wild Indian! I'm going home."

He made another effort to tear himself away.

"Tommy, you're a coyote: you're skeered an' afeared. You know I'd win."

"Oh, no, I'm not," said Tommy. "I'll bet a dinner for the four of us at the Elm Tree that you can't get your name on the front page while I'm on the paper— Hold on, though; I won't bet that. I'll bet you won't get it there this year unless it's merely the name, as a member of a society, or as having attended a meeting, or something like that, you know."

"Thomas, you're hedging," said Pete, "but I'll take your bet. And just my name isn't to count; nothing less than a full paragraph to myself goes. You fellows are witnesses."

"We are," said Allan. "I smell that dinner already."

"And you see Pete paying the bill," said Tommy.

"I don't know who pays, and I don't care."

"He cares not who pays for his dinner, so long as he may eat it," said Hal. "Wise child, Allan. And, by the way, talking of eating reminds me. You know Billy Greb, Allan?"

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"I'm going home," said Tommy.

"(Shut up and sit down, Tommy!) Billy's getting up a freshman club table and wants you and me to join. What do you say?"

"Where's it going to be?"

"Pearson's."

"How much?"

"Six a week."

"That's pretty steep, Hal. Besides, I may go to the track-team table in the spring."

"I'm going home, you fellows," announced Tommy again.

"Will you please shut up?" asked Hal. "Well, you'd better join until then, Allan; sufficient to the spring is the evil thereof."

"Well, I'll think it over and let you know in a day or two. When does Greb want to start it?"

"First of the month. If you weren't a foolish little sophomore, Tommy, you could come in too."

"Huh!" answered Tommy, scathingly. "I've seen all I want of freshman club tables. I'm going ___"

"How about me, Hal?" asked Pete. "I'd like to join, if your friend will have me."

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Hal hesitated for an instant.

"Why—er—I'll speak to him about it. But I think he's got his number made up."

"That's all right," answered Pete, quietly.

"But I'll do my best," said Hal, hurriedly and awkwardly. "Maybe—"

"Call it off!" said Pete, with a cavernous yawn.

"If it was my table—" continued Hal, anxious not to hurt the other's feelings.

"I know. *That's* all right. I can stand it."

There was the sound of a gently closing door.

"Hello!" Pete exclaimed. "Where's Tommy?"

The three glanced in surprise around the room. Then—

"I think," said Allan, dryly, "I *think* I heard him say something about going home."

The next afternoon Pete found Allan at the gymnasium, and walked back to Mrs. Purdy's with him. He was so quiet that Allan was certain he had something on his mind. What that something was transpired when they had reached Allan's room.

"What sort of a cayuse—meaning gentleman—is this fellow Greb?" asked Pete.

"I don't know him very well," Allan replied, "but I fancy he thinks himself a bit of a swell. He's a Dunlap Hall fellow, and of course you know what that means."

"Never heard tell of it," said Pete. "What is it—a preparatory school?"

"Yes, it's— Oh, it's all right, of course, only we used to make a good deal of fun of it at Hillton. You go there when you're nine or ten, and they give you a sort of a governess to look after you until you get old enough to make her life a burden; then they put you in another house. They're terribly English, you know; have forms and fagging; and when you want a row with a chap, you have to notify the captain of your form, and it's all arranged for you like a regular duel, and you go out back of one of the buildings, and somebody holds your coat for you and somebody else mops your face with a sponge, and you try and hit the other fellow in the eye. It's like a second edition of Tom Brown. Think of getting mad with a chap in the morning and having to wait until afternoon to whack him! There's no fun in that. You'd like as not want to beg his pardon and buy him a 'Sunday'! But they think they're a pretty elegant lot, just the same."

"Think of that!" sighed Pete. "And I might have gone there, if I'd known, and had a nurse and all the scrapping I wanted. So this fellow Greb thinks he's the whole thing, does he? Guess that's the reason Hal was hunting a hole when I asked myself to join. I didn't know you were so mighty choice about who you ate with. Out there we ask whoever comes along. I guess you fellows thought I was loco, didn't you?"

"Thought you were what?"

"Why, crazy, inviting myself like that."

"Nonsense, Pete; we all understood. There was no harm done. It's just that Greb wants to get up a table of fellows he knows."

"Does he know you?"

"Why—er—I've met him, of course."

"And he could have met me if he'd wanted to, couldn't he?"

"I suppose he could, but he doesn't know about you."

"Wouldn't care to, I guess."

"Oh, nonsense, Pete; you're making a lot out of nothing."

"Dare say he thinks I eat in my shirt-sleeves and swallow my knife," continued Pete, gloomily. "Maybe he thinks I live on horned toads and grasshoppers."

"But, I tell you, he doesn't know you."

"I guess he's heard of me," answered Pete. "Guess he knew you and Hal and I were traveling together."

"Look here, Pete; if you want to join a club table——"

"Oh, *that's* all right. Moocha wano club table."

"Oh, all right," answered Allan, a bit puzzled.

"I'm going to join a club table on the 1st," said Pete.

"Oh!" said Allan, again. "What—that is, whose is it?"

"Pete Burley's."

"What! How—how do you mean?"

"Mean I'm going to run my own grub-wagon. And I want you to join."

"But— Look here, Pete, I don't believe you can find a decent place to take you. Everything's full up already."

"Where is there a decent place?" asked Pete, calmly.

"Well, there's Pearson's, of course, but you couldn't get in there. And——"

"Why couldn't I?"

"Because she takes training tables chiefly, and is pretty particular, anyhow."

"Yes, that's what she told me," said Pete.

"Then you went there?"

Pete nodded.

"I could have told you you wouldn't get in there. There's a pretty good place further along——"

"Oh, *that's* all right. We start on the 1st."

"Start where?"

"Mrs. Pearson's."

"Pete, you're lying!" gasped Allan.

"No, straight talk. I engaged the front corner room on the second floor. It's a right nice-looking place: paper on the walls, fireplace, lounge, window-seat——"

"But—but how'd you do it?"

"Oh, *that's* all right. We had a little pow-wow. It's going to be six a week and no extras."

"You crazy Westerner!" said Allan, in bewildered admiration. Then, "But you haven't got any one to join, have you?"

"Not yet; but *that'll* be all right. It's going to be select, you know; eight in all. There'll be you and me, that's two; and Hal——"

"I don't believe he'll come," said Allan, doubtfully. "You see, Pete, he's promised Greb."

"I don't guess Greb will have a table," said Pete.

"Why not?"

"Well, where's he going to put it?"

Allan stared. Then——

"Do you mean that you've got Greb's room?" he exclaimed.

"Twa'n't his," answered Pete, coolly. "He hadn't settled the matter, and so I said I'd take it and put down a forfeit. And there isn't another decent place for a high-toned, pedigreed chap like him to go to." [83]

"Pete Burley, you're a wonder!" breathed Allan.

"Think Hal will join?" asked Pete, unmoved by the tribute. Allan nodded silently.

"That'll make three, then. Now, of course, I know lots of fellows who would come in if I asked 'em, but, as I just said, this thing is going to be select; it's going to be the selectest table in town. So you tell me who are the top of the bunch in our class, and I'll go and fetch 'em in if I have to rope 'em and hog-tie 'em." Pete took out a pencil and began to write on the back of an envelope.

"Of course, it's all poppycock," said Allan, "but—well, there's What's-his-name, the class president, and Maitland, and Poor——"

"Whoo-ee! I'm glad you thought of Poor."

"And Armstrong—only he lives at home, I think—and Mays, and Wolcott, and—and Cooper—Cooper of St. Eustace, I mean; the other chap's an awful duffer—and Van Sciver——"

"Whoa, Bill! That's eight—eleven, counting us three; guess I can get enough out of the list. Besides, I must ask Greb; mustn't slight Greb."

"You're not going to ask him?"

"Ain't I? Just you keep your eyes peeled and you'll see." He got up and carefully put the list in the big yellow leather wallet he carried. "Guess I'll see a few of 'em this afternoon. Want to come along?" [84]

Allan shook his head vigorously.

"Not me, Pete. I don't want to have to testify against you before the faculty. How do I know what you'll do to those chaps to make them join?"

"Oh, say, Allan!" Pete turned at the gate. "Remember those ducks we saw on the river last week? Well, let's go after 'em Thursday morning, will you?"

"Shooting, you mean? I haven't a gun."

"You take my shot-gun and I'll use the rifle. I've shot ducks with a rifle before this."

"All right, Pete, but like as not the silly ducks won't be there Thursday."

"Well, we'll find something to shoot, all right, if it's just squirrels. We'll have nothing to do Thursday, and can stay as long as we like; make a day of it. Maybe we can find some place to have dinner and won't have to come back here. I'm getting mighty tired of commons, Allan. Well, it'll be considerable different when we get the table started, won't it?"

"I suppose so," answered Allan.

"Say, do you think Hal or Tommy would go along?"

"Ducking? Tommy might, but Hal's going to sign off and go home over Saturday." [85]

"Lucky chap!" sighed Pete. "Wish I was." He looked thoughtfully across the leaf-strewn college yard. "Suppose I could, but—guess the old man would raise Cain. Allan!"

"Yep?"

"I'd give a hundred dollars for sight of a mountain. Well, I must jog along."

CHAPTER IX

THE DUCK HUNT

Thanksgiving Day dawned cloudy and still, with a hint of snow in the air. Allan slept late, in enjoyment of holiday privileges, and Pete was banging at his front window before he had finished dressing. [86]

They reached Brown Hall a bare two minutes before the doors closed, and hurried through a light breakfast. Ten o'clock found them walking briskly along the Morrisville road, some four miles from college, having crossed the river by the county bridge and turned to the left through the little town of Kirkplain, which is opposite Centerport. Allan wore a white sweater, over which he had pulled an old coat; the pockets of the latter were bulging with shells. Pete wore a canvas hunting-coat and carried his cartridges in a belt. The Winchester was slung over his shoulder, and altogether he made a formidable appearance. Allan had the shot-gun. Tommy had refused to accompany them, pleading, as ever, a press of business; Hal had taken himself off to the bosom of his family.

So far they had seen nothing to shoot at save a red squirrel. Allan had impulsively sought to bring that down, but had failed for the excellent reason that he had forgotten to load. The squirrel had seemed to appreciate the humor of the incident and had chattered in their faces from the bough of a dead maple-tree. Allan had been glad afterward that the gun hadn't gone off. [87]

The blunder reminded Pete of a parallel case in his own experience, and he had told it so well that Allan had been forced to sit on a rock in order to recover from his fit of laughter. This story led to others. Pete proved a perfect mine of interesting narratives on hunting adventure, some of them laughable, some of them so exciting that Allan forgot how heavy the shot-gun under his arm had become.

When they struck the cross-roads, some three miles from Kirkplain, they were in the best of spirits. They took the road to the left, which leads down to the river and the ferry to Harwich. At the ferry they left beaten tracks and followed the river-bank.

The travel was slower now, both because they had to break their way through underbrush, make detours around inlets, cross brooks, and climb an occasional fence, and because they were keeping their eyes open for game. Allan had never done much hunting, and he was becoming quite excited at the prospect. [88]

Pete led the way, forcing his big body through the bushes with scarce a sound, while Allan could make no progress without causing enough disturbance to frighten any self-respecting duck a mile distant. Pete seemed to realize this fact, for he frequently looked back at Allan with pursed lips and violent shakes of his head, and then glanced anxiously at the river. After a half mile of this, Pete stopped in a little clearing and leaned his rifle against a bush. Allan joined him, very much out of breath.

"See anything?" he panted, hoarsely. Pete shook his head.

A few yards away lay the river, sluggish and leaden under gray sky. At their backs the ground rose gently, and the reeds and bushes gave place to a thick growth of trees. A few rods further up-stream was a little promontory. Everything was very still save for the chirp of the birds in the woods and the infrequent screech of a locomotive-whistle from toward Centerport. Across the river and further down-stream the little hamlet of Harwich nestled under its leafless elms. Pete sat down and drew forth his corn-cob pipe.

"Might as well take a rest," he said. "Smoke?"

"No, thanks." Allan didn't possess a pipe of his own, and wouldn't have attempted Pete's for a ten-dollar bill; the very smell of it frequently made him faint. Pete stuffed the blackened bowl full of dry tobacco and lighted it. Then he leaned back on one elbow and puffed contentedly for a moment. Allan nibbled the end of a grass-blade and stared across the empty stream. [89]

"This is about the place where we saw those birds the other day," said Pete, finally. "Guess they've pulled their freight. Sorry!"

"What's the diff?" asked Allan. "We've had the walk. Besides, maybe we'll find a gray squirrel if we go back through the woods."

"Anyhow, I don't guess there's any use going farther up the river. What time is it, I wonder? Did you bring your watch?"

"Quarter of twelve," said Allan. "Getting hungry?"

"I could eat a saddle!" answered Pete. "Supposing we go back and take the ferry over to Harwich? Is there any place there we could get a feed?"

"I don't know, but I should think there ought to be. Got any money?"

Pete sat up suddenly and searched his pockets.

"Not a red!" he exclaimed. "I forgot to change."

"Same here," said Allan, dolefully. Pete picked his pipe up from where it had fallen and relighted it. Then he threw himself onto his back, put one leg over the other knee, and chuckled. [90]

"I don't think it's so terribly funny," said Allan, aggrievedly. "We can't get home until three or four o'clock. Wish we'd had sense enough to bring lunch with us."

"Yes; a half dozen sandwiches and a piece of pie wouldn't go so bad, would they? Nice thick sandwiches, with ham or beef inside, and lots of butter and mustard. And—what kind of pie do you like best, Allan?"

"Oh, shut up, you!"

"I like pumpkin—or, maybe, apple. Yes, apple's pretty hard to beat. We'll have apple; about three pieces each."

Allan groaned and threw a handful of dried grass into Pete's face. Pete brushed it aside and went on:

"When we get the table going, we'll get Mother Pearson to give us apple-pie every night."

"Yes, when you do!" growled Allan.

"Oh, *that's* all right, my son. Just because the only fellow I've found wouldn't join, you needn't think that table isn't going to be. Hal's going to introduce me to Maitland and Van Something ___"

"Van Sciver."

"If you say so. And Cooper; and I'll bet you a bunch of cows I get that table filled up inside of a week. Want to bet?" [91]

"I don't bet," said Allan, aggravatingly. "Besides, if I were you, I'd go slow on betting until I'd paid for that dinner."

"What dinner?"

"The one you wagered with Tommy."

"Ginger! I'd clean forgotten that. But *that'll* be all right."

"You'll lose."

"Lose nothing! Just you hold your horses and keep your eye on your Uncle Pete. Let's think what we'll make Tommy order for us at that feed."

"Let's go home and get something to eat," said Allan, irritably.

"Home? Not a bit of it! We'll find a house and beg a Thanksgiving dinner, that's what we'll do. Saddle up and let's mosey along." He dropped his pipe into his pocket and got to his feet. "There's bound to be a house somewhere's about; look at how the woods have been cleared out here. Shouldn't wonder if we found eight courses and a Hinglish butler."

"One course'll do me," groaned Allan, as he got up, "and I don't care how coarse it is."

"We shot a man out in our county for making a joke like that, and he was a heap homelier than you— *Listen!*" [92]

Allan listened. From beyond the little promontory came the unmistakable quack of a duck. Pete pumped a cartridge into the barrel of his carbine and tiptoed toward the shore. Allan seized his shot-gun, fell over a stone, and followed. Pete waved him back, and then returned.

"They're around that point. We've got to go mighty quiet; if we don't, they'll fly. Keep low until you get to the pebbles there, and then get down and crawl. Come on!"

Allan followed, watching each footstep and trying not to breathe. A clump of trees came down almost to the water at the point, and hid what was beyond. But when Allan had, by painfully wriggling his body, stomach to earth, reached the little expanse of pebbled shore and Pete's side, his heart leaped for joy. Before them was a little cove, and in it, peacefully moving about its surface, was a flock of ducks. How many there were, he couldn't tell; there seemed dozens at first. He threw his gun to his shoulder and squinted along the barrel.

"Hold on!" whispered Pete. "We'll have to scare 'em up somehow."

"What for?" Allan whispered, anxiously.

"You don't shoot ducks in the water, you idiot!" answered Pete. "Here, I'll raise 'em with this stone. Be ready and take 'em as they rise. Wait till you get two together, but shoot quick, and let 'em have both barrels." [93]

He dug a small stone out of the sand and aiming at the middle of the flock, let drive. There was a sensation among the ducks, but not the panic Pete had looked for. They swam away from the spot where the stone sank, and made a good deal of fuss, but not a duck took wing. Pete grunted and threw another rock. The result was the same. The ducks discussed the matter volubly among themselves and swam around in circles, but they didn't show any intention of flying away. Pete was disgusted.

"I'm going to knock that old drake's head off," he whispered. "I guess that'll bring 'em up. All ready?"

Allan nodded, clutching his gun desperately and still squinting along the barrels. There was a loud report, then another, and a third. Two ducks floated quietly on the water. The others, with wild quacks of dismay, paddled to shore and disappeared into the bushes.

"Well, of all crazy ducks!" ejaculated Pete, staring after them.

"They—they didn't fly!" said Allan, breathlessly.

"Fly! Why, the things are clean locoed! They're not ducks, they're—they're—I don't know what they are!" [94]

Pete stared about him in bewilderment.

"They didn't fly, and so I shot," Allan explained.

"And we only got two!" said Pete, disgustedly.

"But they went up there," said Allan. "Why can't we go after them?"

"And shoot 'em on land?" Pete shook his head slowly. "Allan, I've done fool things in my time, but I never shot ducks on land."

"I don't see what difference it makes," objected Allan.

"Maybe not; maybe you're used to crazy ducks. I'm not. I refuse to have further dealings with such—such freaks of nature. How we going to get those?" he asked, nodding at the dead birds.

"We ought to have brought a dog."

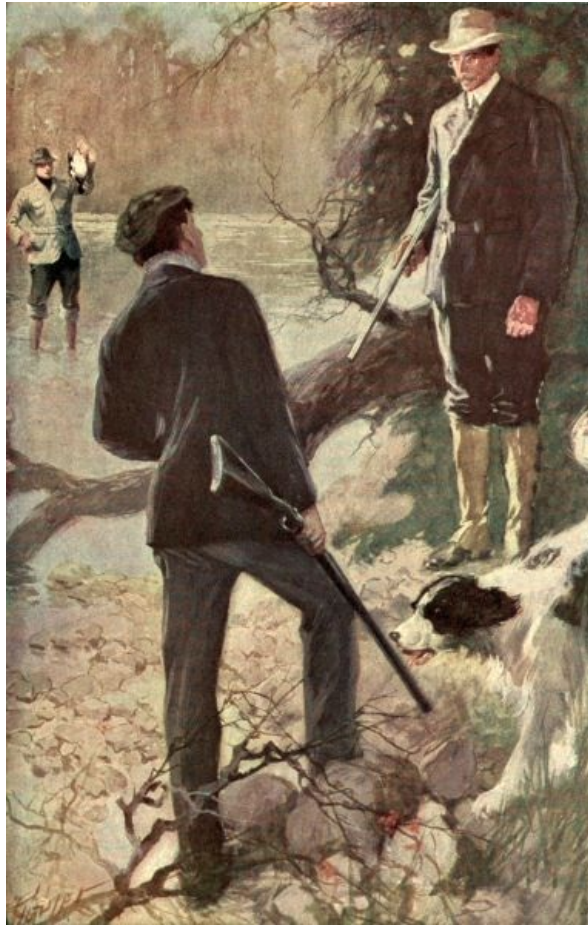
"Or a rowboat. Well, here goes!" He sat down and took off his shoes and stockings. Then, with his trousers rolled up as far as they would go, he waded out into the water. Allan sat down on the bank and promised to rescue him if he went over his depth. Pete reached the first bird—it was the drake he had shot, and it lacked a head—and held it up. He studied it a moment, shaking his head slowly.

"What's the matter?" called Allan.

"Oh, nothing; nothing at all. Only I never saw a duck like this before in my life!"

"Why, what's the matter with—" began Allan. Then the words stopped and he jumped to his feet.

["Sorry you don't approve of them."](#) said a voice behind him, "but they're the best I've got!"



["Sorry you don't approve of them."](#)

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CHAPTER X

DINNER FOR TWO

[96]

The regret, politely expressed though it was, had the effect of a thunderbolt on both Allan and Pete, neither of whom had heard or seen anything to suggest the presence of a third person on the scene. Allan's surprise was ludicrous enough, but the picture presented by Pete—mouth and eyes wide open and the headless duck held stiffly at arm's length, his whole attitude suggesting that the icy water in which he stood had suddenly frozen him stiff—caused even the newcomer to smile a little under his mustache.

The latter was a rather stout gentleman, of middle age, with ruddy cheeks, piercing dark eyes, and an expression of extreme self-possession. He wore a suit of rough gray tweed and leather leggings and carried a shot-gun. At his side, exhibiting two rows of very white teeth, stood a red and white setter. Allan liked neither the gun nor the dog, and envied Pete his chilly, but more distant, position. The newcomer glanced silently from Allan to Pete. It was the latter who found his voice first.

"Those your ducks?" he asked.

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The man nodded. Pete looked again at the drake in his hand.

"Oh!" he said.

The dog growled and Allan observed that the man's gun was cocked and that it was held in a position that was far from reassuring. Pete regarded the man with a puzzled expression.

"Look here, partner," he asked, "are those *tame* ducks?"

"They are, sir."

Pete's face cleared; a grin overspread his features, and he chuckled aloud as he waded back to shore.

"You seem amused?" said the man, politely but with a note of interrogation.

"Well, I'm mighty relieved, as the broncho said when he bucked the man off. You see, I thought they were wild ducks, and when they wouldn't fly, I was afraid they were degenerating. Of course, as they were tame ducks, it's all right." Pete waded out of the water and the setter laid back his ears and growled suspiciously. "Hello, dog!" said Pete, as he went toward where he had deposited his shoes, stockings, and rifle.

"Just stay where you are, please!" said the man. He waved toward Pete's possessions. The dog trotted over to them and stood guard, watching their owner intently. Pete's grin broadened. He tossed down the duck he had rescued.

"There's another out there," he said. "Guess the dog could get it, couldn't he?"

"Where do you gentlemen belong?" asked the man. The gentlemen exchanged glances. Then—"Centerport," answered Allan.

"Students?"

"Yes, sir."

"Humph!" said the owner of the ducks. "Want me to believe you thought my ducks were wild ones, do you?"

"You don't suppose we'd walk six miles to shoot tame ones, do you?" asked Pete, scathingly. The man shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose you're ready to pay for the pair you've shot?"

"Glad to," answered Pete. "How much?"

"Well, I guess a dollar will do. They were both Pekins."

"Can't say I've had a dollar's worth of sport," said Pete, "but here's your money." He put a hand into his trouser pocket. Then he stopped short and looked with dismay at Allan. The owner of the ducks waited silently.

"Guess you'll have to trust us, partner," said Pete. "We both came away without any money." Allan, fearing arrest would follow this announcement, held his breath. But the man only smiled courteously.

"Very well," he answered. "There is no hurry."

"Thanks!" said Pete. He looked inquiringly toward the dog. "How about my shoes and stockings? It's a bit chilly."

"I fancy your walk back will warm you up," said the man. Pete whistled.

"Going to keep 'em for security, eh?" he asked. The other nodded gravely.

"Couldn't compromise, I suppose?" Pete insinuated. "That carbine's worth a good bit more'n a dollar. It's hard walking without any shoes."

"I dare say," was the reply. "But maybe if you stub your toe a few times, it'll remind you to find out whether a duck is domestic or wild before you shoot it."

"Look here, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is," said Allan, explosively, "you'll get your old dollar. We're not thieves. But you've got to let him have his shoes and stockings."

"If I don't?" asked the man, with a flicker of appreciation in his eyes.

"Why—we'll just take them, that's all."

"I wonder if you could do it?" said the other, measuring the two with his eyes. "I almost believe you could."

"Well, then—" began Allan.

"But of course you'd get damaged in the process," continued the other, cheerfully. "Now, look here; you've killed my ducks, and it's only right that you should pay for them. Isn't that so?"

"Yes; but if we have no money——"

"That's it," was the answer. "It doesn't seem probable that you two students would come six miles from college without any money. Where are you going to get your dinner?"

"There isn't going to be any dinner," said Pete. "You can believe us or not, just as you like, and be hanged to you! If you'll put down your gun, I'll lick you."

"That's an honest offer," said the man, smiling outright for the first time, "but it isn't just

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practical. I rather think you could do it, and I don't see why I should be licked merely because you have killed my ducks. Do you?"

"I guess that's so, partner," Pete answered. "But something's got to be done. I can't walk home without any shoes."

The man received this assertion in silence, glancing thoughtfully from Pete to the articles in discussion. The dog looked suspiciously from Pete to Allan. Allan scowled at the dog's master. The latter spoke:

"Here, Jack!"

Jack went to him unwillingly. Pete picked up his shoes and stockings.

"Thanks!" he said. Then he put them on. The man watched him smilingly. When the last lace was tied, Pete got up.

"My name's Burley," he said. "I'll come over with your money to-morrow or next day. Come on, Allan. Good day, sir."

"You're forgetting your rifle," said the man. Pete looked puzzled. Then—

"Do I get that, too?" he asked.

"Yes, you might as well take that along, I guess." Pete went back and got it. "Where you going now?" asked the man.

"Home," said Pete.

"But how about dinner?"

"Well, maybe we'll beg something to eat on the way. I guess there ain't any place around here where they'd take a Winchester carbine as security for a Thanksgiving dinner, is there?" asked Pete, with a smile. The stranger answered the smile.

"Hardly. But I tell you what you do. Strike straight up through the woods here over the hill till you come to a lane. Keep along that for a quarter of a mile until you come to a big brown house standing back from the lane. You go there and tell 'em you're hungry, and you'll get plenty to eat. Ask for Mr. Guild. Don't forget, now; first house you come to. There isn't another for a mile further, so you'd better follow my advice."

"Thanks!" said Pete. Allan echoed him.

"All right," said the man, smiling kindly. "Good morning, gentlemen."

"Good morning," they answered. They started off through the woods in the direction he had indicated, but after a few yards Allan turned and looked back. The man, with the setter at heel, was moving along a path at right angles to them. He glanced up and waved his hand.

"We're sorry about the ducks," called Allan.

"That's so," Pete shouted.

The man nodded good-naturedly. Then the trees hid him.

Allan and Pete walked on in silence for a ways. Then—

"Say, he wasn't such a bad sort, was he?" asked Allan.

"No, he's all right. I don't believe he was going to do any more than scare us, anyway. Guess he was just having some fun with us."

"Wasn't it funny about the ducks being tame ones?" asked Allan, presently, as they left the woods, climbed over a stone wall, and struck off up a lane.

"That's a joke on me," said Pete, laughing. "Ginger! How was I to know that folks left their old ducks floating around loose all over the country here? Out our way, when you see a duck in a lake or on the river, it's a wild duck, and you just naturally go ahead and shoot it. That's what bothered me—those fool ducks sitting there and letting me throw rocks at 'em. Next time— Say, I guess that's our ranch over there."

Allan's gaze followed the other's.

A turn in the lane laid bare a broad expanse of lawn, interspersed with ornamental trees and shrubbery, beyond which stood a long, rambling house of brown-shingled walls and numerous red chimneys. Farther off were stables and barns. From the chimneys the smoke arose straight into the still air, suggesting warmth and good cheer. The boys paused and looked longingly across the lawn.

"Shall we try it?" asked Allan.

"Sure!" Pete said. "I'm so hungry I could eat cedar bark."

"But what will they think?" Allan demurred. "It isn't as though it were a farmhouse, you know."

"*That's* all right; the sweller the folks the better the rations. Come on; let's cut across here."

"We'll just ask for some bread and a glass of milk," suggested Allan.

"Bread and milk? Ginger! I've got to have pie and hot coffee!"

"But we'll go to the back door, won't we?"

"Like tramps? Not a bit of it. We'll go to the front. What was the name he told us?"

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[104]

"Guild."

"That's right; Guild. Hello! look there; there's another one of those setter dogs. Looks just like the beast the fellow back there had, doesn't it?"

But this dog only observed them indifferently from a respectful distance, and then trotted around the corner of the house as they mounted the broad steps, crossed a wide veranda, and pushed the ivory button beside the big oaken door. Allan strove to appear at ease, but in reality looked as though he had come to steal the family silver. A neatly-aproned maid opened the door.

"Is Mr. Guild in?" asked Pete, with unruffled composure.

"Yes, sir. Will you please walk in?" They followed her into a library, in which a wood fire was crackling merrily in the chimney-place. Allan felt like an impostor. Pete calmly selected the easiest chair and lowered himself into it with a deep sigh of contentment. [105]

"This is something like!" he said. "I'll bet we'll get two or three kinds of pie, Allan."

But Allan, sitting uncomfortably on the edge of a straight-backed chair, only smiled distressedly and listened to the footsteps coming nearer and nearer down the uncarpeted hall. The footsteps reached the door; Pete and Allan got to their feet as the door swung open.

"Mr. Guild—" began Pete. Then he stopped short.

Before them was the owner of the ducks!

CHAPTER XI

THE CAPSIZED BOAT

 [106]

Allan and Pete didn't forget that day for a long time. In retrospect, it was the brightest one between the beginning of the college year and the Christmas recess. For long afterward Pete would point with pride to his performance at table on that day, and declare that he believed that should he live to be a hundred he could never eat as much again. Dinner began at two o'clock and ended, not because of lack of further viands but because of inability on the part of the guests, at half-past four.

The family at Hillcrest consisted of Mr. Guild, his wife, a pleasant-faced and sweet-voiced woman several years his junior, and a three-year-old son and heir, who did not make his appearance at table but who was afterward ceremoniously introduced in the nursery. Both host and hostess appeared to have no other desire in life than to make the two guests happy and utterly ruin their digestions.

Even Pete had had momentary qualms over appearing at table in the unconventional attire of shooting-coat and flannel shirt, but their objections had been politely overruled, and by the time the turkey had made its appearance they had both lost sight of the fact that they were not dressed in the mode. It was while carving the turkey that the morning's episode was recalled. [107]

"This, Mr. Burley," said their host, "is only turkey. Had there been more time, we would have had a duck prepared for you."

Allan wondered, while he laughed, whether Mrs. Guild had heard the story of the duck-hunt. The demure expression about her mouth led him to suspect that she had.

After dinner they adjourned to the library again, and Pete was induced to smoke a cigar, although, as Allan guessed, he would much rather have used his corn-cob pipe. Mrs. Guild disappeared for a while, and Pete and Allan stretched themselves luxuriously in front of the fire and listened to their host and did a good deal of talking themselves. Mr. Guild led them to tell of their college life, and displayed such sympathy with their views and ambitions that at the end of an hour the two boys had become his enthusiastic admirers. He knew the West like a book, and Pete became quite excited—for Pete—swapping recollections and stories of "out there." [108]

After a while Mrs. Guild appeared again, and they went into the drawing-room and sat silent and happy in the firelight while she played for them. She apologized for knowing no college songs, but Pete gallantly assured her that he preferred "straight music." Still later there was a four-handed game of billiards in an upper hall, in which Mrs. Guild and Allan were badly defeated by the host and Pete. Then came the visit to the pink-hung nursery and the formal introductions to Master Thomas Guild, Junior. And by that time it was after eight o'clock, and a surrey stood at the door, waiting to bear them back to Centerport.

"You must come out some afternoon," said their host, "and let me show you around. Both Mrs. Guild and I have enjoyed your visit, and we want you again. We don't have so many callers but what a couple more will be welcome at any time. And when you come, it must be to stay to dinner with us."

And Allan and Pete readily agreed, and kept to their agreement. They each voted Mr. Guild a fine fellow, and each lost his heart to the hostess. The dollar was duly paid, and they received a receipt "in full for two ducks. Trusting to receive a continuance of your patronage, I remain, Yours faithfully, Thomas A. Guild." There was another visit to Hillcrest the following week, and several more before the occurrence of the incident which, for a time at least, put thoughts of [109]

visiting out of mind.

On the Monday after Thanksgiving and the duck-hunt, the story of which was now college property, Pete stamped into Allan's room just before dinner, kicked the snow from his shoes against the chimney, tossed his sombrero onto the desk, and subsided into the armchair with a mighty sigh of triumph.

"That's all right," he announced, heartily but vaguely.

"What?" asked Allan, momentarily abandoning his struggle with Herodotus.

"Club table. I've got my eighth man."

"Not really? Who have you got?"

"Well, there's"—he took a list from his pocket—"there's you, and Hal, and Wolcott, Poor——"

"Pete, you're lying!"

"—and Cooper, Van Sciver, Maitland, and your Uncle Pete."

"But—but how'd you do it, Pete? How'd you get them to join? Offer to pay half their board, or—or what?"

"Oh, it just took a little dip-lo-macy, my son; just a little dip-lo-macy. I started out with you and Hal. I got Hal to introduce Poor. Then I told Poor I was getting up a representative table, and got him to promise to join if I secured Maitland and Van Sciver. He introduced me to Van Sciver. I told him that you and Hal and Poor had promised, and he came right over to the party. You were quite a card, my son. I had no trouble with Cooper when I told him you were one of our principal sights. And so it went. After I'd got Poor and Cooper and Van Sciver cinched, there was nothing left to do but receive and consider applications. I could have had twenty, but I set out to make this table exclusive, and exclusive it's going to be, if I have to get the Dean—hang him!" Pete frowned a moment in silence. Then, "Wolcott was the last to join; he agreed ten minutes ago; I just came from his room."

[110]

"Pete, you surely are a lucky dub!" said Allan. "I don't believe there's another fellow in college that could have got all those chaps together!"

"There wasn't much luck about it," said Pete, calmly. "It just took hard work. Why, I haven't studied a lick since Wednesday, and I've cut half my recitations. I guess that's why the Dean wants to see me."

"Have you heard from him?"

"Yes. I had a polite postal card from him yesterday, and an impolite one to-day."

"But why——"

"Well, I didn't have time to call on him yesterday; I was too busy seeing fellows. It seems to have made him some angry."

[111]

Allan whistled expressively.

"You ought to have gone, Pete. He'll raise thunder with you now; see if he don't."

"Oh, *that's* all right; he can't do any worse than expel me. And I'm getting pretty tired of this shop, anyway; there isn't much doing. And now that I've got the table made up, all the excitement's over with. I've thought all along I wouldn't be here much after Christmas."

"Oh, shut up that! Who's going to run the table, if you go and get fired? And what do you suppose I'm going to do, you idiot?"

"Oh, I guess you wouldn't care," said Pete, sheepishly. But he seemed rather pleased when Allan threw Fernald's Selections at his head.

"Well, maybe he'll let me off easy this time; just suspend me, perhaps."

"You'd better go and see him right away. But you can't until to-morrow, now."

"Oh, yes; I guess I'll call at his house to-night."

"He doesn't like you to, they say," cautioned Allan. "If I were you, I'd wait until morning."

"No; better have it over with. I'll drop around afterward and tell you about it. Coming to dinner?"

[112]

Allan pleaded study, and Pete took himself off.

As it turned out, the Dean was merciful and Pete was merely placed upon probation—a fact which appeared to amuse him vastly.

"It's just like old times," he explained to Allan and Hal, the latter having come in to recount the wonderful things which had happened to him during his visit home. "Out in Colorado, I was most always on probation. Used to feel downright lonesome when I wasn't."

"That's all well enough," said Hal, "but you want to be careful, for old Levett's the very dickens if you get too gay with him. First thing you know, you won't know anything."

"Don't now," answered Pete, promptly and cheerfully. "But I wouldn't be surprised if something did drop. The fact is—" he hesitated, sighed dolefully, and shook his head, "the fact is, I've been feeling lately that something unpleasant is going to happen to me. I guess it's a—a premonition."

His tone was quite sad, and Allan and Hal stared at him in silent surprise. Then—

"What's the matter with you, you idiot?" asked Allan.

"Nothing; I dare say it's just foolishness, but somehow—" He sighed again. "Well, *that's* all right," he went on, with an evident effort at cheerfulness. "Have a good time, Hal?" [113]

"You're off your feed, that's what's the matter with you," said Hal, severely. "Your liver's out of whack. Better see the doctor."

"What's probation, anyway?" asked Allan, lightly. "It's likely to happen to any one."

"It isn't that," Pete replied, dolefully. "But I don't want to talk of my troubles," he continued, with martyr-like complacency. "Tell us what you did, Hal."

"Oh, you're plumb woozy!" exclaimed the latter. Nevertheless, he consented to tell again of the remarkable events which had transpired during his absence, and Pete's melancholy disappeared. It was a peculiar feature of it that during the following week it possessed him only occasionally. But when it did, he seemed in the uttermost depths of melancholy—a melancholy quite as mysterious and remarkable to his friends as the celerity with which he recovered on each occasion. Hal declared over and over that he was "woozy"—a term of doubtful significance, but quite satisfying to the user—and Tommy hinted at overstudy. This was among themselves. When Pete was present, they merely called him a fool, and let it go at that.

It was the first day of December that witnessed the advent upon the scene of a new character in our story. A wagon stopped in front of Mrs. Purdy's in the afternoon and an expressman deposited a small box inside Allan's door. He found it there when he returned from his last recitation. It had slats nailed across the top, and from its dark recesses came strange sounds. Allan stared. The sounds resolved themselves into the plaintive mewings of a kitten, and Allan recollected his request to his mother—a request long since forgotten by him, but evidently well remembered by her. He tore off a couple of the slats and lifted out a six-weeks-old kitten. [114]

It was a pathetic little white object, with two black spots on its back and weak-looking pale blue eyes which blinked inquiringly at him. Its mouth opened, and the appealing cry was repeated. Allan set it down and raced for the kitchen. When he returned, he carried a huge bowl of milk.

The kitten was roaming disconsolately about the floor, but at sight of the milk trotted up, and apparently strove to commit suicide by overeating—an intention frustrated by Allan, who removed the bowl finally and took the kitten into his lap in front of the fire. It seemed to have suddenly grown to twice its size, and instead of the heart-rending mews, Allan heard a faint but enthusiastic purring as the poor little object curled itself up in his arm and blinked its gratitude. Presently it went fast asleep and, rather than disturb it, Allan sat there for almost an hour, with his books just out of reach. [115]

That evening they named it. Tommy wanted something patriotic: Erskine, he thought, was just the thing. Hal showed the possession of an unsuspected streak of sentiment and clamored for Hortense. Allan, recollecting the fact that the mother's name was Edith Cinnamon, was in favor of calling the offspring Clove or Nutmeg. But Pete, who had been gravely examining the kitten at arm's length, took his pipe from between his lips, and with the stem tapped the two black spots on its back.

"Two Spot," he said, with finality.

Two Spot it was. And a few days later neither of the others would have changed the name for any consideration, since, as Tommy sadly expressed it, "Poor old Pete had named her."

That first day of December was memorable not only for the arrival of Two Spot, but for the first gathering at Pete's club table. Of those beside our friends who composed the table, it is not necessary to speak at any length.

Poor we already know very slightly. Wolcott, Cooper, Van Sciver, and Maitland were average fellows who had gained prestige for one reason or another, among their companions. It was a fact that Pete had succeeded in gathering together what might have been called the pick of the freshman class. That he had been able to do so was partly because of his tact and powers of persuasion and partly because freshman club tables were so seldom formed at Erskine that the project had the flavor of the unusual. [116]

Dinner was the first meal, and it was a very jolly one. There were one or two introductions to be made, and these Pete performed with his usual breeziness. After that the eight members sat down, Pete thumped the bell commandingly, and the table began its official existence—an existence which endured for four college years.

By the time the roast beef and vegetables made their appearance the ice was very thoroughly broken. When the cabinet-pudding and fruit came on, good-fellowship reigned supreme, and long after the last plate had been pushed aside the members still sat about the table, as though loath to leave. It is doubtful if there was a single one of them who did not, mentally at least, thank Pete Burley for including him in his club table.

One gusty winter afternoon, four days later, Pete appeared at Allan's room at about three o'clock. He wore his thickest sweater and a pair of woolen gloves. [117]

"I'm going up to see the Guilds. Want to come along?"

"You know plaguey well I can't," said Allan, impatiently. "I've got all this stuff to do." He indicated the litter of books and papers hopelessly. Somehow, of late the Midyears had seemed perilously near.

"Sorry. I'll tell 'em you said 'How.' I think I'll take a boat and row up."

"You'll what?" gasped Allan. "Why, it's an easy three miles by the river."

"That's all right; I feel like a little exercise."

"You're a chump if you do," answered the other, irritably. "How'll you get the boat back?"

"I'll let it stay there, maybe. Maybe I'll come back in it after dinner. It's easy enough to get down-stream."

"Not in the dark. You'll drown your fool self."

"Oh, I guess not. Sorry you can't come along."

"I'm not," muttered Allan, as the door closed. "Pete's a perfect idiot lately."

After dinner the wind increased into a very respectable gale, and Allan fell to wondering whether Pete would be fool enough to attempt the trip back in the boat. At nine o'clock his uneasiness drove him forth. He fought his way down Main Street to Center, and so around to Pete's lodgings. Lights in the windows reassured him, and he had half a mind to go back to his studies, but after a moment's indecision he decided to go up for just a moment and tell Pete again what an idiot he had been. So he climbed the stairs and thrust open the door. At the table stood Tommy. [118]

"Oh!" he said, "I thought you were Pete."

"Isn't he here?" asked Allan.

"No; I don't know where he is."

"I do," Allan replied. Tommy was plainly uneasy when he learned of Pete's trip. The two stayed until almost eleven. Then, as Pete had not returned, they went home together.

"He's probably decided to stay there all night," said Allan, hopefully. "Like as not, they wouldn't let him come back."

"I guess that's it," answered Tommy. "Pete wouldn't be such a fool, anyhow, as to try and come down the river on a night like this."

But despite his words, Allan went to sleep feeling not a little worried, and awoke the next morning with a feeling of impending misfortune. Pete was not in the dining-hall, but it was after eleven o'clock before Allan had an opportunity to make inquiries. When he did, he could find no news of his friend. No one had seen him that morning. Allan cut a recitation and hurried down to Pete's rooms. The bed had not been occupied. Allan returned to the yard fighting against fear. [119]

At three he heard the news from Hal, who, white of face, was waiting him on the porch.

"It's—it's all up with p-poor old Pete," he announced, with his mouth working tremulously. "They found the boat he had a mile down the river. It—it was capsized!"

Allan felt his own face go pale, but after a moment he muttered:

"Pete could swim like a fish; you know that."

Hal shook his head.

"Then why hasn't he showed up?" he asked, hopelessly. "No, he's a goner. You remember what he said about premonitions and things going to happen to him? I guess he was right, Allan. Poor old Pete! They—they found his hat, too, down by the wharves."

CHAPTER XII

TOMMY CORRECTS A REPORT

Allan was almost the last of Pete's friends to give up hope; but when, by the next morning, Pete had neither returned nor had news of him been received, even Allan accepted the general belief. The janitor at the boat-house readily identified the overturned boat, while as for the hat, which had washed ashore at the foot of Main Street, even if Allan and Hal had been in doubt about it, there was still Pete's initials marked on the inside. Inquiry at Hillcrest had elicited the information that Pete had never reached there.

The Guilds were deeply concerned, and Mr. Guild not only added a sum to that offered by the college for the recovery of the body, but himself took charge of a boat which all the next day dragged the river between his place and Centerport. The drowned body, however, was never recovered—a fact which surprised nobody, since the current is capricious, and the stream so broad as to preclude the possibility of searching every foot of its bed.

The accepted theory was that Pete had encountered a sudden squall while crossing the river which had either swamped the boat or overturned it. Although Pete was known to have been a capable swimmer and a fellow of more than ordinary strength, yet the fact that he had failed to win the shore from midstream, weighted down as he had been with heavy clothing, was not considered strange. [121]

A telegram was at once despatched to Pete's father in Colorado, and, since that did not elicit a

reply by the following forenoon, a second message was sent. The death was announced in the city papers with much detail, and Pete's athletic prowess was highly exaggerated. The *Erskine Purple*, which appeared the second day after the accident, contained a half-column notice of the sad affair, in which Pete's many estimable qualities were feelingly set forth. Tommy wrote the notice himself, and, as he felt every word he wrote, the article was a very touching tribute.

The club table was a subdued and sorrowful place for several days. Pete's chair stood pathetically empty until, in desperation, Allan put it away. But as a head to the table was essential, an informal election was taken two days after Pete's disappearance, and Wolcott was elevated to the place of honor. A meeting of the freshman class was called and a committee was appointed to draw up resolutions of sorrow, to be sent to Pete's father and to be published in the *Purple*. [122]

When, after the second day of search, the tug-boat commissioned by the college to drag for the body abandoned its work, the first depression had passed and the college by degrees returned to its usual spirits. But Allan and Hal and Tommy were not so speedily resigned. Tommy, in especial, took the event hard.

Perhaps it had been the utter dissimilarity of Pete's nature and his own which had drawn him to Pete. That as may be, Tommy was a very grave-faced little chap in those days.

But Allan, if he showed less grief, was sadly depressed. He had not realized before how much he had grown to care in six weeks for the big, good-hearted Westerner. He felt terribly lonely, and besides he blamed himself for not having accompanied Pete; perhaps, he thought dolefully, had he gone along, the accident wouldn't have happened, and Pete would have been sitting there now across the table, puffing lazily at his evil-smelling corn-cob pipe. But instead of Pete there was only Tommy and Hal—and Two Spot.

Two Spot, grown greatly in bulk since her advent, was snuggled against Tommy's arm. Outside it was blowing a gale and lashing the rain against the long windows. It was a most depressing afternoon, and the spirits of the three friends were at a low ebb. Tommy looked now and then as though a good cry would do him worlds of good. Hal scowled morosely and drummed irritatingly on the arm of the Morris chair until Allan, in desperation, begged him to "cut it out." It was at this juncture that Tommy let fall a remark that set Allan thinking hard. [123]

"Poor old Pete got what he was after, though, didn't he?" asked Tommy, breaking a silence of several minutes' duration.

"What's that?" asked Allan.

"Don't you remember the bet he and I made?" Tommy replied. "Well, he got his name on the first page of the *Purple*, after all. Wish he hadn't."

"That's so," said Hal. "I'd forgotten about that bet. I guess you'll have to pay that wager to us, Tommy, and we'll drink to Pete's memory."

Allan, his heart thumping wildly, looked at the other fellows' faces, but it was quite evident that the wild surmise which had come to him had not occurred to them. He pushed back his chair abruptly and went to the window.

Was it possible? he asked himself. Surely, Pete would not have gone to such a length merely to win a bet! And yet—Pete was Pete; what another fellow would do was no criterion when it came to Pete's conduct. Allan's heart was racing and thumping now. The more he considered the affair in the light of Tommy's remark the more plausible seemed the startling theory which had assailed him. He turned to blurt out his suspicions to the others, then hesitated. If he should prove to be wrong, he would regret charging Pete with such madness. Perhaps he had better keep his own counsel for a while longer. [124]

To you, respected reader, who have all along known, or at least suspected, the truth of the matter, it probably seems strange that Allan should not have instantly realized the hoax. I have no explanation to offer in his behalf. He was still in doubt when Fate, in the not uncommon semblance of a postman, came to his relief.

When he answered the landlady's tap on his door, he received a letter the mere sight of which set all his doubts at rest. The envelope was postmarked Hastings—Hastings is a small city eighteen miles down the river from Centerport—and the round, schoolboy writing was unmistakably Pete's.

Tommy and Hal glanced around when the door opened, but paid no attention while Allan tore open the envelope and rushed through the two pages of writing inside. They only awoke to the fact that something had happened when Allan, waving the sheet above his head, gave vent to a blood-curdling yell of joy that sent Two Spot scuttling out of Tommy's arms and under the dresser. [125]

"What is it?" they cried in unison.

Allan waved the letter again ecstatically.

"It's a letter from him!"

"Him? Who?"

"*Pete!*"

To attempt to describe the subsequent confusion would be absurd. Only a wide-awake phonograph could do it. Two chairs were overturned, Tommy screeched, Hal roared, Allan yelled

back. The letter waved in air. Then Tommy danced an impromptu jig and, being quite unconscious that he was doing it, did it with much grace. Unfortunately none noticed it. Hal was struggling for the letter. Allan was fighting to keep possession of it. Tommy danced on. Occasionally he shrieked. His shriek was not nearly so pleasant as his dancing. After many moments comparative quiet settled and three breathless fellows gathered at the window while Allan, holding the precious document in his hands, read aloud. This is what they heard, leaving out, for the sake of clearness, the frequent interpolations of the listeners:

HASTINGS HOUSE, HASTINGS, *Dec. 7, 1903.*

DEAR ALLAN—I guess you weren't fooled, but anyhow it may be best, in case you are getting worried, to write and let you know that I am still alive and kicking like a steer. I would have written before, but only got a copy of the *Purp* this morning. It was fine. Tell Tommy he did nobly. I know it was Tommy wrote it because of the poetry. I'm going to have that front page framed for my descendants to look upon. They'll know then what a noble youth I was. [126]

I'm leaving here for New York to-night. The old man's there. I'm not stuck on telling him about it, you can bet. He will be rip-snorting mad. I had to drown myself when I did because I got a letter saying he was going to be in New York a couple of weeks, and I knew he wouldn't get any telegrams or things announcing my sad death. I don't guess they'll let me come back to college, and I don't care very much, except that I hate to say good-by to you and Hal and Tommy. But I'll see you again before I go home, unless they are easy on me, which doesn't seem likely, does it?

You see, I rowed up to Harwich, turned the boat over and set it adrift, and tossed my hat after it. I had another inside my coat. Then I walked to Williamsport and took the train back to this place. I've been here ever since. It's a dull hole. But I had to wait for the *Purple* to make sure I hadn't slipped up. I suppose there was a lot of trouble. I'm sorry if I worried you fellows, but life was getting duller than ditch-water and something had to be done. I wish you would go down to my room and pack up the things that are lying around. [127]

Tell Tommy I'll come back some day for that dinner, and that it's got to be a good one. Maybe, if you have time, you'll write and tell me how you all are. It seems like I hadn't seen you for a month. Address me, Care Thomas A. Burley, Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York. You fellows have got to come out to Colorado this summer and visit me if they don't let me come back to college. If you don't, I'll arise from my watery grave and haunt you. Say "How" to Hal and Tommy, and don't forget your poor old

UNCLE PETE.

The news astonished everybody save the Dean, who had already begun to smell a rat. Astonishment gave place to relief or joy, according to the hearer's degree of intimacy with Pete, and joy gave place to resentment. It is rather annoying to lavish regret over the taking-off of a friend only to discover that the friend has worked a deliberate hoax on you and is still alive to enjoy your confusion. That is why, had Pete put in an appearance at Erskine at that time, he would in all probability have been mobbed. [128]

But Pete didn't appear, and ultimately resentment gave place to amusement. The general attitude became one of laughing disapproval. After all, Pete was Pete, and even if he had harrowed their feelings considerably at the same time he had supplied interest at a dull season and had worked nobody any harm. This reasoning may have appealed to the faculty as well. At all events, their verdict, when announced, was thought to be amazingly merciful. Peter Burley '07 was suspended for the balance of the term. As there remained less than four weeks of the term, the penalty would be of short duration.

Allan and Hal were delighted, and even Tommy, after the first day or two of rampant rage, grudgingly acknowledged that he was glad Pete was coming back. This was also after Tommy had written a denial for the *Purple* of that paper's announcement of Pete's death. That denial was very, very simple and brief. There was no mention made of Pete's many excellent qualities, nor did it express exuberant joy over his restoration. It merely stated that the announcement had proved erroneous and that Mr. Peter Burley was visiting relatives in New York city.

When Allan or Hal mentioned that announcement, Tommy went purple in the face and fell to stuttering. Perhaps, as Allan pointed out, it was just as well he stuttered, since what he had to say was really unfit for polite ears. But Tommy's anger was too intense to last, and by the middle of the month he was able to smile wanly at Pete's deception. The awarding to him of a two-hundred-dollar scholarship helped, perhaps, to restore his good humor. Hal said the scholarship would come in very handy in paying for the dinner. [129]

Pete wrote that he had heard the faculty's verdict, and was glad they were going to let him come back. He was leaving New York for home as he wrote, to be gone until the opening of the winter term. By reading between the lines, Allan surmised that Pete's father had not been over-much pleased with his son's escapade; there were signs of a chastened spirit.

The term wore itself to a close, and one sunshiny morning Allan and Hal and Tommy left Centerport for their respective homes, traveling the first part of the journey in company. Two Spot, apparently indifferent to the separation, was confided to Mrs. Purdy, and spent the Christmas holidays in the neighborhood of the kitchen range.

CHAPTER XIII

PETE WRITES HOME

[130]

"Of course," said Allan, "we're not terribly poor, but it's going to make a good deal of difference to us."

The new term was three days old and Allan and Pete were sitting in front of the stove in Pete's study. The stove was a recent addition to the furnishings, and installed more in deference to his friends' demands than from any desire of his own. Pete didn't mind a little cold; just so long as he could find enough water under the ice in the pitcher to wash with, he was satisfied. But Allan and Hal and Tommy made disparaging remarks about his heating arrangements and ostentatiously kept their hats and coats on while visiting him, and so Pete bought a base-burner and a half ton of coal.

"What mine is it?" asked Pete.

"The Gold Beetle. Ever hear of it? It's out in your State."

"Is it at Rico?" asked Pete.

"Yes, that's the place. Didn't you say you were there last summer?"

[131]

"Yes, and I know—something about the mine." Pete looked thoughtfully at the flames dancing behind the mica. "Fact is," he continued, "the old man is interested in it."

"Really? Then don't you think it will be all right? He wouldn't have anything to do with a poor mine, would he?"

"Well, the trouble is you can't always tell whether a mine's good or bad. The old man's got stock in all kinds; some of it's good, some of it isn't worth the paper it's printed on. I've got a lot of that kind myself. I used to think I was something of an investor. Now, this Gold Beetle; what's probably happened to that is that the pay ore has given out. It very often does. A mine'll run thousands to the ton for two or three years, sometimes twenty, and then all of a sudden the lode will just naturally peter out. I guess that's what's happened to the Beetle. I remember pretty well how it lies. There are paying properties all around it, and maybe if they went on or opened up new drifts they'd come across fresh lodes; or maybe they wouldn't; it's just a gamble. I dare say the stockholders aren't willing to put any money into it. How much stock do your folks hold?"

"I don't know exactly. Pretty nearly half of it, I think."

[132]

"Too bad! I'll ask the old man, when I write, what he thinks about it."

"I wish you would. Maybe if he owns some of it we could—could kind of get together and—and do something," said Allan, vaguely but hopefully.

"Maybe," answered Pete, thoughtfully. "Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile I've got to find some way of making a little money; enough to pay my board, at any rate. And that's why I ought to leave the table, Pete, and go back to commons, where I can feed for less."

"But we can't let you do that. Now, look here; you don't eat very much. What's the sense in your paying as much as I do, who eat twice as much? That's plumb foolish! I ought to pay at least eight dollars and you oughtn't to pay a red cent over four; and that's the way it's going to be after this."

"No, it isn't," Allan replied. "If I stay, I'll pay my share, and that's six dollars, Pete. I went over yesterday to see if I couldn't get a place in Brown Hall as a waiter, but there aren't any vacancies; they told me they had two applications for every place."

"But you wouldn't like to wait on table, would you?"

"It isn't a question of liking. I've heard tell of lots of ways of earning money in college, but none of them seem very practical for my case."

[133]

"Well, look here; you figure out how much money you'll need for the rest of the year and let me know."

Allan looked puzzled.

"What good would that do?"

"I'll lend it to you. Now, shut up! I haven't offered to give it to you, have I, you chump? You can pay me back any time you like; there isn't a bit of a hurry. And I've got a whole lot of money in bank from last term. Somehow, it's mighty hard to get rid of money up here. You needn't say anything to any one about it; it'll just be between you and me. That's all right, ain't it?"

"No, it isn't all right, Pete, but it's awfully good of you, and I won't forget it in a hurry."

And although Pete threatened and coaxed and called names, he was at last forced to abandon the proposition. And in the end it was Tommy who, learning of Allan's quandary, made the suggestion which led to a measure of success.

"I knew a fellow at school who used to go around to the fellows' rooms at night and sell sandwiches and wienerwursts and made good money," said Tommy. "Wouldn't care for that, though, I guess?"

Allan acknowledged that he wouldn't.

[134]

"Then there was a fellow I heard of who was agent for a sporting-goods firm and sold on commission. He worked up quite a trade, but it took him a good while to do it. Then there was a fellow had a rental business: rented rooms and got a commission from the landladies; but he did most of his business in the fall. Then—" Tommy paused, struck by a brilliant thought. "You might try for a place on the Purple," he cried. "They elect new men in March. If you got a place, you'd make fair money from March on to the end of the year. That's what I did last year, and I made enough to pay my board."

"But I don't know anything about reporting, Tommy," Allan objected. "Besides, I'm not a hustler like you."

Tommy looked disappointed. He thought for a minute in silence. Then—

"I tell you, Allan," he said, "I'll see Stearns. He's track-team captain, you know. I'll tell him that if you don't find something to do, you won't be able to stay here. And he won't want to lose you, you can bet, because he's set his heart on winning from Robinson this spring."

"But I don't know that that would be quite true," Allan objected. "Because, even if I don't find any work, maybe I'll be able to hang on here somehow to the end of the year."

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"Well, I won't lie to him," said Tommy, "but I'll fix him so he'll find something; you see if I don't."

He lifted Two Spot off his lap and deposited her on the desk, where she subsided contentedly against a pile of books and purred on as though nothing had happened.

"Happy little bunch of fur, isn't she?" asked Tommy. "If she's too great an expense to you, I'll take her off your hands."

"Indeed, you'll not!" answered Allan. "While there's a loaf left in the house, she shall have the crust."

"Scratch him, Kitty! Say, did Pete tell you he'd gone out for the freshman hockey team? Won't he be a sight on the ice?"

"He says he can skate," answered Allan. "All I know is, I don't want to have the thingamabob—puck—when he's bearing down on me."

"Are you going to play?"

"No; I'd like to, but I guess I won't have time. Besides, I don't skate very well."

"Skating isn't everything in hockey," said Tommy, wisely. "I can skate myself. I can make the ice look like a picture in a book or a map of China; but last year, when I went out for the freshman team, I was nearly slaughtered. Leroy butted me into the boards and somebody else cracked me over the shins with his stick and another chap tripped me up—accidentally, *of course*—and I slid thirty-one feet or thereabouts on my head. The hair didn't grow back for a month. I quit. Life was too precious."

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"Wise youth!" commented Allan. "But we mustn't miss seeing Pete play. Let's go over to the rink to-morrow, if there is any ice."

"All right. And I guess there'll be ice; it's cold enough now to freeze a door-knob. Going down to Pete's this evening? I'll see you there, then. So long. Good-by, Two Spot, my angel child!"

Tommy's plan bore fruit. Allan had a visit from Walter Stearns next day, and two days later Allan was giving two hours out of each twenty-four to clerical work in the office of the Erskine College Athletic Association.

The work, which consisted chiefly of answering letters from Professor Nast's dictation—Professor Nast was chairman of the Athletic Committee—was ridiculously easy, if somewhat uninteresting, and seemed out of all proportion to the remuneration, which was one dollar an hour. There were five working days in the week for Allan, and as a result he was earning ten dollars a week—twice as much as he had hoped for. And all the time he was disturbed by a haunting thought that, when all was said and done, he was not really earning the money. But it seemed absurd to find fault with his good fortune so long as his employers were satisfied, and so he offered no objections. Afterwards he marveled at his blindness.

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About this time Pete wrote one of his semi-occasional letters to his father. He wasn't much of a letter-writer, and the epistle as a whole would not interest us, but a portion of it merits attention.

"I remember (he wrote) that you said in New York you'd been down town to a meeting of the Gold Beetle stockholders, and that they had voted to stop work on the mine. I didn't know then that Allan's folks were interested in it. I guess they haven't dismantled yet, and so it isn't too late to change your mind. I guess you have enough stock in it to control it; if you haven't, the Wares' shares will give you the whip-hand. I want you to have them go ahead with the Gold Beetle and fuss round some. A couple of months' work won't break anybody. You can charge your share of it

up to me. There must be pay ore somewhere on the property. Look at all the gold that's coming out all around it. Allan's folks need the money. It's about all the income they have. If that stops, his sister will have to give up her college, and so will Allan. Allan's my side partner, and I'm not going to have him lose what property he has without another try. Let me know right away about this."

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CHAPTER XIV

HOCKEY—WITH VARIATIONS

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Allan, Tommy, and Hal stood at the side of the rink, up to their ankles in snow, and watched Pete play hockey. The rink was built at the far end of Erskine Field, and looked, from the locker house, like a brand-new cattle-pen.

This Saturday afternoon it was snowing in a half-hearted way, making the ice slushy and hiding the town from view. There were about fifty other fellows looking on, for the Midyears had begun, and anything to take the mind off examinations was welcome. The varsity team had traveled down the river to play Hastings High School, and the freshman team was making the most of its opportunities.

There were only twelve candidates present, and so the opposing teams each lacked a forward. But in spite of this the play was fast and furious, making up in enthusiasm what it lacked in science. Pete was playing cover-point on the first team, and thus far his performance had not lacked of applause. If some of the applause was unmistakably sarcastic, still it was applause.

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Pete was a hard skater and very much at home on the ice, but there wasn't much of grace about him. He hadn't as yet learned the subtleties of stick-handling, but he usually managed to get the puck by the simple expedient of skating full-tilt against the opponent and knocking him down in a good-natured, inoffensive way. Allan, Tommy, and Hal felt, as they watched, that they were being fully rewarded for tramping out there through the snow.

"Let's see you skate backward, Pete," called Allan in a lull of the game. Pete grinned.

"Give us the grape-vine, Pete," begged Tommy. Pete grinned again.

"How are you on the outer-edge, old man?" asked Hal. Pete continued to grin.

Then the puck came sliding down toward him, dribbled this way and that by the hockey of an opposing forward. Pete drew himself together, grasped his stick in both hands as though it was a bludgeon, and rushed toward the foe. Down went the foe, and the three admirers laughed joyfully. But Pete didn't get the puck, for the vanquished one had succeeded in passing it across to another forward, exhibiting the first suggestion of team-play of the afternoon, so far as the second team was concerned, and Pete skated wildly in pursuit. The point went out to meet the attack, another clever pass was made, and then—Presto! goal was shaking his head and pulling the disk out from under the netting. The second had scored.

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"Ah, that was great work, Pete!" cried Allan, admiringly.

"That was *playing!*" said Hal. "Oh, it was great!"

"Real science, I call it!" declared Tommy. "How'd you do it, Pete?"

"Don't you mind their scoring, Pete," said Allan, encouragingly. "You knocked your man down. Just you kill all you want to."

Pete skated over and scattered them with his hockey.

"You wait till I get these skates off," he threatened, "and I'll roll you three little snipes in the snow!"

"Don't waste your strength on us, Pete," begged Tommy from a safe distance. "Slaughter the enemy. Don't be discouraged; there's only six left."

"Eat 'em up, Pete!" cried Hal.

Pete shook his stick at them and turned away. As he skated back to his position a chorus of admiring "A-a-ahs!" followed him. When the second half was almost done the score was 5 to 6, in the first team's favor, and the captain of the second, a big, round-faced chap who played center, called on his support for a goal.

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"Play hard, fellows, and let's tie this!" he commanded. "Play together now!"

Fortune seemed to be favoring them. They secured the rubber and swept with it down the rink. As usual, Pete put one man out of the play, but by the time he had recovered from the check the advance was past him and was threatening the goal. Both teams were mixed in wild confusion, and the puck was carroming about from goal to attack and from attack to defense. Then it was sped knee-high at the net, was luckily stopped by the goal, and shot out to the side right at Pete's feet.

Pete started off with it, but was in such a hurry that he overskated, and had to fight for it. When he again secured possession the attack was thick about him. But he started off again, and the forwards of his side skated to their positions. Pete kept close to the boards, fooled the

opposing cover-point by caroming the puck against them, and for an instant had a clear shot at goal. But shooting wasn't Pete's specialty, and so he charged on until, well past the center of the ice, the second team's captain charged him fiercely from the side, hurling him against the boards and knocking his stick into the air.

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Luckily, the puck struck the adversary's skate and caromed back to the side, and Pete, thrusting his skate against it, held it there while the other pushed and shoved with his body and tried to work the puck loose with his stick. About them hovered friend and foe, awaiting the instant when the disk should slide out of the *mêlée*.

The second-team player fought like mad and at last, by a fierce shove, moved Pete's foot. [Pete](#), fearing loss of the precious prize, swung quickly around, bringing his adversary to the boards, and then, catching him with one hand at the knee, [tipped him over the barrier](#) into the soft snow.



[Pete tipped him over the barrier.](#)

Without waiting to see him safely landed, Pete rescued the puck from an interloping enemy and went straight down the rink with it, scorning friend and foe alike, and drove it furiously into goal. When he swung around and looked back, it seemed that a devastating gale had swept over the rink, for along his route first-team men and second-team men were picking themselves up from the ice. But what surprised him more was the appearance of the second's captain, who, snow-covered, black of face and scowling, was swaggering up to him.

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"What did you do that for?" he growled.

From the sides of the rink came shouts of laughter. Allan, Hal, and Tommy were hanging feebly over the barrier, beating the planks with their hands in gasping impotence.

"Do what?" asked Pete, plainly at a loss.

"Throw me over the boards," answered the other, belligerently.

"Oh, that?" asked Pete. "Why, you were in my way, you see."

"You shouldn't have done that, Burley," said the first team's captain. "But you needn't try and scrap here on the ice," he continued, turning to the other. "Play the game!"

"Look here," said Pete, "wasn't that all right? Mustn't I do that?"

"Of course you can't. You ought to know the rules. The puck goes back there again." The first's captain turned away impatiently.

"It's on me, partner," said Pete. "Sorry, and hope I didn't hurt you."

"All right," muttered the other, as graciously as he could. The knowledge that he had served as a source of intense amusement prevented him from putting much cordiality into his tones. The puck was taken back to where Pete had transgressed the rules, and again faced off by him and the second's captain. The latter got possession and the play went on, but to the onlookers it was very dull, and none cared when, after a minute or two, the game came to an end.

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Allan, Hal, and Tommy, still very red of face and still grinning, awaited Pete and escorted him back to the college in triumph, Hal marching ahead and chanting an improvised pæan of praise

until Pete seized him and rolled him over in the snow. Thereupon Hal retired to a safe distance and threw snowballs at Pete. He was not, however, a very good shot and, as a result, Tommy and Allan were hit more often than their companion. It ended with the three joining forces against the obnoxious Hal and chasing him all the way down Poplar Street.

When he reached Mrs. Purdy's, in his retreat, he withdrew into Allan's room, locked the door, and sent Two Spot, a white handkerchief tied around her neck, out by way of a window, to treat with the besiegers. The flag of truce was respected. Hal opened the window and agreed to surrender if allowed to march forth from the citadel with colors flying, and his terms were accepted. He retired from view and presently reappeared in Allan's plaid dressing-gown, and holding aloft a Hillton flag. Silently and proudly he marched forth and twice paraded the piazza. Then the enemy, violating the rules of warfare, fell upon him as one man, and he was borne, struggling and kicking, back into the citadel and deposited on the couch. [146]

Allan returned to the front yard and rescued his handkerchief, which was trailing in the snow as Two Spot chased an imaginary mouse around the bare and solitary rose-bush. Tommy had meanwhile poked the fire into a blaze, and victors and vanquished drew up to it, while Pete smoked the pipe of peace and the others ate sweet chocolate, which, as Tommy pointed out, represented the fruits of victory.

Two Spot sat on Pete's broad knee and purred and blinked at the flames and occasionally stuck her claws tentatively through Pete's trousers as a proof of her affection. And everybody felt very jolly and comfortable until the six-o'clock bell sent them to prepare for dinner.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE "CORRAL"

While the snow kept piling itself up and the Midyears were still racking fellows' brains, the call came for candidates for the relay team to run against Robinson at the Boston indoor meeting. And simultaneously the outdoor track was shoveled free of snow and fellows whose ambitions pointed toward the winning of pewter mugs trotted out in the afternoons, when the mercury was down to zero, and sped around the track with their bare legs looking very pink and cold. Kernahan had induced Allan to enter for both the mile and the two mile, and the latter was one of the most indefatigable of those who daily risked death by freezing.

He was glad to be able to stretch his legs again, was Allan. He had begun to wonder whether the muscles hadn't forgotten how to work. He had his first mile trial a week after the beginning of practise and a fortnight before the date of the meeting.

The result wasn't especially satisfactory; 4:56 was not anywhere near record time for that track, while it was more than twenty seconds slower than what it must be to give him a chance at winning a place. But Kernahan seemed in nowise discouraged. Instead, he told Allan he had done well enough for a starter, and promised to give him a trial at the two miles a week later. [148]

Meanwhile the relay candidates were tested and sifted, the candidates for the field events practised daily in the gymnasium, and athletic activity seized upon the college. The baseball cage resounded with the thump of the balls and the cries of the players, the rowing-room gave forth strange sounds of an afternoon, and the basket-ball team, undisputed lords of the gymnasium floor for two months, were hustled into a corner and given scant attention.

And yet, in spite of all these hints, Winter was strangely dense. Instead of folding up his blanket of snow and taking himself off, he showed no sign of contemplated departure, but on the contrary tightened his icy grip on the world, and almost every day sent a new snow-storm to emphasize the fact that he still reigned.

Afternoon practise on the track took place in every sort of weather. Sometimes it snowed so hard that the runners, as they swept around the far end of the track, were only indistinct blurs in the white mist. Sometimes the track was sheeted with a rough skim of ice, through which the men's spikes broke imperfectly, and on such days the spills were numerous and the turns were things to be carefully negotiated. Sometimes the sun shone and the wind blew, straight and cold, out of the northeast; and such times were best, deluding one for a while, as they did, into thinking that winter's sway was drawing to its end. But they were deceitful moments, and one could fancy old Winter shaking his lean sides with laughter as he drew the clouds together again and emptied a new shower of flakes upon the bleak world. [149]

But matters progressed. The relay team of six runners was formed, the sprinters and distance men worked themselves into condition, and the hurdlers, jumpers, vaulters, and weight men limbered up their muscles.

A week before the meeting Allan was given a speed trial for the two miles. The track was in fairly good condition, and Rindgely and Thatcher made the pace. With Allan was another two-mile candidate, named Conroy. Allan took the lead at the start and held it for the first half mile. Rindgely went in then and made the pace for the next three-quarters, and then gave place to Thatcher, a half-miler. Conroy was a lap behind at the half distance, and at the finish was entirely out of it. Allan found his sprinting ability sorely tried in the last two laps when Thatcher let himself out and Allan tried to keep up with him. But he finished fairly strong, and Kernahan [150]

slipped his watch into his pocket with a nod of approval.

"Ten, one and an eighth," he said.

But that seemed slow time to Allan, who had entertained visions of doing the distance in something like 9:50, and he said so to Billy.

"Well, that's good enough to give you a chance of a place," he answered. "You've got three months yet before the dual meet, and Robinson's best two-miler could only do—9:46, I think it was. You'll get some experience at the Boston meet, if you don't bring home a mug, and experience is what you need. You'll have to get into your pace sooner down there or you'll get crowded off the track. You try half a dozen starts Monday and try getting your pace in the first six or eight strides. You'd better run along now, and don't be scarey of the cold water, my boy."

During that next week the class hockey championship was decided. The freshmen won handily from the sophomores by the score of seven goals to three in the first of the contests, and to Pete went the credit for four of the seven goals. He played magnificently.

To be sure, as has been said already, he knew little of the science of the game, but what he lacked there he made up in vigor and enthusiasm. Thrice he was put off the ice for short periods, but this only caused him to work harder when he was allowed to re-enter the game. In the second half—the first period having ended with the score three to four in favor of '07—he was played up into the forward line, and when he secured the puck and once got away with it, it was his until he had shot at the sophomores' goal. If Pete had been able to shoot as well as he skated and dodged the enemy, the score would have been overwhelming. [151]

But Pete's Waterloo came when the deciding game was contested with '04. Pete's playing was just as hard and fast as before, but the seniors had two or three players who, in the language of Tommy, "made rings around him." Every time Pete tried one of his sensational rushes, some one or other of the discourteous enemy, carefully avoiding his body, stole the puck from under his nose. Pete endured it for a while untroubled, then he began to break hockeys. But the supply seemed unlimited, and the remedy wasn't successful. Defeat fell to '07's share.

They tried to tease Pete on the afternoon's performance that evening, but Pete was invulnerable to gibes. The four had congregated in the "corral" and were hugging the stove closely, Pete sitting astride the stock saddle which, for want of a chair, he had lugged from its corner. [152]

"Must have cost you something for sticks," Tommy suggested.

"Must have cost the other fellows something," laughed Hal. "I saw Rindgely lose three. You were a destructive chap, Pete."

"Rindgely was plumb crazy," answered Pete, with a broad smile. "Every time he got a new stick, I bust it for him. I don't just know whether that's good hockey, but I know it worked mighty well. But Rindgely's got it in for me, all right."

"He seems to have it in for me too," said Allan, thoughtfully. "The other day he didn't want to make pace for me when I tried the two miles, and acted nasty as you like afterward in the locker house."

"He's a queer customer," said Tommy. "A pretty good fellow to keep away from. I don't mean that there's anything wrong with him, you know, but he's awfully uncertain. You never can tell how he's going to take a thing. Just after recess I met him one day, and asked him if he'd taken in the St. Thomas Club Indoor Meet—he lives in Brooklyn, you know—and he nearly took my head off; said he wasn't home Christmas, and implied that it was none of my business. I told him I didn't care a rap where he was."

"That's right, Tommy; don't you let them monkey with you," laughed Allan. [153]

"Well, what did he want to jump on me for?" asked Tommy, warmly. "I didn't care whether he went to the old meet or not; I just wanted to be polite. The reason I mentioned the meet was that he'd told about going the year before while he was at home, and I just happened to remember seeing something about it before Christmas. It's an open meeting, you know, and they have a big card—weights, team races, boxing, and all sorts of stunts."

"What is he, a miler?" asked Hal.

Tommy nodded.

"Guess that explains his cutting up with you, Allan; you beat him in the fall, didn't you?"

"Yes, with a good big handicap."

"Well, he's afraid you're going to cut him out of a place in the dual meet."

"There's no good reason why he should think so. He can beat me, I'm pretty sure. Besides, if Billy Kernahan has his way, I'll be down only for the two miles at the dual."

"We're going to have a dandy article on the indoor meeting this week," said Tommy.

"Wrote it yourself, eh?" suggested Hal.

"I suppose it will be like last year's, though," Tommy continued, ruefully. "We had two columns, with everything figured out finely: who was going to do what, and which fellows would win places. And then it came out all wrong." [154]

"Say, Thomas," said Pete, when the laughter had subsided, "I don't want to hurry you, but I'm

getting the powerful hungers."

"Yes, Tommy, how about that dinner at the Elm Tree?" chimed in Hal.

"He's making money to pay for it," said Allan.

"No, I'm not," answered Tommy, sadly. "That's the trouble. You'll have to wait a bit, Pete; I'm dead broke, honest Injun!"

"All right; just so long as I get that feed. Better not put it off too long, though; I'm nicely conditioned, you know, since the Midyears, and there's no telling what may happen to me."

"That's so," Allan said. "A fellow that's been drowned, suspended, and put on probation, all in two short months, is a pretty slippery customer."

"Say, Allan," said Tommy, reminiscently, "do you remember the night we waited up here for that duffer to come home?"

"The night he was drowned?" asked Allan. "Never'll forget it. The way the wind howled and cut up was a caution; made me think of graveyards and—and corpses."

"Me, too," said Tommy. "I went back to the room and dreamed of Pete floating in my bath-tub, with his old smelly pipe in his mouth and his face all white and horrid. Every time he puffed on the pipe he winked his eye at me, and I woke up yelling like a good one." Tommy arose from his seat and stood gazing into the flames. "It was a beast of a dream."

"Must have been," Hal responded, sympathetically. Pete puffed silently at the afore-mentioned pipe and grinned heartlessly. Tommy glanced over at him and commenced an aimless ramble about the room.

"I said then," he went on, "that if Pete— Say, it's getting beastly hot in here. Let's have the door open."

In spite of the protests, he opened the portal into the narrow hallway, and continued his rambling and his talk.

"I made up my mind then that if Pete wasn't drowned, that if I ever saw his dear, foolish, homely face again, I'd—I'd—"

"Be a better man," Hal suggested.

"Learn to write English," offered Allan.

"Pay your debts," muttered Pete over his pipe-stem.

"*I'd take a fall out of him!*" concluded Tommy, savagely. At the same instant he put a hand under Pete's chin, tipped him heels over head backward onto the floor, smothered his outcries by banging the saddle down over his face, punched him twice in the ribs—and flew! His forethought in opening the door saved him. As he dived through he slammed it behind him in Pete's face, and the others heard four wild leaps on the staircase. Then all was still save for Pete's chuckles. But stay! What sound was that from beneath the window; what doleful wailings broke upon the night air? They hearkened.

"Cowardly, cowardly, cowardly cat!" shrilled Tommy. "Dare you to come down, Pete Burley!"

Pete threw up a front window. There was a sound of hasty footfalls and an exclamation as Tommy collided with an ash-barrel. Then from far up the street came a last defiant challenge: "*O Fresh!*"

CHAPTER XVI

THE INDOOR MEETING

Mechanics' Hall, Boston, was filled from floor to gallery, from doors to stage. The hum of voices, the fluttering of programs, the slow bellow of the announcer as, with megaphone at mouth, he gave the result of the events, made a strange medley of sound.

From one corner of the floor to another there ran diagonally a lime-marked lane. Since half past seven white-trunked figures had rushed, half a dozen at a time, down this lane at top speed, had flung themselves panting, with outstretched arms, against the mattresses at the end, and had turned and trotted back to the dressing-rooms.

The supply had seemed inexhaustible. Heat after heat had been run in the Forty Yards Novice, heat after heat in the Forty Yards Invitation, heat after heat in the Forty Yards Handicap, and now the hurdles were in place, the pistol was cracking forth, and white-clad forms were flying breathlessly over the bars and breasting the red string at the finish.

At each report of the pistol the center gallery leaped to its feet, the hurdlers sprang into sight from below and sped away like arrows across the yellow floor. Hurdles crashed, the crowd shouted, the racers flung their arms at the tape and collapsed against the padded wall at the end of the lane, and the center gallery sank into its seats again and rustled its programs. And the announcer lifted his crimson trumpet:

"Forty-five Yards Hurdles—fourth heat won by No. 390, No. 3 second; time, 6 $\frac{2}{5}$ seconds."

There were dozens of colleges, schools, and associations represented there that night, and hundreds of competitors. There was the blue Y of Yale, the crimson H of Harvard, the red C of Cornell, the green D of Dartmouth, the purple E of Erskine, the brown R of Robinson, and many, many other insignia flaunted on heaving breasts.

Thirty-odd officials, in immaculate evening clothes, lent a note of sobriety to the colorful scene, while a blue-coated policeman, whose duty it was to guard the long table of mugs and tankards, stood out intensely against the gleam and glitter of the prizes. On the big stage, the sloping bank of watchers looked from the floor like a bed of waving somber-hued flowers. From a corner of the balcony came the strains of brazen music.

The jumping standards were set and the competitors ranged themselves along the edge of the track, their sweaters and dressing-gowns of all colors thrown loosely about their bare shoulders. The Clerk of Course could be heard at the dressing-room door summoning the men for the next event:

“All out for the two miles!”

The sloping corners of the track rang with the footsteps of the candidates as they warmed up. There were fifteen entries, and among them were men from Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Phillips Exeter Academy, and Erskine College. Erskine’s representative was rather nervous as, with his number flapping at his back, he was assigned the place at the pole in the front line. Beside him was a Cornell runner whose prowess was well known, and Allan Ware marveled at his own temerity. Surely, he had no chance against the Cornell man, nor, for that matter, against several of the others. Well, he would run as well as he knew how and take his beating philosophically.

The fact was, that the intense excitement was unnerving him. And that was why, when the starter had cried “Set!” Allan dashed forward, taking half the line with him. For this misdemeanor he and three others were promptly relegated to the last row. Then the command came again and the pistol cracked.

At the first turn Allan had to fight to keep from being hustled from the track. After the next corner the runners had settled down to their work, a New York man making easy pace. Allan was well in front. The nervousness had left him now and he had no thought for the cheering spectators, for the blaring strains from the band, for anything, in short, save the struggle on hand. Lap after lap was reeled off until the race was half finished. Allan was still holding his own, with the consciousness of much power in reserve. The New York man still kept the lead, while close on his heels ran one of the Cornell contingent.

Presently a Yale man fought his way up to Allan, and for half a lap they contested fifth place. Then, at a turn, the Yale man took the bank and slid into the lead, and Allan was sixth. He expected changes ahead. Of course the New York runner would not attempt to keep the lead much longer. He would drop back, Allan would overhaul the Yale chap, and in the last two laps he would call on the reserve power he was certain he had and fight it out to the finish.

He looked back. The nearest runner was several yards away and didn’t appear dangerous. The relative positions remained unchanged for another lap, and then things began to happen.

The Yale man dropped back, a second Cornell man—Allan recognized him as the one who had been beside him at the start—spurred into third place, and Allan found himself still running fifth. He had lost count of the laps, but believed there could not be more than two left.

So he started to crawl up. At the next corner, that by the dressing-rooms, he passed the Cornell man who had been second for so long; his duty was done and he was easing up on his pace. Down the stretch Allan gained on a Technology runner, but failed to pass him. Suddenly the gong announcing the last lap clanged. Allan glanced across the hall. The New York man was still in the lead, and was increasing that lead at every stride.

Allan threw back his head and fought for third place. On the next stretch footsteps sounded behind him. At the first corner Allan just succeeded in keeping the lead; on the short stretch, a Yale man passed him and left him as though standing. It was all up now; he was fifth, and there was no chance of bettering his position. The leader, well ahead of the Cornell man, was taking the last corner. The Yale man who had just passed Allan was taking third place hand over fist. The Technology runner was plainly faltering, and yet, thought Allan savagely, here was he, with all sorts of power of lung and muscle left, dragging along behind him!

He clasped his hands tighter and threw himself forward. Fourth place was better than fifth, he told himself, and at least he would not be beaten by a man who was ready to fall. So up he went, working as hard to beat out the Technology runner as though first place was at stake. And beat him he did, and turned off of the track and walked back to the dressing-room apparently as untired as when he had started.

“You lost that race,” said Kernahan, “when you lost your place in the first row. But don’t you care; you’ve learned a thing or two, and one of them’s to wait for the pistol.”

“But I’m not decently winded,” Allan complained. “I could run the mile now, and yet those chaps beat me.”

“Sprinting ability is what you’ve got to learn, my boy. And with three months before the dual ___”

“Hang the dual!” said Allan, petulantly. “I wanted to win this.”

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"Well, there's the mile yet," said Billy, soothingly.

But the mile brought Allan scant satisfaction. He was given a handicap of thirty-five yards, and, although this time he was careful to wait for the pistol, he came to the conclusion when half the distance was run that he might as well drop out of the race. There were almost fifty entries, and it seemed less a race than a fast-moving procession. The turns were always filled with fellows elbowing and fighting, and after the half-distance it was hard to tell who the leaders were, so close they were to the tail-enders.

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Rindgely and Harris had also entered, and about the only satisfaction Allan was able to gather was derived from the fact that he had them beaten from the start. But the smaller handicaps allowed those youths had something to do with that. Allan never knew what number he was at the finish, and didn't much care.

In the dressing-room, Harris, Rindgely, Long, and Monroe—the latter the only Erskine entry who had won a place—were finding balm in the fact that Robinson hadn't showed up in a single event.

"Wait until the team race, though," said Rindgely, darkly. "That's where they'll get us; you'll see."

"Don't believe it," said Harris, stoutly. "When does it come off?"

"After this, I think," said Long. "Who's got a program?"

"That's right," said Monroe. "Hello, Ware! Say, that was a perfect mess, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was," growled Allan. "I never knew whether I was running this lap or the last one."

"Or the one ahead," added Harris.

"Thought you were going to do something," said Rindgely. "You had a good chance."

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"Did I?" Allan responded, with intense sarcasm. "All right, only I didn't know it."

"Let's get out of here and see the Harvard and Penn race," Long suggested. "Where's our team?"

"They're out there somewhere. Thatcher says we're going to get it put all over us," said Allan.

"Thatcher's an old raven," said Harris, as they crowded out to where they could watch the race. "If he runs as well as he croaks, we're all right."

Harvard secured the race with University of Pennsylvania, and though the result was not long in doubt, yet the crimson-clad runners were forced to better the record by three-fifths of a second. Then the clerk's voice was heard at the dressing-room door:

"All out for Erskine-Robinson Team Race! All out!"

Of Erskine's relay team, only Thatcher, the captain, was an experienced runner. The others—Poor, Gibbons, and Tolmann—had earned the right to represent the college at the trials, but for all of that were unknown quantities. They were all of them, Thatcher included, small men; Poor was little over five feet in height, and looked as though he had never had enough to eat. As they trotted around the track, getting warmed up, Robinson's candidates overtopped them to a man. It was a big, long-limbed quartet that Robinson had sent, and had the result depended on height and length of leg alone the Brown would have had the race won at the start.

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Allan had secured a place near the front of the throng at the dressing-room door, and beside him, noticeable because of the evening clothes which he wore, was one of the officials, an inspector whose name was down on the program as "Horace L. Pearson, N. Y. A. C." It was while the two teams were still warming up that Allan heard his name spoken, and turned to find Mr. Pearson in conversation with Harris.

"Beg your pardon," the inspector was saying, "but the man beyond you there is Ware, of your college, isn't he?" But he wasn't looking in Allan's direction at all.

"No, sir," answered Harris, "that's Rindgely."

"Sure of it?"

"Quite, sir," replied Harris, smiling.

"Hm! I saw he was down on the card as Rindgely, but I thought maybe it was a mistake. What does the other man, Ware, look like?"

"He's here somewhere," said Harris. And then his voice dropped and Allan, looking carefully away, felt the inspector's gaze upon his face. He wondered what it might mean and why Rindgely had been mistaken for him, but his speculation was short-lived, for at that moment the pistol cracked and two runners, one with his white shirt crossed with a brown silk ribbon and the other bearing a purple E on his breast, sprang forward and fought for the lead at the first turn. The Erskine man was Thatcher and his opponent was named Guild. As they reached the other end of the track and sped past the dressing-room, conflicting shouts of encouragement from Erskine and Robinson supporters followed them.

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Thatcher had secured the pole at the start and had leaped into the lead at the turn. He was still ahead, but Guild was close behind him, his long strides seeming to be always on the point of taking him past, yet never doing so. Thatcher's plan was plainly to hand over the race to the next runner of his team with a good, big margin of gain, trusting that, if unable to increase the advantage, the other Erskine men would at least hold what they had. But the big gain wasn't

forthcoming yet.

As he neared the starting-point and the finish of the first of his two laps he strove desperately to leave his opponent, but it was not until the last lap was a third run that daylight opened up between the two. The Robinson chap was proving himself a worthy foe. Half-way around the last lap there was ten feet between Purple and Brown. From there on down to the mark, where the next two men stood with eager, outstretched hands, Thatcher gained and gained; but he had commenced late, and when Guild touched the hand of his team-mate and fell over into the arms of the Robinson trainer he was only fifteen yards to the bad. [167]

Gibbons, short of leg and rather heavy of build, was flying over the first turn as though possessed, and behind him pattered Thorpe of Robinson. Down the stretch they flew, while the band was drowned by the shouts of the onlookers. It was a pretty contest that, even though to discerning ones, at least, the end was not in doubt. Gibbons looked like a small whirlwind, and gave every indication of killing himself before the second lap was finished, but Thorpe, with long and easy strides, ate up the interval between them foot by foot, and when the second lap began was in position to take the lead whenever he wanted to.

Half-way down the side he did so. Gibbons fought him off desperately for an instant, but at the turn Robinson led by a yard. Then it was that Gibbons surprised even his trainer, for, instead of steadily dropping back, he refused to yield an inch and chased Thorpe down to the finish like an avenging fate, crossing the line a bare yard behind him. [168]

That yard of advantage was five yards half through the next lap, Tolmann failing to prove a match for Brine of Robinson. Foot after foot and yard after yard opened up between them, and when the last lap began the Brown's runner was an eighth of a lap ahead.

"Well, that's settled right now," said Long, who had jostled his way to Allan's side. "If we still had Thatcher we might stand some show, but I guess Poor can't cut down that lead enough to make it look even close."

"Thatcher's idea was all right," said Allan, "but he didn't know how good his man was. Robinson's next man is her captain, I think, and I suppose he ought to be the best of the lot."

"He ought to be, but maybe he isn't. Poor is a plucky little chap, and maybe he'll give Jones a run for his money. Look at him!"

At the other end of the hall Erskine's last hope was leaning over the mark, one slim white arm thrust forward and one reaching impatiently back toward where Tolmann, swaying and gasping, was vainly striving to save the race. Poor looked plucky without a doubt, and when, after what seemed an age, Tolmann struck weakly at his hand and staggered off the track, he was off like a shot, his thin legs twinkling like a salmon-colored streak as he followed the Robinson captain. The latter was almost a quarter of a lap ahead and was running easily, yet keeping a watchful glance upon his opponent. And, as it proved, that watchful glance was not thrown away. [169]

The band blared forth a two-step with might and main, supporters of the rival colleges clapped, shouted, and shrieked, and the runners' shoes *tap-tapped* on the floor and pounded over the built-up corners.

And then, of a sudden, a roar started among the audience and gathered volume and swept deafeningly across the great hall, and Allan, raising himself on tiptoes, gave a shout of joy. For just an instant or two after passing the second turn the Robinson captain had become inattentive to his pursuer, and in that brief moment Poor had literally eaten up space with his flying feet until now twenty yards would have spanned the distance between them. Jones, warned by the applause, leaped ahead, but Poor refused to yield an inch he had gained. More than that, he kept on gaining.

The bell clanged the beginning of the last lap of the race and the Robinson runner swept over the line fifteen yards ahead of Poor, his long strides making the latter's look ridiculously short by comparison. But if his strides were short, they were also rapid, and Poor, his little, weazened face screwed into an agony of effort, chased his opponent down in the next half lap, and at the second turn was barely two yards behind. Jones was plainly worried. As he pounded around the corner his right arm was thrust out in an involuntary effort to keep his opponent from passing him. But Poor was not able to do that on the turn, and for the next stretch their relative positions remained unchanged. [170]

As they dashed by the group at the dressing-room door, Allan and Long and Harris and the others shrieked exhortations and encouragement to their runner. Then the next turn was taken, Jones stumbled, saved himself, and led the way down the last stretch, his head back, his mouth wide open, and his speed lessening at every stride.

But if he was ready to give up, so, too, was Poor, who had run a quarter of a lap farther than he. And all the way down that stretch the Robinson captain struggled and faltered and the Erskine runner dogged his steps, unable to pass him. And then something happened, and so quickly that it was all over before the sight had time to register the meaning of it on the brain.

Half-way over the turn, and twenty yards from the finish, Jones swayed, tripped, and rolled over to the edge of the track, and Poor, less than two yards behind him, plunged blindly over him, sprawled and rolled along for three yards, and then, in some strange manner, found his feet and took up the running again. So, too, did Jones, but the larger man had fallen more heavily, and for an instant remained dazed upon the floor. [171]

That instant decided the race, for although he was up again almost before the audience had

sensed the catastrophe, yet he had lost the lead. For the last few yards the two men, giddy, swaying, their heads fallen almost onto their breasts, strove weakly for the line. The next moment Poor threw out his arms and sprawled forward on his face across the chalk-mark and Jones, stumbling past him, fell, sliding on hands and knees to the edge of the track.

Down by the dressing-room door Allan and the others were whooping it up joyfully, for Erskine had turned defeat into victory and won the relay by a scant three yards!

CHAPTER XVII

ALLAN LEAVES THE CLUB TABLE

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March winds are freakish, prankish things, and the wind in the face of which Allan crossed the yard one morning a fortnight or so after the indoor meeting was no exception. He was on his way from Grace Hall to the Chemical Laboratory for a ten o'clock, and at the corner of the chapel he passed a couple of fellows whom a casual glance showed him he did not know. But that he was not a stranger to one of them was soon proven. The wind, scurrying around the corner of the chapel, tossed him the following fragment of conversation with startling distinctness:

"Who's that fellow, Steve?"

"Ware, a freshie; he runs, or tries to. He was in the mile and two miles at Boston week before last and didn't do a thing in either of them. Guess the Athletic Association will take his job away now. They just employed him to keep him in college, I guess. This thing of giving fellows work just because——"

The words ended as suddenly as they had begun, so far as Allan was concerned, and he strode on to the laboratory. But his cheeks were burning and his heart was filled with wrath. For the first time he realized that his employment by the E. A. A. had a suspicious look, to say the least, while it was even probable that what the fellow he had overheard thought was really true. He was angry at the unknown youth for saying what he had, angry with Stearns for placing him in such a questionable position, and angry at Professor Nast for countenancing it. He wondered whether all the fellows he knew or who knew him believed as did the fellow he had passed, that he was knowingly allowing the Athletic Association to present him with money he was not earning.

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The blood dyed his face again, and he marveled at his blindness. Why had he not seen from the first that Stearns had secured him the place in the office merely to ensure his stay at college and his participation in the dual meet with Robinson? And hadn't he more than half suspected all along? But no, he was guiltless of that charge. Credulous and blind he had been, but not dishonest. And dishonest he would not be now. He passed a miserable, impatient half-hour, and when it was over hurried to the office of the Athletic Association and found Professor Nast at his desk.

The professor was a mild-mannered little man, rather nervous and seemingly indecisive, but he was executively capable and had much sound common sense. He viewed Allan's arrival with mild curiosity, nodded silently, and turned back to his work. But Allan didn't allow him to continue it.

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"How much am I worth here, sir, if you please?" he demanded, unceremoniously. The chairman looked somewhat startled and disconcerted.

"Why—er—that is a difficult question to answer, Mr. Ware. But if you—ah—consider that you are not being paid enough, I shall be glad to consider the matter of increased remuneration if you will make out an application in writing, stating——"

"Well, is my work here worth a dollar an hour, sir?"

"Eh? A dollar an hour? I—er— But I think you are receiving that amount, are you not?"

"Yes, sir; and that's what the trouble is."

"Trouble? Suppose you explain what you mean."

"Well, I—" He hesitated for words an instant and then threw politeness to the winds. "You've made me do what isn't honest, you and Stearns," he charged, angrily. "You offered me the work here just to keep me in college, so I could run at your old meet, and you gave me a dollar an hour for work that any one would do for half that money. Oh, I know it's lots my fault," he went on, silencing the professor's remonstrances. "I ought to have guessed it, but I didn't. I didn't think a thing about it until to-day I overheard a fellow say in plain words that I was taking money I wasn't earning. That's a nice thing to have fellows say about you, isn't it? And I dare say the whole college thinks just as he does, and—and——"

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"Hold up a minute," said the professor, finally making himself heard. "You're accusing Mr. Stearns and me of pretty hard things. Let's talk this over quietly. Sit down, please."

Allan obeyed. The professor swung around in his chair until he faced him, clasped his hands over his vest, and gravely studied Allan's angry countenance.

"I'm not sure that you—ah—have any right to come here and charge me—or Mr. Stearns—with unfair dealings. But I will accord you the right, Mr. Ware, for I see that there has been a mistake

made. It was, however, a mistake and nothing more, I assure you. Neither Mr. Stearns nor I had any intention of deceiving you. Allow me to finish, please," he added, as Allan made an impatient movement.

"It has been the custom here, of recent years, to give employment in this office to men who have needed the work, and preference has been given to athletes. If they have been paid more for their labor than that labor was really worth—and I am ready to grant that they usually have—the money with which they were paid has always come out of the general athletic fund and not from the college. I am not—ah—prepared to defend this custom; on the contrary, sir, I think it a very bad one, and I for one should be glad to see it discontinued. In your case, now, Mr. Stearns came and saw me and told me you needed employment. The place was vacant and I offered it to you at the terms which have always been paid. You are not earning one dollar an hour, Mr. Ware, and if you feel that you have been deceived by us, I am very sorry. No deception was intended on my part, and I am sure Mr. Stearns believed that you—er—understood the situation."

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"I didn't, though," answered Allan, somewhat conciliated by the other's manner. "I didn't dream of it. I—I did think the work was rather easy considering the pay, but I thought maybe it would get harder, and that—that I could make up. If I had known the truth, I wouldn't have had anything to do with the work."

"I am sorry, but, as I have said, there was no intent at deception. I offer you my apologies, and I am sure Mr. Stearns will be quite as regretful as I am. If there is anything I can do to better matters, I shall be delighted to do it, Mr. Ware."

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"Yes, sir, there is. I'd like to keep on with the work until I have squared myself."

"You mean you want to work without wages?"

Allan nodded. The professor considered the matter for a while in silence. Then—

"If you insist," he said, "we will make that arrangement. But there is another method that may answer fully as well. Are you averse to continuing the work at—er—a just remuneration?"

"N-no, I suppose not," Allan replied. "I need the work, and if you'll pay me only what it's worth I'd like to go ahead with it."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, for you have been very conscientious, Mr. Ware, and your services in the office have become valuable to me. I should dislike to make a change. Supposing, then, you continue at—ah—fifty cents an hour? Would that be satisfactory?"

"Is it worth that much?" asked Allan, bluntly.

"Yes, it honestly is; it is worth quite that. Well, and in regard to—ah—let us say arrears; I am working on the compilation of a rather difficult lot of statistics which are to be incorporated into my report. You could assist me vastly with that matter and could work, say, an hour three evenings a week. In that way, it seems to me, you could very shortly 'square' yourself, as you term it, and could, to some extent, choose your own time for doing so. What do you—ah—think?"

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Allan considered the matter. It sounded rather easy, and since an hour ago he had grown to view easy tasks with suspicion. But he could find no ground for objection, and in the end he accepted the proposal gratefully and stammered a somewhat lame apology for his hasty discourtesy. The Chairman of the Athletic Committee waved it politely aside.

"We will consider it settled, then," he said. "This afternoon we will decide on the hours for the extra work. I'm glad you brought this matter up, Mr. Ware, for I think the time has come to do away with a pernicious custom. Good morning."

On his way to his next recitation Allan reflected somewhat ruefully that under the new arrangement there was one thing which had been lost sight of, and that was a public vindication. As long as he continued to work in the office fellows would continue to think he was receiving money not earned. To be sure, he had the consolation of a clear conscience, but it was hard to have the fellows he knew and whose respect he craved think badly of him.

But there Allan was mistaken, for the story got out in short order—Tommy saw to that!—and it wasn't long before he heard an account of the matter, in which he figured as a model of indignant virtue and a galley-slave to conscience, from a fellow whom he knew very slightly. After that he had no doubts about public vindication.

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It was not a difficult matter to find three hours in the evening each week for the new labor, and he found it, since he had a fondness for mathematics, far more interesting than the daily letter-writing and clerical work. But five dollars a week wasn't ten, and so, despite the protests of Pete and all the other members of the club table, he left the hospitality of Mrs. Pearson's and went back to the college dining-hall, where he could, by careful management, make his monthly bill ridiculously small. Pete commanded and implored to be allowed to "fix things up" so that Allan need not leave the table; he almost wept; but Allan was obdurate. Pete even threatened to "let the table go hang" and return with Allan to Commons, but was finally dissuaded when Allan pointed out that in all probability he (Allan) would very shortly be taken onto the training-table of the track squad.

So Pete accepted the inevitable and draped Allan's chair with some dozen yards of black crêpe, and allowed none to occupy it for a week of mourning. But Allan wasn't a stranger to the table, for every Saturday night he returned there as Pete's guest and sat in his old seat and was made much of by the crowd.

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CHAPTER XVIII

AN ALARM OF FIRE

"Mary had a little dog,
It was a noble pup;
'Twould stand upon its front legs
When you'd hold its hind legs up!"

Thus warbled Tommy as, having kicked the door shut, he subsided into one of Allan's chairs by sliding over the back. Allan pushed his book away, yawned dismally, and looked over at his visitor mutely questioning:

"Where's Pete?" Tommy demanded.

"Am I his keeper?" asked Allan.

"You're his *fidus whatyoucallit*. Seen him to-night?"

"No; maybe he's studying."

"Careless youth," muttered Tommy. "Say, did you hear about Pete and Bœotia?"

"No; who's Bœotia, anyway?"

"Oh, it's that place in—er—ancient history, you know. It was at recitation this morning; Professor Grove asked Pete how Bœotia was situated. Pete wasn't prepared, but he thought he'd make a bluff at it. So he gets up and drawls out in his cheerfully idiotic way, 'Oh, he had a pretty good situation, but he lost it.'" [182]

"What did old Grove say?" laughed Allan.

"Well, I wasn't there and can't tell you. I'm going to settle my debts this week, and we'll have that dinner at the Elm Tree Saturday night, if that's all right for you fellows."

"It's all right for me," said Allan.

"The funny part of it is," Tommy went on, smiling, "that I made just enough to pay for the dinner out of the reports of Pete's drowning which I sent to the Boston paper. I got my account yesterday."

"Tell that to Pete," laughed Allan.

"I'm going to. Where's the angel child?"

"The angel child is probably out in the kitchen. I can't keep her at home since vacation; she found out then where the grub comes from."

"I think she ought to go to the dinner with us, don't you?"

"Well, scarcely. Let's go down to the 'Ranch' and see what Pete's up to. I can't study any more to-night."

Town Lane was as dark as pitch save at remote intervals where street lamps flickered half-heartedly, and to reach Pete's domicile at night without breaking a limb was quite a feat. To-night nothing more exciting occurred than a collision with a stable door which was swinging open, and the two reached the corner to find Pete's windows brightly illumined. Tommy, being in a musical mood, took up a position underneath and broke into song. [183]

"Here 'neath thy window, Love, I am waiting,
Waiting thy sweet face to see,"

he declared, strumming the while on an imaginary guitar. But the verse came to an end without signs from the window, and so they climbed the stairs. The "Ranch" was deserted. But even as they assured themselves of the fact by looking into the bedroom, soft footfalls sounded on the stairs from the third-story loft, and a moment after Pete, looking like a conspirator, crept into the front room and softly closed the door behind him. Then his eyes fell on Allan and Tommy, and he grinned mysteriously.

"Where'd you come from?" Allan demanded.

"Up-stairs."

"What's doing up there?" asked Tommy, suspiciously.

"Nothing at all." But the grin remained. Tommy sniffed.

"I'm going up to see," he threatened. [184]

Pete sank into a chair, took up his pipe, and spread his hands apart as if to say, "Please yourself; believe me or not, as you like." Then he lighted his pipe.

"What have you done with your coat?" asked Allan. "And why are you festooned with cobwebs and decorated with dust?"

"*Quien sabe?*" answered Pete, shrugging his broad shoulders.

"Just the same, you've been up to something," declared Allan, sternly. "And you'd better 'fess up."

"Huh!" grunted Pete.

"Out with it!" commanded Tommy.

"Huh!" said Pete again.

"Sounds like a blamed old Indian, doesn't he?" asked Tommy, disgustedly. "Well, don't you come and beg me to intercede with the Dean for you."

The smile on Pete's face broadened; he chuckled enjoyably; but commands and demands failed to move him to confession, and, after arranging for the dinner at the Inn, Allan and Tommy took their departure, Pete, for some reason and contrary to custom, making no effort to detain them. As they clambered down the steep stairs, Pete called after them:

"Say, it would be a great night for a fire, wouldn't it?"

"Fire?" repeated Allan. "Why?"

"Oh, such a dandy old high wind," answered Pete. "Well, *adios*."

"Wonder what he meant?" said Allan, on the way back. "It would be just like him to get into another mess."

"About time," chuckled Tommy. "Good night."

Allan went to bed soon after eleven, with Two Spot, according to nightly custom, curled up against the small of his back. For a while he lay awake listening to the howling and buffeting of the wind, but presently sleep came to him.

It seemed hours later, but was in reality scarcely thirty minutes, when he awoke abruptly with the wild clanging of a bell in his ears. He sat up and listened. It was undoubtedly the fire-bell, and had he had any doubt about it the sound of running footsteps in the street would have convinced him at once.

For a moment he weighed the prospective excitement of a conflagration against the comforts of the warm bed. In the end the fire offered greater inducements, and he leaped out of bed, lighted the gas, and tumbled into his clothes. And all the time the fire-bell clanged and clashed on the March wind. Leaving Two Spot to the undisputed possession of the bed, Allan left the house and looked expectantly about him. But there was no glow in the sky in any quarter; darkness reigned everywhere save about the infrequent street lamps. Here and there persons were running toward the fire-house, and Allan followed their example.

Down Main Street he hurried, entered the yard back of the library, and cut across in the face of the buffeting wind to the beginning of Town Lane. When he reached Elm Street he was part of a steady stream of excited citizens and students, all hurrying anxiously toward where, half-way down the narrow thoroughfare, the brazen alarm was pealing deafeningly forth. And then, for the first time since he had awoke, Allan recollected Pete and his mysterious observation regarding fire. And instantly he knew that Pete and the fire-bell were in some way working mischief together.

Pete's rooms were in the building at the corner of Center Street, and next door stood the fire-house, a plain two-storied building, surmounted by a twenty-foot tower, at the top of which hung the bell. When Allan reached the scene the windows of Pete's front room were brilliantly illumined, and from one of them hung Pete, exchanging lively salutations with friends in the throng below.

For a moment Allan's suspicions were deadened. In front of the fire-house the crowd jostled and craned their necks as they stared wonderingly upward to where the tower showed indistinctly against the midnight sky. On every hand were heard bewildered ejaculations, while members of the volunteer fire department ran hither and thither, questioning, suggesting, and plainly distracted. The big doors were open and inside the engine and hose-cart, horses in harness, were ready to sally forth the instant any one discovered where the fire was or why the bell clanged on and on without apparent reason. Through a hole in the ceiling a big rope descended, and at every clang of the bell it rose and fell again, and the building shook with the jar.

"Hello, Allan! Isn't this great?" shouted a voice in his ear, and Allan turned to find Hal, arrayed principally in a plaid dressing-gown and white duck cricket hat, grinning from ear to ear.

"But—but what is it?" asked Allan, bewildered.

"Don't know; nobody knows. There's the bell and there's the rope; no one's pulling it; must be spooks! Isn't it jolly?" And Hal leaped with delight and thumped Allan on the back.

"But why does the bell ring?" he asked, following the general example and staring upward at the tower.

"That's it! Why does it? Some say it's the wind, but that's poppycock, you know. What I think is that some one's got a rope hitched to the bell and is pulling it from the back of the building somewhere; that's what I think."

"But haven't they been around there to see?"

"Yes, but they're so excited and fussed they wouldn't know a rope if they fell over it. Some one's having a lark, you can bet on that. Isn't it a picnic? Just hear the old bell! Wow! Listen to

that!"

Allan put his mouth to Hal's ear and whispered a single word. Hal started, shot a glance at Pete's window and Pete himself, and burst into a gale of laughter.

"D-d-do you think so?" he gasped. "But—how could he? Look, there he is at the window. O Pete!"

"Hush up!" whispered Allan. "They'll get onto it. Look, they've got a ladder! They'll find out what's up now, all right, because the rope will be hanging. We ought to warn Pete; come on!"

They wormed their way through the crowd, exchanging shouts of salutation with acquaintances as they went, until they were under Pete's window. There they found Tommy, note-book in hand, looking very important and excited.

"O Pete!" shouted Allan. "Is your door unlocked?"

"Hello, partner!" returned Pete in a happy bellow. "Isn't this great? Here I sit at my parlor window and watch all the wealth, beauty and fashion of our charming metropolis. And, say, ain't the racket fine? This is more noise than I've heard since a dynamite blast went off behind my back! Why, it's almost like living in a city! Say, if you fellows——"

"We want to come up," shouted Allan. "Unlock your door."

Pete shook his head.

"Not on your life, partner; I've only got my nightie on. Want me to freeze to death?"

"Well, put something on," said Allan anxiously, "and come down."

"'Fraid of catching cold. Besides, I must turn in now; I'm losing my beauty sleep."

"But—but, Pete, they're—they're putting up a ladder!" blurted Allan.

"Are they?" asked Pete imperturbably. "Well, I'm not coming down to help 'em. They'll have to get on without me, my boy. Hello, Hal, that you? Ain't this wano? Such a cheerful——"

Pete's roar stopped suddenly, as did the noise of the crowd. Two firemen half-way up the ladder at the front of the building nearly fell off. For a sudden appalling silence gave place to the uproar! The bell was still!

After a moment of startled surprise—for at first the silence seemed louder than the noise—every one broke into incoherent laughter and ejaculations. The men on the ladder paused, undecided, and finally slid back to earth to hold a consultation.

"Well, ain't that a shame!" lamented Pete. "Just when I was beginning to get sleepy! Now I'm all woke up again. Say, you chaps, wait a bit and I'll slip something on and let you up." He disappeared from the window and was gone some time. Then the key scraped in the door at the foot of the stairs and Allan, Hal, and Tommy slipped through. Pete, standing guard, locked the portal in the faces of several undesired fellows and followed them up-stairs.

As Allan entered the room he glanced eagerly around. Just what he expected to find would have been hard to say, but whatever it was he didn't find it. The room presented its usual appearance, save that articles of apparel lay scattered widely about just wherever Pete had happened to be when they came off. Pete locked the room door, took his pipe from the table and proceeded to fill it. The others looked about the room, looked at each other and looked at Pete. Pete scratched a match, lighted his corn-cob and smiled easily back. Allan sank into the easy chair.

"How—how did you do it?" he gasped.

"Do it? Do what?" asked Pete, blowing a cloud of smoke toward the open window. Outside sounds told of the dispersing of the throng.

"You know what," said Allan.

Pete went to the window, called good night to an acquaintance, closed the sash and ambled back, smiling enjoyably.

"Wasn't it moocha wano?" he asked. "Just answer me that, Allan. Did anything ever go off more beautifully, with more—er—*éclat*, as we say in Paree? Is your Uncle Pete the boss, all-star bell-ringer? Did you get on to the expression, the—the phrasing? Did you——"

"Shut up, Pete," said Hal, grinning. "Tell us about it. Go on, like a good chap."

"There's little to tell," said Pete with becoming modesty. "Up there"—he pointed toward the ceiling—"is a loft. Over there is a bell. Bring a rope from the bell into the back window of the loft, down-stairs and through that door and—there you are! Quite simple."

"But, look here," piped up Tommy. "You were at the window when the bell was doing its stunts. How—how was that?"

"Simple, too," answered Pete, waving aside a cloud of smoke. "There was a noose in the end of the rope and the noose fitted over my knee as I kneeled on the floor. It was hard work and I guess the hide's about wore off, but it was all for the sake of Art."

The three deluged him with questions simultaneously, and Pete, sitting nonchalantly on the edge of the table, answered them as best he could.

"But how about the rope?" asked Allan finally. "They'll see it and trace it through the window."

"Oh, no, they won't, because, my boy, it isn't there any longer. When I said I'd put something

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on and let you fellows in, I cut it off at the foot of the tower and brought my end of it away. They'll find a rope there, all right, but they'll never guess it went through the back window. Besides, I can prove an alibi," he ended, with a generous and virtuous smile.

"That's so," answered Tommy. "We saw you at the window."

"When the bell was ringing," added Hal.

"And I saw both his hands," supplemented Allan.

"Yes, I meant you should," said Pete. Going to the trunk he took from behind it the lariat which usually hung on the wall, and from one end of it detached a few feet of hemp rope. This he put into the stove. The lariat he replaced upon the wall.

"Thus we destroy all evidences of guilt," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

PETE PUTS THE SHOT

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For a few days following the mysterious serenade on the fire-bell there was an epidemic of mild colds throughout the college; and as each fellow who had a cold was able and eager to tell—through his nose—what had happened at the fire-house, it would seem that there might have been some connection between the affliction and the midnight occurrence. But no serious illness resulted, and so we may leniently assert that no harm came of Pete's joke.

Not that any one knew it was Pete's joke, save the quartet and one other. The one other was Mr. Guild, out at Hillcrest. When morning came the severed rope hung in plain sight from the bell tower, and although it told clearly what had happened, yet it threw no light on the identity of the culprit. Of course every one—townfolk especially—declared it to have been a student prank, but none suspected Pete Burley, for it apparently entered no one's head that the bell might have been rung from Pete's room. The perpetrator was popularly believed to have been hidden in some near-by yard.

That Pete's innocence was never questioned was a lucky thing for Pete, because the faculty would have viewed the affair in the light of a last straw, and Pete's connection with Erskine College would have ceased then and there. As it was, the affair remained forever a mystery.

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Mr. Guild heard the story a few days later, when the quartet drove out to Hillcrest in a rattle-trap carryall and spent the afternoon. This was the second visit the fellows had made to the owner of the ducks since the beginning of the term. Mr. and Mrs. Guild had been in the South for two months, and after their return, in February, the snow had made the roads almost impassable. Hal and Tommy had been introduced on the occasion of the previous visit and had been cordially welcomed. Mr. Guild enjoyed the story of the bell-ringing and laughed heartily over it.

"That's a better joke, Burley," he said, "than that drowning business of yours. That was a trifle too grim to be wholly humorous. And when I remember the way I had the river dragged for your lifeless body, and expected to see it every time the men drew the grapples up, I—well, I hope your dinner the other night choked you."

But it hadn't. The dinner had passed off very successfully, and save that Hal had partaken of too much pie and had sat up in bed until three o'clock in the morning well doubled over, it had been an affair worthy of being long remembered. Even Pete, who claimed the right to be severely critical, had found nothing to find fault with, save, perhaps, the fact that in winning the banquet he had unwittingly provided the money to pay for it!

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The second week in March witnessed the return of the track team candidates to practise in the gymnasium. Spring was unusually late that year—perhaps you recollect the fact?—and several feet of snow hid the ground until well toward the last of March. But meanwhile the candidates, thirty-eight in number, were divided into two squads and were daily put through chest-weight and dumb-bell exercises and sent careening around the running track. Allan, who since his failure to "make good"—in the language of the undergraduate—had been somewhat disgusted and down in the mouth, with the return to practise experienced a renewal of faith in himself and his abilities. Billy Kernahan laughed at his pessimistic utterances and assured him that outdoor work would do wonders for him.

Meanwhile Hal was hard at work with the freshman baseball squad and was turning out to be something of a "star" at the bat. Tommy, who during the winter months had found much difficulty in keeping himself busy, was as happy as a lark, since the awakening activity in athletics, the class debates and the final debate with Robinson afforded him opportunities to perform wonderful feats of reporting and gave him almost as much work to do as even he could desire.

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Pete was left forlorn. Of the quartet he alone had no interest in life save study; and without wishing to be hard on Pete, I am nevertheless constrained to say that in his case study as an interest was something of a failure. He managed to stand fairly well in class, but this was due rather to an excellent memory than to any feats of severe application. When, toward the last of March, the baseball men and the track team went outdoors, he was more deserted than ever. Hal and Allan were inaccessible to him save in the evenings, and even then insisted on studying. As for Tommy—

"You might as well try to put your thumb on a flea as to try and locate Tommy," he growled aggrievedly. "I tried to meet up with him on Monday, and the best I could do was to find out where he had been last seen on Saturday. I haven't caught up with him yet, by ginger!"

"Why don't you go in for something?" asked Hal. "Try baseball."

"Baseball!" grunted Pete. "What do I know about baseball? It would take me a month to learn the rudiments of the game. I'll go out for spring football practise next month, but that only lasts a couple of weeks, they say, and after that I guess I'll pack up and go home."

"Try golf," said Allan, with a wicked smile. Pete snorted.

"I'd look well hitting a little ball with a crooked stick, wouldn't I?" he asked disgustedly. "No; I may be a blamed fool, but I know better than to make such a show of myself as that."

In the end Pete found an interest, and the manner of it was strange. It happened in this wise.

It was a few days before the class games. If his friends would not come to him, Pete could, at least, go to his friends. And so he had got into the way of walking out to the field in the afternoon and watching Hal on the diamond or Allan on the track. Sometimes he had a word or two with them; but at all events it was better, he thought, than moping about the college. The scene was a lively and, when the weather was bright, a pretty one. To-day the sky was almost cloudless, the sun shone warmly and there was a quality to the air that made one want to do great things, but yet left one content to do nothing.

When Pete approached the field he saw that the varsity and freshman baseball teams were both at practise, that the lacrosse candidates—whose antics always amused him—were racing madly about at the far corner of the enclosure, and that the track men were on hand in force. The scene was full of life and color and sound. Pete broke into song:

Sam Bass was born in Indiana, it was his native home,
And at the age of seventeen young Sam began to roam;
He hit the trail for Texas a cowboy for to be,
And a kinder-hearted feller you'd never hope to see.

Pete's voice was untrained but hearty. Had the tune been more melodious the effect would possibly have been more pleasing. As it was, the adventures of Sam Bass were chanted—as they always have been where Pete came from—in a melancholy reiteration of some half-dozen notes that threatened in the course of time to become terribly monotonous.

Sam used to own a thoroughbred known as the Denton mare;
He matched her in scrub races and took her to the fair.
He always coined the money and spent—

The song died away to a low rumble as Pete stooped and picked up a battered sphere of lead which lay on the sod before him. It was surprisingly heavy and he wondered what it was. Then his gaze fell on a lime-marked circle a few yards away, and it dawned upon him that the thing he held was a sixteen-pound shot, such as he had seen the fellows throw. Near-by the sod was dented and torn where the weight had struck. Pete hefted the thing in one hand and then the other. Then he raised it head-high and threw it toward the circle. It narrowly missed smashing the stop-board. Pete took up his song once more:

He started for the Collins ranch, it was the month of May,
With a herd of Texas cattle, the Black Hills for to see.

He picked up the shot again and looked about him. There was nobody near, and of those at a distance none was paying him any attention. So he laid his pipe on the ground, balanced the shot in his right hand, stepped to the front of the circle and sent it through the air. It described a good deal of an arc and came down about eight paces away. Pete was sure he could beat that, so he strolled over and recovered the weight, and, humming lugubriously the while, strolled back and tried it over again. This time it went a few feet farther and Pete was encouraged. He took off his coat and rolled his sleeves up, spat on his hands and seized that lump of lead with determination.

Up near the finish of the mile, by the side of the track, Allan was in conversation with Kernahan. Suddenly he stopped, smiled, and pointed down the field.

"For goodness' sake," he exclaimed, "look at Pete Burley trying to put the shot!"

Billy turned and watched. When the shot had landed, he asked:

"Has he ever tried that before?"

"No, indeed; Pete's stunt is football." Kernahan smiled.

"Sure. I remember him now. Well, you try a few sprints of thirty yards or so, and I guess that'll do for to-day. That stride's coming along all right; don't be in too big a hurry. To-morrow do a slow mile and a few starts. Then you'd better knock off until the meeting."

Allan nodded, turned and jogged away up the track. Billy strolled toward Pete. When he drew near his ears were greeted with a plaintive wail:

Sam Bass was born in Indiana, it was his native home,
And at the age of seventeen young Sam began to roam;
He hit the trail—

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Away sped the shot, and fell with a thud fully thirty feet distant. Pete grunted. Billy's face lighted. Pete wiped the perspiration from his brow with the back of one big hand and strolled after the shot. When he turned back he saw the trainer. He looked somewhat abashed and showed a disposition to drop the weight where he stood. But he thought better of it.

"Taking a little exercise," he explained, carelessly.

Billy nodded.

"Good idea," he said. "Don't throw it, but push it right away from you as though you were punching some one. You get it too high."

"Oh, I was just fooling with it," said Pete.

"I know; but you try it, and don't let it go so high."

The first attempt was a dismal failure, the shot scarcely covering twenty feet. Billy's presence embarrassed the performer.

"Try it again," said Billy. Pete hesitated. Then,

"All right," he said, cheerfully.

This time he did better than ever, and Billy paced off the distance.

"About thirty-two feet," he announced. "That'll do for to-day."

"Huh?" said Pete.

"That's enough for this time. You don't want to lame your muscles, if you haven't done it already."

"Oh, my muscles will stand it," answered Pete. "Do 'em good to get lame, I guess." But Billy shook his head.

"No, that won't do. You leave off now and report to me to-morrow at four-thirty."

"What for?" asked Pete, in surprise.

"For practise. We'll try you in the meet next Friday."

"No, I guess not," said Pete, shaking his head. "If you had a roping contest I might try my hand, but these athletic stunts have me beat."

"Never mind about that," answered the trainer, "you do as I say. We need you, and we're going to have you. Four-thirty, remember; and you'd better get some togs."

He nodded and walked away. Pete, staring after him, expressed his surprise by a long whistle.

CHAPTER XX

TRACK AND FIELD

The class games were notable that spring merely because they brought into sudden prominence a new and promising candidate in the shot-putting event, one Peter Burley, '07, of Blackwater, Colo. To be sure, Pete didn't break any records, nor did he come out first, but he contributed one point to the scant sum of the freshman class total by taking third place with a put of thirty-nine feet, four and one-half inches. Pete's appearance in athletic circles was a surprise to the college at large, and those who remembered his prowess at football and took his size and apparent strength into consideration jumped to the conclusion that here was a "dark horse" that was going to carry everything before him and break the college record into minute particles. Personally, Pete viewed his participation as a good joke, but he wasn't quite certain whom the joke was on.

It was evident that he had it in him to become a first-rate man at the weights, and Kernahan viewed his "find" with much satisfaction. Erskine had for two years past been rather weak in that line of athletics, and Billy had visions of developing the big Westerner into a phenomenal shot-putter and hammer-thrower; though, for the present, at least, he said nothing to Pete about the hammer, for fear the latter would mutiny. Pete had had only three days of practise under Billy's instruction prior to the class games, but in that time he had mastered one or two of the principal points and had thereby added seven feet to his best performance of Monday.

Billy was more than satisfied, the rival shot men, who had viewed Pete's appearance among them at first with amused indifference, were worried, and Pete was— But truly it is hard to say what Pete was. The whole thing was something of a joke to him, and possibly mild amusement was his principal sensation, although he was probably glad to be able to please the trainer, who had taken a good deal of trouble with him, and to add a point to the tally of his class.

But after the class games amusement gave place to surprise and dismay, for Billy informed him that the spring meeting would take place a week later, and that by diligent practise meanwhile he ought to be able to add another two feet to his record. Pete had been laboring under the impression that his troubles were over with the class games, and he promptly rebelled. But rebellion didn't work with Billy; he was used to it. He had a method of getting his own way in things that was a marvel of quiet effectiveness; and so Pete concluded when, on the next Monday,

he was once more out on the field "tossing the cannon ball," as he sarcastically called it.

All that week, up to the very morning of the spring track meeting, he stood daily in the seven-foot circle and practised with the shot, while Kernahan patiently coached him. Pete had the height, build and strength for the work, but it was the hardest kind of a task for him to grasp the subtleties of the hop and the change of feet. I am inclined to think that Billy's oft-repeated explanations went for little, and that in the end—but this was not until he had been at practise for almost a month—he learned the tricks himself by constant experimenting.

The actual putting was very soon mastered, but for weeks Pete's best efforts were spoiled because he either overstepped the ring or left himself too far from the front of it. But when the spring meeting came he climbed to second place, Monroe alone keeping ahead of him. The latter's best put was forty-three feet ten inches, and Pete's forty-one feet three inches.

Monroe seemed to Pete to view the latter's efforts as beneath notice, and Pete resented that from the first. As was to be expected by any one knowing Pete, Monroe's attitude was accepted as a challenge, and Pete vowed he would beat the college crack if he had to work all night to do it. From that time on Billy found no necessity for pleading; Pete was always on hand when half past four came around, and none was more earnest than he, none worked so hard. Pete had found his interest. [206]

Meanwhile Allan had done fairly well in both meets. In the class games he had entered for the two miles and the mile, had won the first by a bare yard from Rindgely and in the latter had finished third behind Hooker and Harris. At Billy's advice he relinquished the mile event thereafter and became a two-miler pure and simple. As Billy pointed out, either Rindgely or Hooker—and possibly Harris, who was coming on fast—was capable of beating Robinson at the mile, and it was better for Allan to put all efforts into the two miles, in which, so far as was known, Robinson at present excelled. Allan had hard luck at the spring meeting, getting away badly in the first place and taking a tumble in the next to the last lap that put him out of the race so far as the places were concerned. Conroy staggered in ten yards ahead of Rindgely, Harris securing third place, and Allan finishing a poor fourth.

By this time the training table was started, and Pete, much to his delight, temporarily deserted the freshman club table up-stairs and moved to the first-floor front room, where Allan, Rindgely, Hooker, Harris, Conroy, Stearns, Thatcher, Poor, Leroy, Monroe, Long, and several others whose names we have not heard, were congregated under the vigilant eyes of Billy Kernahan. I don't think Pete was properly impressed with the honor conferred upon him by his admission to the training table, but he was glad to be with Allan again and rather enjoyed the novelty of having his meals arranged for him. If it had not been that training required the relinquishment of his beloved corn-cob pipe, I think Pete in those days would have been perfectly happy. [207]

Meanwhile, at another training table farther around the bend of Elm Street, Hal was one of the stars of the freshman nine. Of the quartet, Tommy only was not head over ears in athletics, but the fact didn't trouble him a scrap. He had all he could do—and a trifle more—and was laboring, besides, under the harmless delusion that the college's success on diamond, track, and river depended largely upon his supervision and advice. Whenever he had time, which wasn't very often, he delighted to stand beside the lime-marked ring and offer gems of instruction in the art of putting the shot to Pete. And Pete, who was miserable without companionship, stood it smilingly for the sake of Tommy's presence. In the evenings Tommy frequently found a moment or two in which to look up Allan or Hal and give them the benefit of his advice regarding playing second base or running the two miles. But those young gentlemen exhibited a strange and lamentable impatience, and Tommy quite often left their presence under compulsion or just ahead of a flying boot. [208]

Meanwhile the spring vacation came and went. Of the quartet, Hal and Tommy went home, and Allan and Pete stayed at college, Allan from motives of economy and Pete because nothing better offered.

After recess baseball held the boards and the varsity team was half-way through its schedule by the first week in May, and had but two defeats behind it. On the track the candidates were put through their paces six days a week. Erskine was almost sure of victories in the sprints, equally certain of defeats in the middle distances, expected to win the mile, was in grave doubt as to the two miles, and hoped to share the hurdles with her opponent. In the field events, the high jump alone was certain to yield a first to the Purple. The pole vault, broad jump, and both weight events were of doubtful outcome. As Tommy figured it out in the columns of "his" paper about this time, Erskine had a chance of winning by seven points. But as second and third places were almost impossible to apportion with any accuracy, this forecast was not of much value. The dual games with Robinson came on May 28th. A fortnight before that Allan's work was stretched over six days, as follows: [209]

Monday, a two-mile run at an easy pace.

Tuesday, a fast mile, followed by an easy three-quarters.

Wednesday, a hard, fast mile.

Thursday, two miles and a half in easy time.

Friday, a mile and a half at medium speed.

Saturday, a time trial over the two miles.

This was hard work and lots of it, but Allan's physical condition could scarcely have been

bettered, and never, from the beginning of outdoor practise until the big event was over with, did he go "fine" for a moment. Twelve days before the meet Allan had his last trial, and when, still running strongly, he crossed the finish line, Billy's watch clicked at 9:53⁵/₈.

Billy smiled cheerfully enough, but down in his heart he was disappointed. He had expected better things.

CHAPTER XXI

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

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I have never found any one with sufficient courage to defend the winters at Centerport. At the best they are bearable, at the worst they are beyond description. Nothing any one might say would be too harsh to apply to what the residents call "a hard winter."

In short, from January to April the weather is everything detestable, and reminds one of a very bad little boy who has made up his very bad little mind to be as very bad as he possibly can.

And then—as like as not between a sunset and a sunrise—spring appears, and it is just as though the very bad little boy had grown sorry and repentant and had made up his mind to be very, very good and sweet and kind, and never do anything to grieve his dear, *dear* parents any more. And there is a soft, warm breeze blowing up the river valley, the grass on the southern side of the library is unmistakably green, a bluebird, or maybe a valiant robin, is singing from a branch of the big elm at the corner of the chapel, and there is a strong, heartening aroma of moist earth in your nostrils. And you know that from thenceforth until you leave the old green town the last of June your lines are cast in pleasant places and that it is going to be very easy to be happy and good.

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Well, I suppose there are other places where spring is superlatively pleasant, where the trees and sod are extravagantly green, and where youth finds life so well worth living. Only—I have never found them. And I doubt if there is an old Erskine man the country over who can recollect the month of May at Centerport without a little catch of the breath and a sudden lighting of the eye.

For in those Mays his memory recalls Main Street and the yard were canopied with a swaying lacework of whispering elm branches, through which the sunlight dripped in golden globules and splashed upon the soft, velvety sod or moist gravel and spread itself in limpid pools. And the ivy was newly green against the old red brick buildings, the fence below College Place was lined with fellows you knew, and the slow-moving old blue watering-cart trundled by with a soft and pleasant sound of splashing water. Fellows called gaily to you as you crossed the yard, the muslin curtains at the windows of Morris and Sesson were a-flutter in the morning breeze, and from Elm Street floated the musical and monotonous chime of the scissor-grinder's bells. What if the Finals were close at hand? The sky was blue overhead, the spring air was kind and—you were young!

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I think something of this occurred to Allan when, at a quarter of ten on a mild, bright morning three days before the dual meet, he crossed the street from his room, books under arm, and turned into College Place.

Perched on the fence in front of the chapel were Clarke Mason, the editor of the Purple, and Stearns, the track team captain. After exchanging greetings, Allan dropped his books back of the fence and swung himself onto the top rail.

The sun was pleasant, the ten o'clock bell would not ring for several minutes, and there was an invitation in the way in which Mason edged away from the post. Allan was a warm admirer of Mason, and the fact that, as was natural, he seldom had an opportunity to speak with him made him glad of the present opportunity. There was but one topic of overwhelming interest at present, and that was the track and field meet with Robinson. With two successive defeats against them, and the added result of the last football game still in memory, it is not strange that Erskine men had set their hearts on administering a trouncing to the Brown and regaining something of their old athletic prestige. The boat race and the baseball contests were too far distant for present consideration.

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"I don't know when there's been so much enthusiasm over the athletic meet as there is this year," said Mason. "And it's bound to tell, too. I've noticed that when the college as a whole wakes up and wants a thing it generally comes pretty near getting it."

"We wanted the football game badly enough," said Stearns.

"Yes, just as we want all of them, but there wasn't the enthusiasm there has been some years. I think we expected to win, and so didn't get much wrought up over it. But next year—although you and I won't be here to see it, Walt—I'll bet the college will be red-headed over football; there'll be mass-meetings and the band up from Hastings, and Ware here will be marching out to the field singing 'Glory, Glory for the Purple' at the top of his lungs. And the team will just naturally go in and win."

"At that rate," ventured Allan, "we ought to lick Robinson on Saturday, for, as you say, the fellows are all worked up over it."

"I think we're going to," answered Mason, with quiet conviction. "But, of course, I don't know

so much about it as Walt here, and he says I'm off my reckoning."

Allan looked at the captain with surprise. All along Stearns had displayed a confidence that, in Allan's case at least, had been a great incentive to hard work. Stearns frowned a little as he answered:

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"Oh, well, maybe to-morrow I'll be hopeful again. A fellow can't help having a spell of nerves now and then, you know."

"Well, if it's only that, we'll forgive you," Mason replied. "I thought maybe something had happened. Things have a way of happening, I've noticed, just before a meet; Jones lames his ankle, Brown is put on probation, Smith is protested, or something else unforeseen plays havoc."

"That's so," said Stearns, emphatically, "and maybe one reason I feel uneasy is because nothing *has* happened; Robinson hasn't protested any one and no one has sprained his ankle or got water on the knee. I think I'd feel safer if something of the sort had occurred."

"Well, I guess you're safe now," laughed Mason. "The men have quit practise and Robinson's opportunity for protesting our best men has passed."

"I don't know," said Stearns, doubtfully. "Something will turn up, you see if it doesn't."

"Nonsense! How about you, Ware? Going to win the two miles?"

"I'm scared to think about it," answered Allan, uneasily. "That Robinson crack can do better than I've succeeded in doing yet, and so I guess I'll have to be satisfied with second place."

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"Oh, Ware's all right," said Stearns, encouragingly. "He's going to present us with five points, and we'll need 'em!"

This sounded more like the Stearns Allan was accustomed to.

"They tell me that chum of yours, Burley, is going to do great things with the shot, Ware," said Mason, questioningly.

"I hope so," Allan answered. "He can, all right; the only thing is whether he will get fussed and forget how; he's funny that way."

"Well, Billy thinks he's a wonder, and says that by next year he'll be able to give a foot to the best college man in the country. Well, there's the bell. I hate to waste a day like this indoors, but—needs must when the faculty drives!"

The trio slipped off the fence and went their separate ways, but before they parted Stearns drew Allan aside.

"I say, Ware," he said, "don't say anything to any one about what—what you've heard. There's no use in discouraging them, you know, and what I just said doesn't amount to anything; I guess I'm feeling a bit nervous. You understand?"

But Allan, as he crossed the yard to College Hall, in the tower of which the bell was clanging its imperative summons, couldn't help feeling apprehensive and worried. It was so unlike Stearns to admit even the possibility of defeat. On the steps Allan ran against Pete, big, smiling, and serenely satisfied with life.

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"How'd you get on yesterday?" asked Allan, as they went in together.

"Oh, pretty middlin'," said Pete, cheerfully. "I got within four inches of that cayuse of a Monroe."

"But you'll have to beat him if you expect to win over Robinson," said Allan, anxiously.

"Oh, I'm not bothering about Robinson," answered Pete. "If I can do up Monroe, that's all I give a hang about!"

The next afternoon, Thursday, Stearns appeared at Allan's room, looking excessively cheerful.

"Hello!" he said, as he sat down. "How are things?"

"All right," answered the other, wondering at the track captain's errand. "How about you?"

"Fine as silk," he said. "Say, Ware, Robinson has sent a foolish letter, and asks the committee to look up your record. Of course," he went on, carelessly and hurriedly, "it's all poppycock, but they think they have a case, and so maybe you'd better walk over with me and see Nast about it; just explain things so he can write back to 'em, you know. Are you busy?"

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Allan, bewildered and dismayed, looked across at Stearns with wide eyes and sinking heart. The track team captain's forebodings of yesterday flashed into memory, and it was with a very weak voice that he asked finally:

"You mean that—that Robinson has protested me?"

Stearns laughed carelessly, but something in the other's tone sent a qualm of uneasiness to his heart.

"Oh, there's no question of a protest," he answered, "because the time for protests has gone by. But, of course, they knew the committee would investigate the matter, and that if everything wasn't all right they wouldn't allow you to run. But, of course, as I say, it's all nonsense. They say you were entered in the mile run at the St. Thomas Club Meet, in Brooklyn, during vacation, and came in third. And—and there's a silly newspaper clipping with your name in it. But, as I told Nast, you can explain that all right, I guess. Fact is, you know," he continued, with a little annoyed laugh, "you've got to; we can't afford to lose you, Ware."

Allan took his cap from the desk.

"Come on," he said, quietly.

CHAPTER XXII

A NEWSPAPER PARAGRAPH

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During the short walk across the yard little was said. Stearns now and then shot puzzled and anxious glances at Allan's face, but the latter looked straight ahead of him, and Stearns learned nothing. In the office Professor Nast approached the subject at once. The Robinson authorities, he stated, had written, saying that Ware had won third prize in the mile event at an indoor meet of the St. Thomas Club, in Brooklyn, on the evening of December 26th, and in support of the contention enclosed a clipping from a newspaper. The clipping was handed to Allan, and he read, opposite a big blue pencil mark:

"Mile run—Won by E. C. Scheur, N. Y. C. C. A. (45 yds.); second, T. Webb, St. T. A. A. (45 yds.); third, A. Ware, E. A. A. (50 yds.). Time—4m. 47s."

Allan returned the clipping calmly.

"You understand," said the professor, gently, "that the mere fact of your having entered this meeting without permission would not of itself render you ineligible on Saturday. The trouble is that the meeting"—here he tapped the newspaper clipping with his pencil—"was not an amateur affair; the prizes were purses of money, and, being an 'open' meeting, there were, as you may see, a number of professionals participating. That—er—is the difficulty."

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"I know nothing about it," said Allan, quietly.

Stearns sank back in his chair with a long sigh of relief. "I told you it was all nonsense!" he exclaimed. The professor himself looked well pleased.

"I did not run in that meeting," continued Allan. "I have been in Brooklyn but once, and that was fully six years ago."

"I am very glad to hear it," said the professor, "very glad. Now, while I am not in duty bound to explain the matter to the Robinson authorities, yet it is better for various reasons to do so. And there is one thing—" He paused and tapped the desk frowningly. "About this clipping?" he asked. Allan shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't explain that. Perhaps there's another 'A. Ware' and perhaps 'E. A. A.' stands for something else besides Erskine Athletic Association."

"Stands for lots of things, probably," said Stearns, a bit impatiently.

"We might find that out," mused the professor. "Where were you, Ware, that evening, the—ah—yes, the twenty-sixth of December?"

"I was in New York, visiting my aunt on Seventy-third Street. I was in the house all the evening, except for about half an hour, when I went out on an errand."

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"Well, you couldn't have crossed the river to Brooklyn, run a mile race and returned home in half an hour," said the professor, lightly. "Now, will you get your aunt to write me a letter, stating those facts and assuring me that you were not and could not have been in Brooklyn? It is not, you understand, that I doubt your word, Ware, but I have my duties in these affairs and I must perform them. Simply a letter, you understand, will suffice."

"I will do my best," Allan replied; "but——"

"Eh?" shouted Stearns.

"But my aunt has left New York city and is traveling in the West, probably in California now. I shall have to find her address from my mother first, and by that time——"

"Now, look here, sir," interrupted Stearns. "Surely Ware's word of honor is enough in a case of this sort? It's only a—a coincidence of names, sir."

"For my own satisfaction Mr. Ware's word is sufficient," replied the chairman, with dignity, "but the rules require evidence, and I must have it. I only ask Mr. Ware to supply me with a statement from some person who knows of his whereabouts on the evening in question. Perhaps there is some other person who will do as well?" But Allan shook his head.

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"No, sir, I'm afraid not. My aunt lives alone except for the servants, and I saw no one I knew that evening. I will telegraph to my mother at once, and perhaps I will be able to get a letter from my aunt before Saturday. But it's a pretty short time."

"Produce your evidence any time before the two-mile race is called," said the chairman, kindly, "and it will be all right. And, by the way, a telegram will answer as well as a letter, if your—er— aunt is in the West. I am anxious to help you in every way possible, and I regret that the duties of my office require me to be or—er—seem exacting. Another thing, Ware; the Athletic Association will incur all the expenses of telegraphing in this affair; and you need not—ah—spare money. Good morning."

"Oh, it will be all right," said Stearns, cheerfully, as they hurried together to the telegraph office. But Allan shook his head despondently.

"No, I've felt ever since yesterday that something would happen to ball things up. And now it's happened. And I don't believe I'll hear from my aunt in time. However, I wouldn't have got better than second place, anyway. But I did want to run," he ended, dolorously.

"Nonsense! Cheer up! We'll make the wires hum. We've got pretty near two whole days, and we can telegraph around the world fifty times in two days."

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The telegram asking for his aunt's address was duly despatched to his mother in New Haven, and after that there was nothing left to do save wait her reply. Allan parted from Stearns and went dejectedly back to his room. There he found Pete engaged in a carouse with Two Spot. They wouldn't let Pete practise with the shot to-day, or again before the meet, and he was feeling quite lost in consequence. Allan wanted some one to unfold his tale of woe to, and he was glad to find Pete awaiting him. Pete, as the story was told, grew very indignant, and offered to punch Professor Nast's head. But Allan finally convinced him that the chairman of the Athletic Committee wasn't at all to blame.

"It's a beastly way to have things end, after you've been practising hard all spring," he said, as he arose impatiently from his chair and strolled to the desk. A Latin book was lying on the blotter, with a slip of paper marking the page where Allan had been at work when Stearns appeared. Now he opened the book, crumpled the marker into a ball and tossed it disgustingly onto the floor. Then he drew up a chair and plainly hinted that he desired to study. Pete, however, refused to heed the hint.

"It's a mighty foolish business," he said, thoughtfully.

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Allan grunted.

Two Spot had discovered the little ball of paper and was making believe that it was a mouse. She rolled it from under the couch with playful pawings and frantic rushes, and finally tossing it in the air, so that it fell at Pete's feet, she stopped, blinked at it and suddenly fell to washing her feet, as though too dignified to do aught else. Pete stooped absent-mindedly and picked up the bit of paper, unfolding it slowly and smoothing it across one huge knee.

"Seems to me," he said presently, "you chaps have forgotten one thing."

"What's that?" Allan asked, ungraciously.

"To wire the St. Thomas Club people and ask them if you ran in their old meeting."

"Well, that's so," said Allan, hopefully. "But, then, there was probably some one there named 'A. Ware,' and they'd just answer 'yes.'"

"Ask 'em if Allan Ware, of Erskine, ran in the meeting, and, if he didn't, who the dickens the 'A. Ware' was who did run. Tell you've got to know in a hurry, and that it's blamed important."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Allan, "that's a good idea. Funny we didn't think of it, wasn't it?"

For answer Pete grunted, as though he didn't think it at all funny.

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"Hello, who's 'Horace L. Pearson, N. Y. A. C.?' " asked Pete, holding up the scrap of paper rescued from Two Spot, and which now proved to be torn from the program of the Boston indoor meeting.

"I don't know; why?" asked Allan.

"I used to know a fellow of that name out in Colorado. He was sort of studying mining. What does 'N. Y. A. C.' mean?"

"New York Athletic Club. It's probably the same fellow. I remember him now. He was the chap that thought Rindgely was me."

"Eh?" asked Pete. "How was that?"

So Allan told him, and Pete grew very thoughtful as the short narrative progressed. When Allan had finished he asked:

"I suppose these fellows that do stunts at the Boston meet go to pretty near all of them, don't they?"

"Oh, I don't know; a good many, I guess. Why?"

"Just wondering," answered Pete. "Come on and send that telegram. If you address it to the president or treasurer or something, it will do, won't it?"

"I'll send it to the chairman of the Athletic Committee," said Allan, seizing his hat. "I'm glad you thought of it, Pete. You're some good in the world, after all, aren't you?"

"Sure. See you this evening. I want to see Tommy. Where do you suppose I'll find him?"

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"Oh, come on down to the telegraph office."

"Can't; I want Tommy."

"Well, try the Purple office; maybe he's there. Don't forget to come around to-night. I may get an answer from my mother by that time."

Pete was successful. To be sure, Tommy wasn't in the office of the Purple, but Pete hadn't supposed he would be; Tommy wasn't so easily caught. But by tracing him from one place to

another, Pete at last came up with him in the library, where he was eagerly securing data for an article on rowing which he was preparing for a Boston Sunday paper.

"You see," he explained, hurriedly, "I don't know very much about rowing, but it wouldn't do to say so, and so I come here and consult these gentlemen." He indicated the half-dozen volumes by which he was surrounded. "If I only wrote what I knew, you see, I'd never make any money."

"Well, that's the first time I ever heard you acknowledge you didn't know it all, from throwing to tying," said Pete.

"Oh, a fellow has to keep up a front," said Tommy, shrewdly, with a grin.

Pete slipped into the next chair, and for the next quarter of an hour they whispered fast and furiously. When Pete got up, he said:

"This isn't for publication in your old paper, Tommy, you know. And don't say anything about it to any one, will you?"

And Tommy pledged himself to secrecy, adding:

"And I think you've got it, Pete. Are you going to see him to-night?"

"As soon as I can find him in his room," Pete replied.

"Then I'll come around to Allan's to-night and hear what's happened."

"Maybe I won't tell Allan," answered Pete. "Anyhow, not unless I have to. I'll see what the coyote has to say for himself."

"Rindgely? Oh, he'll have plenty to say, all right. He'll talk himself blue in the face if you let him."

"Maybe I won't let him," answered Pete, grimly.

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE FRESHMAN GAME

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"Your aunt was in Los Angeles California Monday expected stay week
address Mission House. Is anything wrong?
MOTHER."

This message Allan found awaiting him when he hurried home from dinner that evening. So far so good, he reflected. But Monday was three days gone, and if his aunt had changed her mind and gone on!—well, he didn't like to consider that contingency. Seating himself at his desk, he composed two messages, one to his aunt and one to the manager of the Mission House. In the latter he requested that his message to Miss Mary G. Merrill be forwarded to her, in case she had left the hotel. In the other message he finally expressed, at the expense of thirty-four words, what he wanted his aunt to do. Then he hurried again to the telegraph office and begged the emotionless operator to get both messages off at once. The operator nodded silently.

"You haven't received any other message for me, have you?" asked Allan. The operator as silently shook his head. Allan wandered back to his room. Studying was a task this evening, and he was glad when Tommy demanded admittance. A few minutes later Pete, too, arrived, looking very satisfied with life. Allan did not notice the exchange of glances between the last comer and Tommy, and if he had he would not have understood them, nor would he have connected them with the matter uppermost in his thoughts. Tommy raised his eyebrows inquiringly and Pete nodded with a smile and mysteriously tapped the breast of his coat.

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Allan was full of his quandary and found much relief in telling everything to Tommy and exhibiting the telegrams received and copies of those sent. Pete, strange to say, and somewhat to Allan's disappointment, did not display the amount of interest in the subject which Allan thought he should have; and even Tommy seemed soon to tire of the matter. Allan fell into silence, reflecting pessimistically on the readiness of your friends to abandon your troubles. Pete and Tommy left early—Tommy had been on the point of leaving ever since his arrival—and with their parting injunctions to "cheer up" and "don't let it bother you" in his ears, Allan went sorrowfully to bed.

The next day was Friday, and it dawned cloudy and chill. May has its moods, even in Centerport, but it was unfortunate that it should have displayed the fact to-day, for the gloominess of the weather increased Allan's despondency until Two Spot, blinking inquiringly from the Morris chair, saw that the world was awry and decided to go to sleep until things were righted again. And the answer to his St. Thomas Club message, which came just before noon, did not tend to lighten Allan's spirits.

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"Ware of Erskine," it ran, "won third in mile run December twenty-sixth."

Allan, as he tossed the sheet of buff paper angrily aside, wondered whether, after all, he had not taken part in the meeting while temporarily unbalanced; he had heard of such things, he thought. Or perhaps he had fallen asleep and—but no, his imagination couldn't conceive of any one running a mile race and negotiating inclined corners without waking up! It was a strange and maddening mystery, and the more he puzzled over it the stranger it seemed and the more

exasperated he became.

Stearns called after lunch and listened to an account of the developments with perfunctory interest. He had given up hope of having Allan enter the meet, and had decided that it didn't much matter. For it was evident that Allan was worried and nervous, and the chances that he would give a good account of himself, if he ran, were slim. Stearns was sympathetic, but Allan could see that he, like Pete and Tommy, wasn't inclined to let the matter trouble him overmuch. [230]

After the track captain had left, Allan fell into still deeper despondency and mooned about his room—which was the last thing he should have done—until four o'clock, when a half-hour of jogging on the track took him out. No reply from Aunt Mary had reached him by dinner time, and although he stayed awake until eleven, in violation of training orders, listening eagerly for the opening of the gate which should announce the advent of the messenger, he was at last forced to go to sleep without the message. You may be certain his sleep did him little good. He dreamed all night, or so it seemed, and morning found him tired and haggard. His first look was toward the door-sill, but no buff envelope rewarded it.

"That settles it," he muttered, bitterly; "I'm not going to hope any longer."

Having reached this decision, he threw back his shoulders and walked to breakfast whistling a tune. To be sure, the tune wasn't always tuneful, and sometimes it died out entirely, but it was a brave effort. Breakfast at the training table was an uncomfortable meal for him. The others were in the best of spirits, and there was present a half-suppressed excitement that showed itself on the countenances and in the bearing of the fellows. [231]

None there save Stearns and Pete knew of Allan's trouble, and they gave no sign. Pete even seemed to Allan to be indecently happy, and his attempts at conversation met with scant encouragement. Half-way through the meal Rindgely's absence was discovered, and Kernahan was despatched to hunt him up. He had not returned when Allan left the house. Every one was cautioned to spend the forenoon out-of-doors and report promptly at eleven-thirty for lunch.

The town soon took on a gala appearance. The sidewalks were thronged by ten o'clock, and none seemed to have anything to do save discuss the outcome of the afternoon's performances. Erskine banners hung from the shop windows and fluttered over front doors. Pete wanted Allan to go out to the field with him and see the Erskine-Robinson freshman game, but Allan had no heart for it, and refused to leave his room. He had no recitations, for the professors had very generally given cuts. He wrote a letter to his mother—a very dismal production it was, too—and then sat at the window with Two Spot in his lap and watched the crowds pass on their way to the game.

The college band, followed by a mob of singing, cheering freshmen, went by in a cloud of dust, and presently a barge containing the home nine passed, and Allan had a glimpse of Hal's gray-clad shoulders. The Robinson youngsters had already gone out. The steady stream of townfolk and students became broken; groups of three and four passed at intervals; now and then a couple of students, laughing and chatting, or a solitary mortal hurried by the house. Then, quite suddenly, as it seemed, all traffic ceased, and Poplar Street resumed its wonted quiet. [232]

Half an hour later Allan's eyes, roaming from the magazine which he was striving to read, sighted a faded blue coat across the little park, and his heart leaped into his throat. A messenger boy, whistling a blithe tune, toiled slowly along, as though his shoulders bore the weight of a great sorrow. Once, when almost at the corner, he stopped, leaned against the fence and seemed on the point of going to sleep. Then he roused himself and came on. Allan restrained an impulse to dart out into the road and waited on the porch, with his heart beating like a trip-hammer. The boy reached the corner, glanced with mild interest at Allan—and went on up Main Street.

After the first moment of blank and sickening dismay, Allan went to the end of the porch and looked after him. Perhaps, after all, he was mistaken, and would discover the fact and turn back. But eventually the lad sauntered across the street and disappeared around the corner of McLean. Allan went back to his chair, his heart like lead and a lump in his throat that wouldn't be swallowed. [233]

Out at Erskine Field great things were happening. The purple-lettered youngsters were more than holding their own against the far-heralded team of Robinson. It was the sixth inning, and the score stood 9 to 5 in Erskine's favor. Hal had played a magnificent game at second and already had a double-play to his credit, and had, besides, succeeded beyond all of his team-mates at hitting the redoubtable brown-stockinged pitcher. Side by side on the warm turf back of third-base, Tommy and Pete were sitting cross-legged, having passed the ropes by virtue of Tommy's ever-present note-book, with its staring inscription, "Erskine Purple," on the cover. The last man of the Erskine side went out, the teams changed places, the seventh inning began with Robinson's tail-enders coming to the plate, and Pete resumed his narrative, which had been interrupted by Hal's hard drive to left-field.

"He didn't have any idea what I had come for," Pete said, "and was going to be very nice and polite; he can be when he likes, you know. But I wasn't there to pass compliments or swap stories, so I got right down out of the saddle and talked business. 'Rindgely, I know that you ran in the St. Thomas Club meet in Brooklyn the night after Christmas, under the name of A. Ware, and won fifteen dollars,' I said, 'and you've got to come out in the open and say so.' Of course, it was a rank bluff; I was pretty certain about it after I'd talked with you, but I didn't know [234]

absolutely, and couldn't prove anything. If he had kept his nerve and told me to go to thunder, it would have been all off on the spot, and I'd had to crawl off with my tail between my legs. But it took him so sudden that he just gasped and got pale around the gills. Then I knew I had him roped. So I just waded in and gave it to him hot and heavy. Told him he was a horse-thief and an all-round galoot; that he ought to be ashamed of himself, and a lot more. When I got through he was a pretty sick steer. I had him hog-tied and branded. Then he began to play fair.—Ginger! look at that hit! Good work! That's two out, ain't it? Only one? Well, it ought to be two."

"And then what?" asked Tommy, making strange marks in the score-book on his knee.

"Well, I got kind of sorry for the poor old jack-rabbit. He told me all about it, and swore up and down he hadn't meant any harm; that he wanted to try what he could do against some good men at the mile, and hadn't cared a hang about the money. 'But what did you use Ware's name for?' says I. 'Wasn't your own bad enough?' 'Because,' says he, 'I didn't want my folks to know about it; they live there in Brooklyn, and might have seen my name in the paper next day. I didn't think about making myself ineligible,' says he, 'and I didn't think I was doing Ware any harm.' Well, that may be a lie, but he was sure in the dumps, and so I agreed to make things easy for him. 'You write it all out in black and white and sign your name to it,' says I, 'and if I can I'll keep dark about it. If Allan gets a message from his aunt, all right; if he doesn't, I show your document to Nast. I'll wait till the two-mile is called.' Bully for you, Hal! That's three, ain't it? Sure! Hit it out, Seven!"

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"You see," he went on, after the nines had changed places and the Erskine captain had seized his bat, "you see, I didn't want to be any harder on Rindgely than I had to. He said if the faculty got hold of it they'd be sure to either bounce him bodily or hold up his diploma. Well, I guess they would, all right, eh?"

"Sure to," answered Tommy, promptly, as he marked the first man out at first, scored an assist to the credit of the opposing pitcher and a put-out to that of the Brown's first-baseman.

"So that's the way we fixed it up. And I hope Allan gets word from auntie, for I'm blessed if I want Rindgely to get kicked out without graduating. It would be hard luck for a chap to do four years at hard labor here and then slip up just when he was going to grab the prize, wouldn't it?"

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"Hardest kind of luck," said Tommy. "Hope you don't have to show the confession."

Erskine went out in one, two, three order and the eighth inning commenced. The band was doing gallant work and Pete found conversation beyond his powers until the last strains of a lively two-step had died away. By that time the Brown's second man had been retired, and Robinson's hopes were dwindling fast.

"Is he going to run this afternoon?" asked Tommy.

Pete shook his head.

"No; you see, I couldn't let him do that; it would be against the law; if Allan couldn't run he couldn't, and that's certain."

"No, he hasn't any right to," said Tommy, thoughtfully. "He's plainly ineligible because he ran for money; and then, there would be other reasons."

"Well, that's the way I figured it out," said Pete, with a note of relief in his voice. He was glad to have his decision supported by some one who knew more about such things. "But he saw himself that it was all up with him as a runner. He said he'd be sick to-day, and, as he wasn't at breakfast, I guess he is. I'll bet Dr. Prentiss will have a hard time finding out what's wrong with him." And Pete chuckled wickedly.

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"All out," said Tommy. "Say, Hal! Oh, *Ha!* Give us a home run, Hal! Get out! Of course you can. We want some more runs."

"I guess we don't stand much show of winning this afternoon," went on Pete. "With Rindgely out of it and Allan all balled up, I can see Robinson getting a few points."

"They'll win first in the mile, all right," answered Tommy. "Hooker's not in the same class with Rindgely this spring, and Harris isn't a bit better; though maybe he'll manage to get placed. As for Allan, he never has had any too good a chance at the two miles, and now, after all this rumpus, it's a fair bet he'll be out of it entirely. It's a mean shame the way things have gone, and when you think that it's all Rindgely's fault, expulsion doesn't seem a bit too bad for him."

"Maybe," said Pete, doubtfully, "but I don't want to be the feller to get him bounced; that's all. If Allan's confounded old relative doesn't come to time I'll—well, I guess I'll give Rindgely's statement to you and let you attend to things."

"You've got another guess, Pete," said Tommy. "I don't want anything to do with it. Besides, you worked the racket and ought to see it out."

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Pete sighed dolefully.

"I suppose I'll have to," he murmured.

Again the inning closed without a tally, and Robinson came in for her last turn at bat. Her players looked very determined, and it seemed not impossible that they would go in and make up the four runs that threatened to defeat them. And the band played again. Pete and Tommy were driven from their places by the crowd, which had left the stands and were invading the field, and they allowed themselves to be pushed forward to the foul-line.

"I suppose Allan thinks I'm a brute," said Pete, dismally. "I didn't go near him last night. But I

just couldn't stand seeing him so miserable, and not blurting out everything I knew. So I fought shy. I just hope it ends all right."

Whether that ended all right another chapter will have to tell, but there was no doubt about the game ending that way. Robinson went down before superb pitching, and with the score still 9 to 5, the spectators flooded over the field and their cheers drowned even the band.

CHAPTER XXIV

"ON YOUR MARK!"

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Once more the crowds were moving out to Erskine Field. It was after one o'clock, and experienced persons knew that there were no reserved seats and that "first come first served" was the rule. The midday sun shone warmly and only enthusiasts looked forward with pleasure to sitting on the unshaded stands for the next three hours. Robinson's athletes went out William Street in two barges, their paraphernalia following them in a tumble-down express wagon drawn by a limping sorrel nag, whose bridle was draped with brown and white.

The contents of the barges were viewed with polite interest, but the wagon awakened amusement on the part of sober citizens and ribald mirth on the part of undignified undergraduates. Nearing the field, the eyes caught sight above the tree-tops of the great purple banner, with its snowy E, which fluttered lazily at the top of the tall staff. At half after one the stands were thickly sprinkled with spectators, and the flutter of programs—used in lieu of fans—was visible across the field; with a little imagination one could have likened the ladies, in their bright and many-colored gowns and hats, to flowers, and thought the fluttering programs lighter petals stirred in a breeze.

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On the track, runners and sprinters were jogging to and fro and on the edge of the field the officials were gathering, their purple and gold badges glowing bravely in the sunlight. Two big tents had been erected at the end of the oval nearest the gates, and about them white-garbed contestants lay or sat on outspread dressing-gowns, while rubbers and trainers came and went among them like anxious hens among their broods.

In front of the Erskine dressing-tent sat Allan. He had been up and down the straightaway three times and was still breathing heavily as a result. He had no hope now of being allowed to enter his event, and even if he were, he reflected, he would stand small show of winning, since it was evident that he was in poor shape. Physically he seemed fit enough, but he was aware all the time of a feeling of nervousness and depression that was ill-calculated to help him in a grueling two miles.

Word had been left at the telegraph office that if a message came for him it was to be rushed out to the field as fast as possible, and to this end a horse and buggy from Pike's stable was already standing in front of the door. Stearns was taking no chances, for now that Rindgely had been declared too ill to enter the contest, another five points were almost certain to go to Robinson, and if it was possible for Allan to enter the two miles and make a fight for a place, he must do it. Stearns was worried and down-hearted.

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Even the most optimistic calculators could not figure a victory for Erskine with first places in both the long-distance events conceded to her rival. As a last resort, Stearns had secured the postponement of the two miles to the tag end of the afternoon. He had thrown himself on the generosity of the Robinson captain and explained the predicament.

And the Robinson captain, who was Brooks, their crack hurdler, had consented, a piece of sportsmanship which met with the condemnation of his trainer and many of the team. But the expedient promised to work little good, for it was plain that if Allan's telegram to his aunt had reached her she would have replied not later than yesterday. But Stearns was in desperate straits and no chance was too slight for him to seize upon.

At a few minutes after two o'clock the pistol was heard from the far end of the straightaway, and Erskine took the first honors of the meet, Stearns securing first place and Leroy second in the 100 yards dash, and earning 8 points for the Purple.

To chronicle the afternoon's proceedings in detail would be a tiresome as well as an unnecessary task. In the 120 yards hurdles, which followed the first dash, and in the 220 yards hurdles, which came later on the program, Robinson had things pretty much her own way, Brooks, her captain, taking first place handily in each. Robinson won 12 points in these events, and Erskine 6. Stearns again showed his mettle in the 220 dash, and Robinson got second and third; 5 points for Erskine and 4 points for her adversary. In the quarter-mile the best the home team could do was to secure third place, and that by the narrowest margin, though the time, 50 $\frac{2}{5}$ seconds, was absurdly slow. When the mile was called, the 220 yards hurdles had not been run and the score on Professor Nast's sheet stood: Erskine, 18; Robinson, 18. So far things were happening in a way that brought joy to the professor's heart, but the field events were still undecided and the long distances were yet to run.

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The mile event worked the audience up to the highest stage of excitement, and for a long while, in fact until the three-quarters had been passed, the race was most anybody's. But after that Coolbroth of Robinson sprang into the lead, closely pursued by Harris of Erskine, and Patterson

of Robinson. The finish was made in that order, Harris and Patterson fighting for second honors all the way around the last lap, and Harris finally winning his 3 points by a bare two yards. The hammer throw was decided about this time, and Robinson was credited with first and third, Monroe winning second for Erskine. The score now was not so satisfactory to the supporters of the Purple, since it stood: Erskine, 24; Robinson, 30.

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The Purple exceeded expectations in the broad jump, allowing her rival but 1 point. In the high jump, however, she didn't show up so well; Robinson took first and third places. After the 220 yards hurdles, which, as has been already told, were won by Brooks, Erskine securing but 1 point, the score was heavily in the Brown's favor, 45 to 36. By this time the afternoon had worn well toward sunset. Only the shot-put, the 880 yards run, the pole-vault and the two miles remained. Of these, Robinson was conceded 8 points in the pole-vault, 5 in the shot-put and 1 in the 880. It was difficult to see how Erskine could pull out of the meet ahead. In fact, it was evident that she couldn't. Even Tommy, normally optimistic, had lost hope. While the competitors in the hurdles were trotting off to the tents he hurried across to where the shot-putters were at work. As he approached, six of the nine candidates were donning their dressing-gowns, and he knew that the trials were over and that the six were out of it. Then he pursed his lips and whistled softly. Of the three competitors remaining for the finals, two were Erskine men, Monroe and—yes, the other was Pete! The Robinson candidate was Tiernan, who had won first in the hammer throw. Pete hailed Tommy and drew him aside.

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"Have you got that paper safe?" he asked.

"Yes." Tommy reassured him by allowing a corner of it to peep forth from his inside pocket. Pete nodded and glanced toward the tent.

"For goodness' sake, don't lose it," he said. "And keep a watch for the two miles. We're not through here yet and I don't want the scheme to slip up."

"All right. And say, Pete!"

"Yep?"

"Do your best, old man, won't you?" begged Tommy. "They're 'way ahead of us, but if we get first and third out of this we may have a fighting chance."

"Well, we'll see," said Pete, untroubled. "I've got Monroe dead to rights, anyway."

"Yes, but beat Tiernan, Pete; we've *got* to win!"

"Well, just as you say, Tommy," answered Pete, smiling at the other's look of tragedy. "For your sake, Tommy, I'll do my best."

"Burley!" called the field judge, and Pete drew his sweater off and stepped into the ring. There were three competitors remaining, and each was allowed three tries, the best of which was to count. Pete picked up the shot, took up his position at the rear of the circle, placed the weight in his broad right hand, threw his left arm out to balance him, raised his left foot from the ground, and then, with a motion that was neither hop nor glide, reached the front of the circle, brought his right shoulder smartly round and sent the weight flying. The measurer started to lay the end of the tape where the shot had struck, but stopped at judge's announcement.

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"Foul," said the latter. "You overstepped, Burley."

Pete nodded carelessly and donned his sweater again. Kernahan, who had approached during the try, beckoned to him, and they stepped aside.

"That won't do, Pete," said Billy. "Keep that elbow in to the body; you had it spread way out that time. And mind the stop. Take all the time you want, you know; there's no hurry."

Pete grinned.

"*That's* all right," he said. "Don't worry about me, Billy. I'll get it away all right next time."

Monroe followed with a put of 43 feet 6 inches, and Tiernan bettered this by half a foot. Again Pete peeled his sweater off and took up the shot. As he stood there, balancing himself, he looked, with a careless, good-natured smile on his face, like a giant who, for his amusement, had entered the sports of pigmies. He was taller than Tiernan and bigger everywhere than Monroe; the judge came barely to his shoulder. The muscles of his arms were like great ropes under the clear skin. Once more he crossed the ring, and once more the leaden ball was hurled forward. From the stands came a chorus of applause. Tommy's face lighted, and even Billy gave an appreciative nod. The Robinson trainer, standing across the circle, shot a quick glance at Pete as he stepped out and took his sweater from the turf.

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"Forty-four feet seven inches," announced the judge, as he held the tape to the edge of the stop-board. Tommy clapped Pete on the shoulder and whispered his delight. Pete smiled good-humoredly.

"All out for the 880!" cried a voice across the oval. "Hurry up, half-milers!"

Monroe made his second try, and the tape said 44 feet 1 inch. He turned away in disgust. Pete smiled. Robinson's champion took plenty of time at his next try, and made a splendid put. He had exceeded Pete's best attempt and there was a breathless silence around the ring as the tape was adjusted. Then,

"Forty-five feet two inches," said the judge.

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The Robinson trainer, who had looked anxious a moment since, smiled demurely. Over on the

starting line the half-milers were being placed. Along the length of the stands the spectators were leaving their seats here and there. Pete stepped into the seven-foot circle for his last try. Tommy, a few feet away, watched him eagerly. With the shot in his right hand, Pete looked across and dropped his left eyelid in a portentous wink.

Tommy's heart sank. If Pete would only stop his fooling for a minute, he thought, and really put his heart into it! And while the thought came to him, Pete was hopping across the ring and poising himself for an instant at the front edge. Then his body swung around, his right arm shot out like a steel spring, and the shot went arching over the ground. Tommy's heart leaped into his throat and then thumped wildly. From the stands whose occupants were near enough to be able to follow the shot-putting came a great roar of applause. Tommy, with his eyes fixed intently on the tape, felt a hand seize his arm and pull him around.

"Come along," said Pete, "and find Nast."

"Wait! Wait till we find out——"

"Find out nothing," said Pete. "Monroe can't touch that put!"

But even as Tommy hung back the judge looked up from the tape with a smile on his face.

"Forty-five feet eleven inches!" he said.

"*Oh, bully!*" cried Tommy. "But Tiernan——"

"Huh!" said Pete.

From across the field came the sharp report of the pistol sending the half-milers away, and as Pete and Tommy hurried to the tents the white-clad runners swept by in a bunch on the first of their two laps, Poor and Tolmann side by side in the lead, and Thatcher, Erskine's main hope, running warily well toward the rear. Around the turns they went and entered the back-stretch, hundreds of voices urging them on.

Allan, a depressed-looking figure in his dragging drab gown, met them as they crossed the track. There was no use asking him whether he had received the longed-for message; one glance at his face was sufficient. Pete took him aside out of the throng.

"You're going to run, Allan," he said, in low tones, "so get warmed up. Now, don't ask any questions, for I can't answer 'em yet. Just do as I tell you. It's all right; you're going to run, and if you don't win out I'll—I'll lick you!"

The expression of hope which had at first leaped into Allan's face died out again, but a look of curiosity remained.

"What—what do you mean?" he asked, wonderingly.

"Just what I say. You're going to run, and if you want to do anything in the race get your muscles stretched. Let go of me; I'm in a hurry. Have you seen Nast?"

"I've found him," said Tommy, hurrying up. "He's gone over to the finish. Here come the half-milers. Track, there!"

Once more the runners sped past, but now they were no longer bunched together. In front, leading by half a dozen yards, ran Poor. Next came Thatcher, then a Robinson man, then Tolmann. Behind Tolmann the rest of the field pegged away, already out of the reckoning, barring accidents.

"All out for the two miles!" bawled the clerk.

Pete shot a glance at Tommy and the latter nodded. Together they turned away.

"Get a move on, Allan," cried Pete. "Don't stand there like a wooden Indian!" Allan, his face expressing wonder and returning hope, slipped quickly out of his dressing-gown.

"I guess you're joking, Pete," he said, "but——"

"Is Mr. Ware here?" piped a shrill voice, and the blue-coated messenger boy pushed his way through the throng about the tents. "Telegram for Mr. Ware!"

With a cry Allan turned and seized the envelope from the boy's hands and tore it open. Under the gaze of dozens of curious eyes, he read the words on the still damp sheet of yellow paper and turned with exultant eyes to Pete and Tommy, who had paused at the edge of the track.

"It's all right!" he cried. "Where's Nast?" And he sped off around the track. Tommy and Pete followed, and the latter, as he went, took a folded sheet of foolscap from his pocket and tore it into tiny pieces.

"Hurry up for the two miles!" bawled the clerk again.

When Allan reached the finish he was unable for a moment to reach Professor Nast, for the half-milers were tearing down the home-stretch and the crowd was thick about the tape. Shouts of triumph, roars of applause, arose. Down the cinders, their straining forms throwing long wavering shadows before them, came Thatcher, Tolmann, and a Robinson runner, the first two almost side by side, the third man four or five yards behind. Then, in an instant more, the red string fluttered away and Thatcher raced over the line, a winner by a bare yard over his team-mate.

"Eight more points!" cried Tommy, gleefully. "Who knows how the shot-put came out?"

"We got first and third," answered Hal, turning. "Hello, Tommy, is that you?" But Tommy was

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too busy casting up figures on his score to do more than nod.

"Was Pete first?" he asked in a moment.

"First! Gosh, he was first by almost a foot. Tiernan fouled on his last try, and——"

"How about Monroe?" asked Pete, worming his way forward.

"Hello, you old brick!" cried Hal, seizing his hand. "Why, Monroe did something like forty-four feet two, I think."

"*That's* all right," said Pete.

By this time Allan had found Professor Nast, and the latter was reading the message. It ran:

"Allan was at my house New York evening December twenty-sixth except between eight and eight-thirty o'clock when he went errand for me Thirty-ninth street. Could not have gone to Brooklyn and did not if he says so.

MARY G. MERRILL."

The professor handed back the sheet of paper and put his hand on Allan's shoulder.

"Good," he said, with satisfaction. "Go in and win, Ware."

He pushed him toward where the long-distance men were assembling at the start. Allan waited for no more, but darted down the track. As he reached the group, his name was called and he answered as he slipped into the second line of runners. The next instant Stearns was pulling him aside, his eyes wide with eagerness. [252]

"Is it all right?" he whispered. "Did you get word?"

"Yes, a minute ago. I've seen Nast."

Stearns gave him a hug that left him almost breathless.

"Thank goodness!" he said, softly. "The meet's tied at 54 points. The whole thing depends on this, and we've got to have first place, Ware, we've *got* to! Watch that man Burns over there; the tall chap with the tow hair; he's dangerous. And— Say, Billy," turning to the trainer, who had slipped across the track to them, "Ware's in it, after all. I was telling him to——"

"Get the lead at the start, or as soon as you can, and just simply hold it, if you have to break a leg," said Billy, quietly. "How are you feeling?"

"I—I don't know," answered Allan. "But—I guess I'm all right."

"Good. See that light-haired Robinson man over there at the pole? Well, play for him, Ware. And don't let him head you for a minute. All right now."

"All ready, there?" called the starter, as he dropped back and glanced at the pistol in his hand. There was an instant of silence. Then, [253]

"*On your mark!*" he cried.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAST EVENT

Eleven men had entered for the two-mile run, six from Robinson and five from Erskine. Of these, we know Ware, Conroy, and Hooker, wearers of the purple ribbon, and have just heard of Burns, the Brown's crack long-distance runner. In view of the result of the race, it may be well to mention also Tammen, another Robinson entry, who, until to-day, had been viewed as a second-rater. For the others, they were big and little, fair and dark, and all with their spurs still to win. Taken together, they were a clean-built, healthy lot as they stood at the starting line, their white running pants and white shirts—the latter crossed by the purple ribbon or the brown and white—just tinged with saffron by the long rays of the setting sun. The starter glanced again at his pistol.

"*Set!*" he cried.

And as the runners put their weights forward and poised arms front and back, the pistol spoke and the spiked shoes bit at the cinders as the men strove for the inside of the track. The timers looked up from their watches and the group about the line broke up. Ten minutes—possibly a little less, perhaps a little more—must elapse before the result could be known and Erskine or Robinson could claim the meet. For by a freak of fortune each college had now 54 points to its credit, and final victory would go to that one whose colors first brushed the string at the finish. Whether the spring's labor and planning was to be crowned with victory or draped with defeat depended on who won first place and its 5 points. [254]

A knowledge of this accompanied Allan all through the race, now spurring him on to determined effort, now casting him into the depths of hopelessness and despair. The meet depended upon him, and he wished with all his heart that it didn't. For from the first instant he knew that he was not in a condition to do his best. He was aware of high-strung nerves and a general feeling of worry. For the latter there was no longer any reason; but reason or no reason, it remained. The last two days and their accompanying nights of unrefreshing slumber had had their effect. For the rest, his muscles were strong and supple, his lungs eager for their task.

Half-way around the first lap he had secured the lead, none disputing it with him, and had

settled down into that apparently slow pace which makes the two-mile event look so unexciting at the first. He knew himself capable of making that pace for the entire distance and finishing comparatively fresh, but he also knew that Burns, who was coming serenely along half-way back down the length of the string, could stand it quite as well, and could probably sprint in the last quarter mile and beat him out. He decided then to increase the pace, in the hope of wearing the Robinson crack out, yet knowing that to make too fast a race would finish him up just as surely as it would Burns.

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When the home-stretch was reached in that first lap Allan set his legs to faster work, and as he crossed the line and completed the eighth of his distance, supporters of the Purple shook their heads. It wouldn't do, they murmured; he would run himself out in the first mile and a half. Even Kernahan was a little worried, though nothing of the sort showed on his face. At the end of the second lap Allan had not abated his speed a jot.

As he passed the groups around the finish and the tents, his eyes were set straight ahead, his long strides clung closely to the inner rim of the track and he was holding himself well erect. Into his cheeks the blood was creeping and dyeing them crimson, save for two disks that showed whiter and whiter as the contest wore on. Behind Allan ran an unknown Robinson man, then Hooker, then Tammen, then Burns. Conroy was dangerously far back, and, with others in his neighborhood, was showing that he didn't approve of the pace.

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Of all distances, the two miles is the hardest to run. Speed as a factor in success is largely eliminated, and endurance is the supreme test. The race requires a large courage on the part of the runner, the courage to endure. It has been said, and truly, that it takes a fast man for the sprints and a brave man for the distances. At the completion of the fourth lap it is safe to say that five of the six runners were as completely and hopelessly beaten as though the race was finishing. Their legs dragged, their heads were falling back, and their lungs were aching. But it had been the fastest half of a two-mile race ever run on Erskine Field.

Of those in the van of the long line of runners, which now stretched half-way around the oval, only three maintained their form at the beginning of the fifth lap; those were Allan, Burns, and Tammen. Save that the unknown Robinson man who had held second place at the beginning had dropped back to fifth position, the order was unchanged. Between Allan and his team-mate, Hooker, there was three yards of cinders; between Hooker and Tammen, five yards more. Back of Tammen, only a stride separating them, ran Burns, untroubled, and holding his own with great, long, easy strides.

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The turf was strangely green, for the low slanting beams of the sun bathed it in their golden glow. The stands were almost deserted, for the occupants were clustered all along the home-stretch, their eager gaze following the white-clad figures on the darkening track.

If Allan's form was still nearly what it had been at the beginning of the race, it must not be supposed that the mile had not told. Usually the two-miler finishes the half-distance in comparatively unwearied condition and faces his troubles from then on, but Allan had set a fast pace, and it had told on him, in spite of appearances. He felt as he usually did at the end of the mile and a half, and he wondered troubledly if he had not overdone it.

At the turns, now and then, a backward glance revealed the confident face of Burns, while Hooker's tortured breathing told its own tale. Either he must last out or Robinson would take second and third positions, as well as first. But he had grown fearful of his ability to do so, and on the sixth lap he eased up on his pace. And half-way down the back-stretch he wondered if he had not, after all, made a mistake in doing so. For Burns, refusing to slow down, had bested Tammen and Hooker and was apparently striving to pass Allan. But at the beginning of the next lap, the seventh, Allan saw that the supreme struggle was not yet, for Burns had slipped in behind him, apparently content to let him set the pace for a while longer.

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Then Hooker began to drop back. He had done his best, but his best was not good enough. Tammen passed him and ranged himself behind Burns, and these three, when the last lap began, were leading the field by sixty yards or more. As they swept by the finish the shouts of the spectators made a deafening roar in their ears. Allan had a dim vision of Pete leaping alongside the track at the first turn, near the tents, waving his long arms against the sunset glow and shouting unintelligible things.

Once around that first turn, Allan shot a glance over his shoulder and his heart leaped. Unless he was very much mistaken, Burns had lost ground. That was Allan's last turn of the head. From that time on it was merely a question of hugging the rim of the track and enduring the ache of limb and chest, doubting all the while his ability to hold his place and all the while determining to do it.

He was right about Burns. That redoubtable runner had gone to pieces all in the minute. At the second turn he was plainly no longer dangerous to Allan, and back at the finish the throng roared its relief and delight. And while it was still shouting, Tammen shot around Burns and began to lessen the dozen or so yards between him and Allan. And Allan, hearing vaguely a new note in the voices across the field and the rapid pat of steps on the track behind him, guessed what was up and felt his heart sink. Here was a man who could sprint, something Allan had never been able to do satisfactorily, and here, in all probability, was the winner of the race! Those gazing obliquely across the oval saw Allan falter for a stride just at the farther turn, and their hearts sank.

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But after that first instant of what was something like terror, Allan pulled himself together. In his own words, it was up to him to win, and win he would, if only his breath would last that long. Tammen, three yards behind him, made no attempt to pass him at the turns, but kept himself in

hand for the home-stretch. And Allan, grim and determined, weakening with every long gasp for breath, knew that when the track stretched straight before him to the distant white line the battle would really begin, and that in the length of that distance the meeting would be won or lost.

And then he finished the turn and the rim ran straight beside him. And then the *pat, pat* behind him crept nearer and nearer. Presently, when the stretch was half run, Allan was conscious, without looking—for he dared not take his eyes from the track ahead—of something grayish-white at his elbow. [261]

The time had come to do the impossible, to spur his weary limbs into renewed effort, to force his panting lungs to greater exertion, and to keep that grayish blur where it was. To have thrown himself—nay, to have simply let himself drop onto the grass beside the track and troubled no more about anything, would have been at that moment the greatest pleasure of a lifetime. But along the track voices were roaring and shrieking, and, although the words were sounds only, the meaning of them he knew. They wanted him to win, and the desire found a new echo in his heart. He wanted to win, and—why, yes, he *would* win!

And now the white line was in plain sight, although he didn't see it, and the roar of voices was rising and growing. For a moment it seemed to him that he was motionless, and that the dark ranks on either side were moving slowly past him. And at the moment a glimpse of whitish-gray at his right dispelled the illusion, and with a sob for breath, he forced himself on. Once in that remaining twenty yards he staggered, and the watchers held their breaths for fear, but he recovered himself and plunged, reeling, on—and on—and on. Was there no end to it? he wondered, in agony. The haunting blur beside him was gone now, and—

"Hold up! Easy, man, easy!" cried a voice that he seemed to know, and then dozens of arms were clutching him, and he let himself go. And as his eyes closed a whitish form passed before them and dropped from sight. Tammen, plucky to the last, was being lifted from the track, where, defeated and exhausted, he had fallen. And Allan, with closed eyes and tortured lungs, felt himself being carried to the tent, while in his ears was a roar of sound that told of victory and a race well run. [262]

CHAPTER XXVI

"VALE"

Allan and Pete sat on the steps of McLean Hall. The yard was a fairyland of glowing lanterns and moving colors. Near at hand, in a bough-screened stand, the band was playing. Above their heads the old elms of Erskine rustled their leaves and whispered among themselves, comparing, perhaps, this class-day with the many that had gone before. On the gravel paths matrons and maids, in light gowns, accompanied by robed seniors or dress-suited undergraduates, passed and repassed. The scene was as fair a one as ever Allan had witnessed, while even Pete was forced to grudging admiration. [263]

"You'll come out in August, then," Pete was saying.

"Yes," answered Allan, "and don't you be afraid I won't turn up, for this is the biggest excursion I ever took. So far I've never been farther away from home than this, and Colorado seems like the other side of the world."

Pete smiled in the half-light.

"Hope you'll like us, Allan. We may seem rather a rough and unpolished lot at first, but we're not so bad when you cotton to our way of life." [264]

"Of course I'll like you," said Allan, vehemently. "If it wasn't for you and your father, Pete, where'd we be now?"

"Where you are, I guess," laughed Pete. "Let me tell you something, Allan. When you get out to Blackwater, don't you go to speaking pieces at the old man, and thanking him; that's a line of talk he can't stand."

"But I've got to thank him," objected Allan.

"No you haven't; your mother's done that already in her letter. Besides, there isn't anything to make a fuss about. I gave the tip to dad, and he bought up enough stock in the Gold Beetle to get control. Then he called a meeting, voted to go ahead with the mine, and—did it. And he found a whole bunch of ore, just as I knew he would. He don't need any thanks. Why, ginger, the old mine will make him richer than it will you folks!"

"Well, then, I'll thank you again," said Allan.

"If you do, I'll punch you! Look, there's Rindgely with his folks. Nice-looking woman, that mother of his. Say, maybe I ain't glad I didn't have to show that confession of him!"

"So'm I," said Allan, heartily. "It would have been a shame to prevent him from graduating. After all, I don't suppose he realized what he was doing." [265]

"Well, I don't know about that," answered Pete. "Anyhow, I'm glad we caught on to him in time."

And it was all Two Spot's doing, too; did you ever think of that? If she hadn't rolled that ball of paper to my feet I'd never have seen that chap's name and asked about him. It was that that put me onto the game. I remembered Tommy's telling about Rindgely and the St. Thomas Club. By the way, it's time those fellows showed up."

"Tommy and Hal? They're always late. Have you heard Tommy's voice? He cheered so hard at the ball game this afternoon that he can't talk above a whisper. Hal's trying to induce him to sing with the glee club."

"There's Hooker and Long. What sort of a captain do you suppose Long will make?"

"First rate, I should think. The fellows like him and he's a hard-working, earnest sort of a fellow."

"Well, just as long as they didn't light on Monroe," said Pete. "That man will be the death of me, he puts on so many airs. Next fall, when I get back, I'm going to start right in and learn how to throw the hammer, and keep at it until I can beat him at that, too."

"You'll be busy at football," suggested Allan.

"Football? Oh—well, maybe; football isn't a bad game, after all. But— Here they are. O Tommy! Tommy Sweet!"

Tommy and Hal, attracted by Pete's bellow, turned and joined them.

"Thought we'd never get here," said Tommy, hoarsely. "Hal got mixed up with an ice-cream freezer and ate six saucerfuls before I could drag him away."

"That's so," Hal confessed. "That's the trouble with breaking training; things taste so good and it's so jolly nice to be able to eat all you want to. I expect to be fine and sick to-night."

"You have every right to," said Allan. "When a little old freshman gets taken onto the varsity and makes a home run in the ninth inning, just when it's needed, and lets in three men—"

"Oh, shut up! And come on up to the room and eat. We can hear the music finely from the windows. I've got some nice cold ginger ale up there, and Mr. and Mrs. Guild ought to be along about now. Come on."

"Well, I never took much of a shine to ginger ale," said Pete, drawing his big form erect; "the fizzy stuff always goes up my nose. But I'll have some, for it sure is hot to-night."

"We'll drink Tommy's health," said Hal, as they moved across the turf under the swaying lanterns, "and we'll get him to sing us 'A Health to King Charles' in his nice new voice."

"Toast yourselves," growled Tommy, hoarsely.

"We will!" cried Allan. "We'll toast ourselves, and we'll drink to next year, when we'll all be jolly sophomores—except you, Tommy dear, who'll be a disgustingly serious and dignified junior."

Laughing, they crossed the yard, under the glow of the lanterns, and passed out of sight into the shadows of Elm Street. Against the front of College Hall appeared in sputtering purple flames the word

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