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Title: Center Rush Rowland

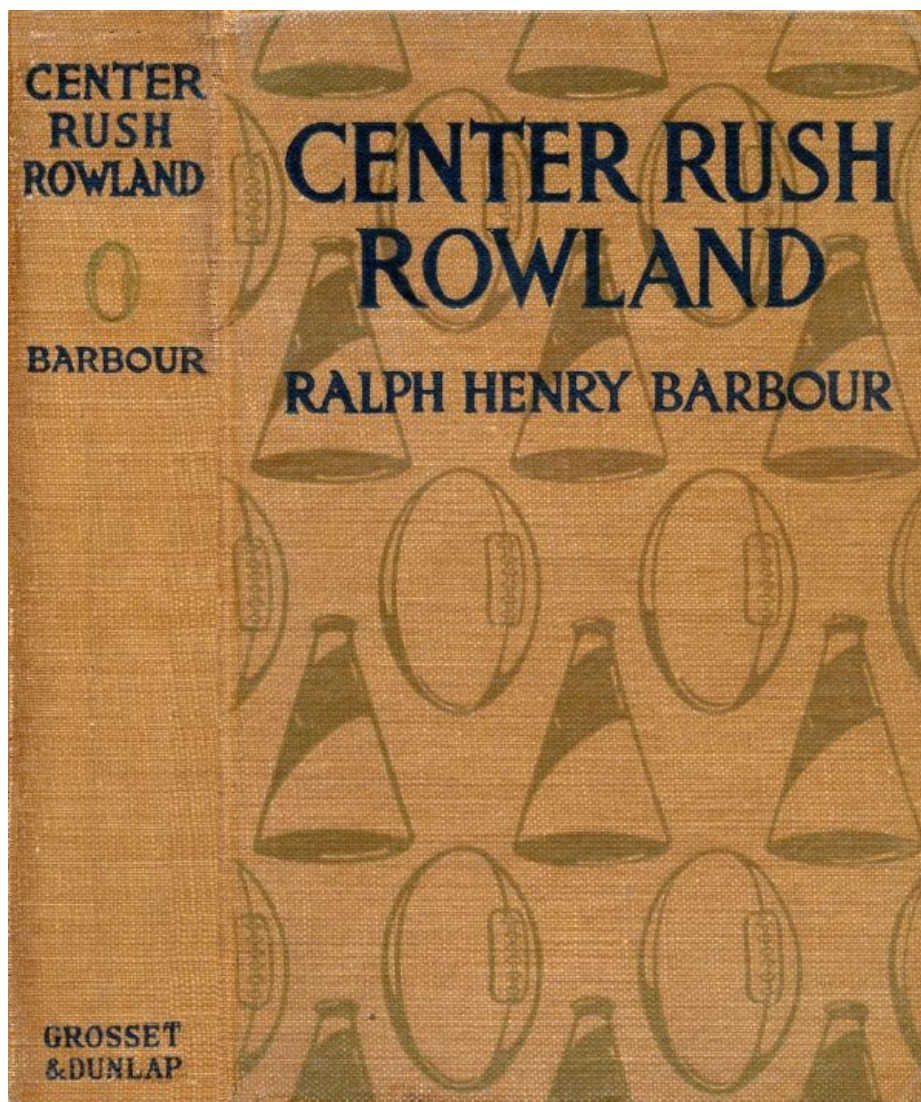
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BY THE SAME AUTHOR
LEFT END EDWARDS
LEFT TACKLE THAYER
LEFT GUARD GILBERT



[Ira felt the blood pouring into his cheeks as he jumped to his feet](#)

Center Rush Rowland

BY

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

AUTHOR OF

LEFT END EDWARDS,
LEFT GUARD GILBERT, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

E. C. CASWELL



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CENTER RUSH ROWLAND

[1]

CHAPTER I

ROWLAND ARRIVES

"Say, where's this school located?"

The speaker removed a straw hat, rather the worse for wear, and mopped a damp forehead, while a youngster with a freckled face, who was engaged in lowering an awning in front of a

grocery store, paused and viewed the inquirer with a mixture of curiosity and amusement. Eventually he jerked a thumb northward. "Two blocks straight ahead," he answered.

"All right. Thanks." The other settled his hat on his head again and went on. He was a big, deep-chested, broad-shouldered youth, rugged-looking, bronzed of face and hands. He carried himself a trifle awkwardly, as though conscious of being a bit too large for his seventeen years. Under the straw hat the hair was warmly brown and a pair of calm dark-grey eyes looked out with level gaze. He was good-looking without being handsome, for, while his nose was exceptionally straight and well made, the mouth, turned up at the corners in a quiet smile, was too wide for beauty, just as the chin was too square. [2]

The street hereabouts mingled houses and shops, but beyond the next intersecting thoroughfare, which a sign declared to be Main Street, the shops ceased. On the boy's left was an elm-shaded cemetery filled with slate headstones, mossy and ancient, and beyond it was a wooden church with a square, stunted steeple. Burying ground and churchyard continued for the next block, while across the tree-lined street, pretentious dwellings peered over white picket fences or rather straggly lilac hedges with an air of strict New England propriety.

The boy in the straw hat walked slowly, partly because the day was excessively warm for the last of September, and partly because he was curious to see this place that was to be his home for the next nine months. So far it was attractive enough and not greatly different from Cheney Falls, which was the little Maine town from which he had departed yesterday evening. Of course, one should scarcely expect to find much difference between towns barely four hundred miles apart, but he had never been so far away from home before and had looked on Massachusetts as a place quite foreign. He was, perhaps, a trifle disappointed to discover that Warne was only, after all, a bigger and more ancient appearing Cheney Falls. [3]

At the next crossing he stopped in the shade of a maple tree and viewed with interest the scene before him. Across the street—the corner post declared it to be Washington Avenue—lay the school grounds. The campus, a level expanse of smooth turf intersected by neat gravel walks between rows of linden trees, stretched at his left for a distance of two blocks. Beyond the campus the school buildings were lined up as though on parade, with, to aid the simile, a building at either end set in advance of the line—like officers. There were five buildings in the row—no, six, for there was a smaller one peering around a corner like a "rookie" slightly out of position—and all were of red brick with grey slate roofs save the big and more pretentious one in the centre. This was, as the boy knew from familiarity with the school catalogue, the Recitation Building, Parkinson Hall. It was built of light-hued sandstone, in shape a rotunda flanked by wings. It was two stories in height, with an imposing dome in the centre. Two curving steps led to the big doors and the entrance was guarded by copper columns holding big ground-glass globes. There were, the observer decided, more windows than he had ever seen in one building. On the whole, Parkinson Hall was really beautiful, and one didn't have to be a student of architecture to realise it. The boy on the corner felt a thrill of pride as he looked, for this was to be his school after today. He guessed, too, as he fanned his flushed face with his hat, that he was going to like it. It was a heap more attractive than the pictures in the catalogue had shown it. But of course, he reflected, the pictures had just been black and white, while now the scene was full of colour: the blue of the sky above, the warm red of the bricks, the cooler cream-white of the sandstone, the many greens of grass and trees and shrubbery and ivy, the hot, golden-yellow splotches of sunlight and the purplish shadows. [4]

Facing the campus, on the south side of Washington Street, were perhaps a dozen residences, beginning beyond the church property, each surrounded by lawns and beds of flowers and shaded by big elms or maples. Nearby a locust shrilled loudly, making the heat even more appreciable, and beyond the churchyard a gate opened and closed with a click and a man passed through and approached the corner. He was a tall, spare gentleman and wore, in spite of the weather, a long, black frock coat and a broad-brimmed, black felt hat. As he drew near the boy observed a lean, clean-shaven face, kindly, nearsighted eyes behind gold-rimmed glasses and a rather thin mouth set in a friendly smile. The gentleman appeared to be quite sixty years of age, but held himself very erect and walked with a firm energy that was a defiance to the heat. He bowed and smiled and would have passed around the corner had not the boy spoken. [5]

"Excuse me, sir, but will you tell me where I should go to register?"

"Very gladly indeed," was the reply in a thin but pleasant voice. "The small building in the corner of the campus is your destination, young sir." The gentleman laid a friendly hand on the boy's arm and with gentle pressure turned him about. "That is the Administration Building and you will see the office of the secretary on your right as you enter. I am not certain, however, that you will find him in just now." The speaker drew a very large gold watch from his pocket and snapped open the case. "Hah! You will just get him, I think. It is not as late as I presumed it to be." [6]

"Thank you, sir."

"You are entirely welcome. I should be very glad to accompany you and present you to Mr. Hoyt if it were not that I have an engagement in another part of the town. May I inquire your name?"

"Ira Rowland, sir."

"Rowland? A fine old English name. I am Professor Addicks, of the Greek and Latin Department. We shall doubtless meet again, and, I trust, to our mutual advantage."

"To mine, I'm sure, sir," replied the boy, with a smile, "but where your advantage will come in I'm afraid I don't see!"

"Why, as to that," responded the Professor, his grey eyes twinkling behind his glasses, "I shall have the pleasure of your society for several hours each week, and, from what I see of you, I judge that an advantage. Good morning, Mr. Rowland."

The old gentleman smiled sunnily, bowed again and went on along Maple Street, and as he proceeded his smile continued and seemed to hold a trace of not unkindly amusement.

Ira Rowland once more donned his hat and made his way toward the small, three-story brick building set close to the street. Over the door was a small sign which bore the words, "Parkinson School—Administration Building." Two worn granite steps led to the entrance and as Ira mounted them the screen door was thrust open and a rather smartly dressed youth collided with him. [7]

"I beg your—"

"All right," said Ira, drawing aside to let the other boy pass on down the steps. But the other seemed to have got over his hurry and was observing Ira with an interest that held both surprise and amusement. However, he spoke before the silence became embarrassing.

"Are you—are you Parkinson?" he asked.

"No." Ira shook his head. "My name's Rowland."

"Oh, I see. But I meant were you a student here."

"Going to be. I'm looking for the place to register."

"First door to your right." The other stepped aside and held the door open. "You've got a good day for it," he added pleasantly.

Ira nodded once more, not thinking of any suitable rejoinder to this somewhat puzzling remark, and went on. The boy at the door looked after him until he had passed into the secretary's office, still holding the screen open. Then he let it shut, whistled softly and expressively and hurried off, a broad smile wreathing his good-looking face. [8]

The office of the secretary was a square, well-lighted and business-like apartment holding, beside the necessary desks, chairs and filing cabinets, only one settee. A railing divided the room approximately in half, and the secretary's desk was set close to it. Two boys finished their business as Ira entered and turned to go out. But at the doorway they turned with one accord and looked back at the newcomer, and as they disappeared their mouths began to curve upwards at the corners.

Mr. Hoyt, the secretary, was a small, light-complexioned man with a near-sighted scowl and a nervous manner. But experience had taught him expedition, and before the second hand on the face of the big clock between the windows had moved sixty times Ira had answered all questions and was moving away in possession of a copy of the school catalogue and a slip of paper on which was printed a list of private houses, approved by the school, offering accommodations.

Parkinson School had a roster of four hundred and eighty-odd that year and the four dormitories housed but three hundred and ninety. Since Ira had applied for admittance as late as the preceding June he had not drawn a room on the campus, and now, leaving the little brick building, he drew the list from between the pages of the catalogue and consulted it. More than two dozen addresses were given, each followed by the mystifying letters "R" or "R & B." Fortunately the catalogue contained a map of the town in the vicinity of the school, and by referring to that he found that most if not all of the addresses were within a few blocks of the campus. Instead of returning by Maple Street, he entered a gate and went along the gravel walk leading in front of the row of school buildings. Being very intent on the matter of locating the first entry on the list: "J. D. Anstruther, 29 Linden Street, R & B," he failed to notice that the steps of the Gymnasium Building toward which he was proceeding held a half-dozen youths who were watching his approach with poorly concealed amusement. In fact, he would have turned off on the path leading across the campus to the middle gate on Washington Avenue had not one of the group hailed him. [9]

"Good morning, stranger! Are you looking for something?" [10]

Ira stopped and removed his puzzled gaze from the map. After a moment of hesitation he crossed the few yards to the gymnasium steps. "Yes," he replied, addressing the group in general, "I'm looking for a room. Where's Linden Street, please?"

"Linden Street? Straight ahead. Follow this path until you come to a gate. Open the gate—it isn't necessary to climb over it—and there you are."

"Thanks." Ira viewed the speaker a trifle doubtfully, however. In spite of the serious countenance, the reference to the gate had sounded suspicious. "And will you tell me what 'R' means here; and 'R & B'?"

"'R'? Oh, that means—er—"

"R," interrupted a tall, dark-haired chap, stepping forward and taking the list from Ira's hands, "means 'Rats,' and 'R & B' means 'Rats and Bugs.' You see, the faculty is very careful about our comfort. Some fellows object to rats and some object to bugs. So they state here what you're to expect."

"Rats and bugs!" exclaimed Ira. "You're fooling, aren't you?"

"Certainly not," replied the other almost indignantly. "Do you mind rats? Or bugs?"

"Why—" Ira's gaze swept over the group in puzzlement—"I'm not particularly stuck on either of 'em. Aren't there any places where they don't have 'em?"

"No, not in Warne. Warne is noted for its rats. Bugs are scarcer, though. You'll notice that only about half the houses offer bugs with their rats."

"'Offer' 'em," muttered Ira dazedly. Surely these fellows were poking fun at him. And yet they all looked so serious, so kind and eager to help him. He shook his head as he reached for his list. "Do you know anything about that first place, J. D. Anstruther's?"

"Not bad," was the answer, "but I've never lived there myself. I've heard, though, that the rats at Baker's are bigger. Billy, you roomed at Anstruther's, didn't you? How about it?"

"Good rooms, but rats very inferior," answered a chunky, broad-shouldered boy in tennis flannels. "And scarcely any bugs at all."

"There it is, you see," said the dark-haired youth sadly. "Now if you want some corking big rats you'd better try Baker's. That's on Apple Street. Or, if you prefer bugs, too, you might go to Smith's. I've heard Smith's spoken of very highly."

Ira received this advice in silence. He was thinking. At last: "Well, I'm much obliged to you," he said gratefully. "But I guess I'd rather go where the rats aren't so big. Of course you fellows are used to rats, being together so much, but I've never had much use for them."

"Just a minute," exclaimed a well-built boy of medium height who held a pair of running shoes on his knees. "I didn't quite get that. About our being used to rats, Freckles. Come again, please."

"I beg your pardon?" said Ira innocently.

"The gentleman wishes to know," explained the dark-haired boy sweetly, "the meaning of your cryptic utterance. Why, Mr. Johnson, should our being together make us used to rats?"

"My name is Rowland."

"Really? Well, then, Mr. Rowland, kindly elucidate."

"I guess I don't know what you want," said Ira, viewing them blankly.

"Of course he doesn't," said another member of the group. "He didn't mean anything. What class are you in, Hayseed?"

"Who, me? I'm going into the third, I guess."

"Then you've got another guess," jeered the boy with the running shoes. "How were the crops when you left home, Freckles?"

"Speaking to me? My name's Rowland. First name's Ira."

"Well, don't take on about it. You can't help it. How's crops?"

"It's mostly lumbering where I come from. Cheney Falls, Maine, is my home."

"Dew tell!" drawled the dark-haired youth. "What were you, a bump?"

"A bump?" asked Ira.

"Yes, don't the logs up your way have bumps on them?"

"Oh, yes!" Ira smiled faintly. "The bumps grow on 'em, though. You—you don't put 'em on."

"Oh, you don't? Thought you did. Well, what did you do in the lumbering line, then?"

"Well, last Winter I worked on the knots. It's hard on your fingers, though." He observed a hand reflectively. "I'm not going to do that again," he added.

"Worked on the knots," repeated the boy with the running shoes. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why, you see," explained Ira patiently, "you take a pine or a spruce log and it's got knots in it and it isn't so good for sawing."

"Well, what was your stunt?"

"Me? Oh, I untied the knots," replied Ira gravely.

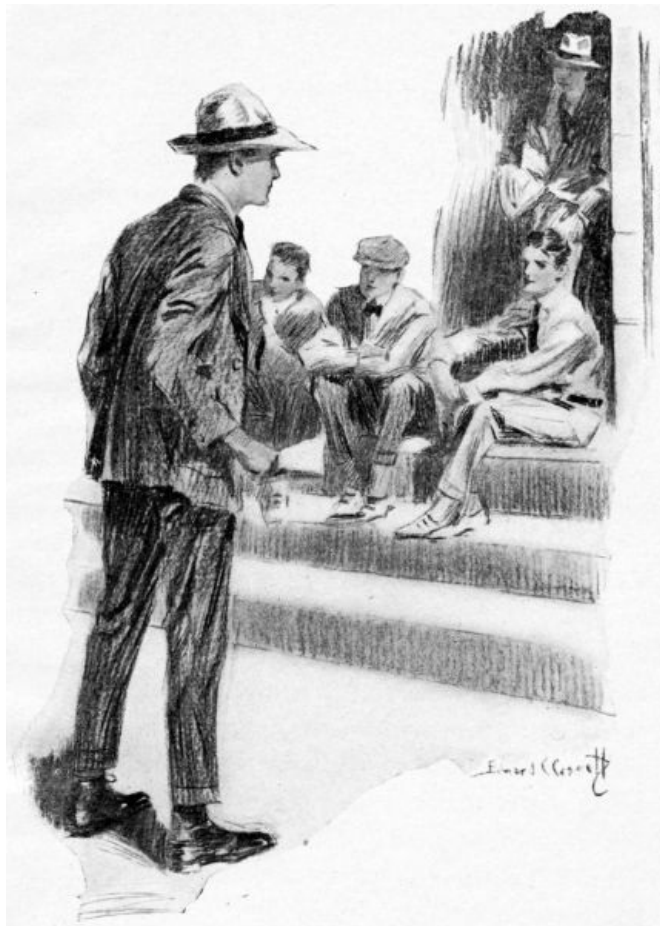
There was a moment of silence. Then most of the audience chuckled. But the boy with the running shoes flushed.

"You think you're pretty smart, don't you?" he asked irritably. "You're one of those 'country wits' we read about, eh? Dressed for the part, too! For the love of mud, where'd you get the costume?"

"Oh, cut it out, Gene," said the dark-haired fellow. "Run along, Rowland, and find your room."

"Better get a job as a scarecrow," sneered the boy addressed as Gene. "Say, those clothes must have cost you as much as six dollars, eh? If you'd had another dollar you might have got them big enough."

"They're all right for me," responded Ira calmly. "And [the coat slips off right easy.](#)"



"The coat slips off right easy"

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Gene, jumping to his feet.

"Oh, forget it, Gene!" begged one of the fellows. "Let him alone."

But Gene pushed his way past the boy's detaining arm and thrust an angry countenance in front of Ira. "What do you mean, eh?" he repeated. [15]

"What do you take it that I mean?" asked Ira, viewing the other undismayed with half-closed grey eyes.

For answer, Gene Goodloe brought his right hand up quickly from his side. The boy with dark hair stepped forward to interfere, but he was too late. Ira sprang nimbly to the right and ducked, avoiding Gene's blow, and at the same time shot his own right fist around. It was only a half-arm jab, but there was enough behind it when it landed on Gene's chin to send him staggering back into the arms of one of the others and to temporarily deprive him of all desire for battle. He stared at his assailant in a dazed and almost reproachful way as they lowered him to the turf, and then he closed his eyes wearily.

"That's a bad place to hit a fellow!" grumbled the dark-haired fellow, regarding Ira uncertainly. "You'd better get out of here before someone comes."

"Maybe he will want to go on," suggested Ira mildly.

"Huh! Maybe he will, but not for awhile! Billy Wells, duck inside and get some water, will you? You, Rowland, or whatever your name is, you get along. If the faculty sees this they'll make trouble for you. I know he made the first swipe, but that wouldn't help you much." [16]

"All right," said Ira. "What's his name?"

"Goodloe. Why?"

"I'll let him know where he can find me. Just tell him, will you?"

CHAPTER II

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE

"Not what you'd call a very good beginning," thought Ira, ruefully, as, followed by the somewhat puzzled looks of the group in front of the gymnasium, he made his way across the campus. "It was his fault, though. There wasn't any call for me to stand around idle and get jabbed in the nose. Just the same, it would have been better if I'd gone on about my business instead of trying to get a rise out of them. Guess what you need to do, son, is keep your hands in your pockets and your mouth shut!" [17]

For the following hour he was very busy. Mrs. Anstruther regretfully informed him that all her rooms were engaged, and the same announcement awaited him at Baker's. It was at the latter house that the mysterious symbols were satisfactorily explained. "R," he was told, meant that the house offered rooms only, while "R & B" stood for room and board. Ira mentally called himself an idiot for not having guessed as much. At a little past one he gave up the search long enough to perch himself at a counter in a lunch-room on School Street. A sign over the doorway held the inscription "The Eggery," and, judging from the fact that fully half the patrons in sight were boys of ages from fourteen to twenty, it was the favourite resort for hungry Parkinsonians. There were many small tables at the back, but all were occupied, and Ira finally found an empty stool in front of the long counter. The school colours, brown and white, were lavishly displayed, and there were many framed photographs of school teams and numerous unframed posters on the walls. These, however, interested Ira less than the neat sign which proclaimed the restaurant's offerings, for he had eaten his breakfast on alighting from the Portland train in Boston, and that had been quite early, and he was now extremely hungry in spite of the warmth of the day.

[18]

While the electric fans overhead spun dizzily and the clatter of crockery and the babel of a hundred voices made a cheerful pandemonium, he thoughtfully contemplated the signs. One thing he knew he was going to have, and that was iced tea, but beyond that he was open-minded. Corn-beef hash sounded too warm. The same was true of roast beef and lamb stew with dumplings. Eggs didn't sound appealing, although they were offered in more styles than he had ever heard of. He was still undecided when a voice said: "Try the cold ham and potato salad. It isn't bad."

[19]

Ira looked around to find the boy with whom he had collided at the door of the Administration Building sitting beside him.

"All right," said Ira. "I guess I will. It looks good."

"It's too hot to eat today," went on his neighbour, "but you sort of get the habit. This iced coffee is the best thing I've found. Do you like it?"

"I never tried it. I thought I'd have some iced tea."

"No one can blame you. I saw you over at Ad, didn't I?"

"Ad'?"

"Administration. What's your class?"

"Third."

"Mine, too. Here's Alphonse. Tell him what you're risking."

"Alphonse" proved to be a sandy-haired waiter who grinned at the speaker as he ran a towel over the counter. "Sure, take a chance," he said cheerfully. "What's it going to be, sir?"

"Some of the cold ham and potato salad and a glass of iced tea," replied Ira. "Got any lemon?"

[20]

"I don't know. I'll see," was the sober response. "We did have one last week." Then, applying his mouth to a tube: "One-cold-ham-potato-salad!" he called. "Ice-tea-with-lemon!"

"Do you eat here regularly?" asked Ira of his neighbour.

"Dear, no! I eat in hall, but they don't start until supper tonight. Lots of the fellows don't come until afternoon, you see. Them as does has to eat where they can, and this is as good a joint as any. How do you like the place, as far as you've got?"

"All right. I haven't seen much of it, though. I've been tramping around looking for a room most of the time."

"Any luck?"

Ira shook his head. "There was one at—" he refreshed his memory by glancing at the slip—"at Parent's, but it was pretty small and awfully hot."

"Keep away from that dive," advised the other. "You'd freeze to death in Winter there. Besides, we come to school to get away from them."

"To get away from—"

[21]

"Parents," chuckled the other. "Asterisk. See footnote. Joke intended. Have you tried Maggy's?"

"No. I don't think it's on my list."

"Let's see. Yes, here it is: 'D. A. Magoon, 200 Main Street.'"

"Oh! I thought you said—"

"Maggy's? Yes, they call her that for short. She's got some good rooms, but you have to more than half furnish them. About all Maggy gives you is a carpet and a bed. If you like I'll go around there with you when you're through."

"Why, thanks, that's very kind, but I don't want to trouble you."

"You don't. I haven't a thing to do until the boat comes in."

"Boat?" ejaculated Ira.

"Figure of speech, meaning that the afternoon stretches before me devoid of—of—Say, what do I call you?"

"Rowland's my name."

"Mine's Johnston. There's a t in it to make it harder to say. Here's your grub. Guess I'll have a piece of pie, Jimmy."

"What kind?" asked the waiter as he slid Ira's repast before him.

"Why the airs? You know you've only got apple."

Jimmy grinned. "Got you this time, Johnston! There's cream and cocoanut, too."

"Make it cream, Jimmy, and tell the Pie Specialist downstairs to let his hand slip a little."

"Do they give board at this place you spoke of?" asked Ira when he had sampled his dinner.

"No, they don't. You can eat in hall, though, or you can get your meals around. There are four or five places like this and a lot of boarding houses. The way I did my first year was live at the restaurants and quick-lunch joints for the first term and then, when I was sick to death of them, go to a regular boarding house. Smith's is pretty fair. A lot of fellows eat there."

"They give you pretty good meals at the school dining hall, don't they?"

"Y-yes, but they charge for them." Johnston shot a swift, appraising glance over Ira. "If you can stand six dollars a week, all right. Some fellows can't." Jimmy presented his slice of pie at that moment and Johnston observed it gloomily. "That fellow's got perfect control, hasn't he, Jimmy?"

"Oh, they cut the pies with a machine," replied the waiter airily. "Want some more coffee?"

"Walk around! Think I'm a millionaire? Make it a glass of water instead." Then, addressing Ira again: "What are you going in for?" he asked.

"Going in where?"

"My fault! I mean what are you going to do with your spare time? Football? Tennis? Golf? What's your line?"

"Oh! I don't know. I've never played anything except a little baseball. I guess I won't try any of those things yet."

"You look as though you'd make a football player," said Johnston. "If you don't intend to try it you'd better keep out of sight. If Driscoll sees you he will get you sure."

"Is he the captain?" asked Ira.

"Coach. Ever played it?"

"Football? No." Ira shook his head. "I never thought I'd care to. I saw a game once at Lewiston."

"Where's that?"

"Maine. I live in Cheney Falls."

"No one can blame you. How's the grub?"

"Fine, thanks. Who is Goodloe?"

"Gene Goodloe? Track Team captain. Know him?"

"Not very well. I—I sort of met him awhile back."

"You'll like him, I guess. Most of us do. He's a corking runner. Good fellow to know, Rowland. Better cultivate him. Meet all the fellows you can, old man. The more the merrier. You can't know too many at school, especially if you're a new boy. I had a perfectly miserable time of it here my first year. I was horribly shy, you see. Yes, I got over it!" He laughed as he caught Ira's quick glance of surprise. "Had to. I used to get red clear around to the back of my face if anyone spoke to me. The second year I realised that it wouldn't do and I made up my mind to get cured. How do you think I did it? I got up one morning and went out and spoke to every fellow I met, whether I'd ever seen him before or not. It nearly killed me at first and I got all sorts of snubs and funny looks, but it cured me. Now I—I'd slap Jud himself on the back if it would do me any good."

"Jud?" asked Ira.

"Otherwise Doctor Judson Lane, principal of this here school. All through? Going to have desert? No? Come along then. There's your check. Might as well pay it if you've got the money. They have a nasty way of going out on the street after you and bringing you back if you get absent-minded."

They slid off their stools and made their way to the cashier's desk, Johnston hailing many acquaintances on the way and once pausing in response to the invitation of one. Ira had an uncomfortable suspicion that he was the subject of the short, whispered dialogue that ensued. "It's probably these clothes," he thought. "They *are* different from other fellows'. I'll have to get some new ones, I guess."

Outside, Johnston chatted merrily as he conducted his companion around the corner of Main Street and finally brought up before a three-story house set close to the sidewalk. It showed evidences of past grandeur, but the buff paint was peeling away from the narrow porch and stores had been built close to it on either side. The first floor was occupied by a tailor's establishment on the right and by the agency of a spring-water company on the left. Johnston gaily pointed out the convenience of having your trousers pressed on the premises as they waited in the hallway. Presently, in response to the tinkling of a faraway bell, footsteps creaked on the stairs and a tall and angular woman came into sight.

"Good afternoon and everything," greeted Johnston. "You don't remember me, Mrs. Magoon, but we were very dear friends once. I used to come here to call on Dan Phillips a couple of years ago."

"I remember you very well," was the reply in a dry voice. "You're the young man that broke the newel post one time when you was sliding down the——"

"My fault! I see you do remember me, after all. I feared you didn't. Now——"

"It wasn't ever paid for, either, although you said time and again——"

"You're perfectly right, ma'am. It just somehow slipped my memory. I'm glad you mentioned it. Everybody ought to pay his just debts, I should think. I've brought you a lodger, Mrs. Magoon. This is Mr. Rowland, Mr. Thomas Chesterfield Rowland, of Cheerup Falls, Maine, a very personal friend of mine. He was about to take a room over on Linden Street, but I prevailed on him to come to you. I told him that you had just the room for him. You have, haven't you?" Johnston beamed ingratiatingly.

"Well, I dunno," said Mrs. Magoon, folding her hands in a blue checked apron and looking doubtfully from one boy to the other. "Everything's pretty well taken now. There was a young man in here not ten minutes ago to look at the only room I've got left. I dunno will he be back, though. He said he would, but they always say that. If you'd care to look at it, sir——"

[27]

"He would," declared Johnston. "He would indeed. After you, Rowland. One flight and turn to your left."

"Two flights and turn to your right, if you please," corrected the landlady. "All the second floor rooms are taken." She toiled upstairs at their heels and directed the way to a large, scantily furnished room at the back of the house. "It's a nice, cheerful room," she said pantingly. "Two good windows and a fine view. There's a washstand goes in here yet."

The fine view consisted of several backyards, the roof of a shed and a high board fence in the immediate foreground, but beyond the fence lay the trim, green lawn of a residence on Washington Avenue, while, by stretching his neck a little, Ira could see a few gravestones in the cemetery around the corner of the next-door building. Just now the foliage hid the school, but Mrs. Magoon predicted that in the Winter he would have a fine view of it. There were two big windows on the back of the room, a sizable closet, a fireplace with a dingy, white-marble mantel and a rusted grate and a few oddments of furniture all much the worse for wear. Ira tested the bed and shuddered inwardly. It was like a board. There was a green plush rocking-chair, a battered walnut table with an ink-stained top, a bureau of similar material and condition, two straight-backed chairs and an ornate black walnut bookcase with one glass door missing. A faded, brown ingrain carpet covered the centre of the floor, the wide expanse of boards surrounding it having at some far distant time been painted slate-grey.

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Johnston expatiated warmly, even with enthusiasm, on the room's attractions. "How's that for a fireplace, old man?" he asked. "It's real, mind you. No stage fireplace, with a red lantern in it, but the genuine thing. Lots of room here, too. Must be twenty feet each way, eh? Of course, you'll need a few more things. A window seat would help. And another easy-chair, maybe. Then, with the family portraits on the walls and a fire crackling cheerily—what ho! 'Blow, wintry winds! What care we?' Or words to that general effect. You say there's a washstand, too, Mrs. Magoon? Fine! Imagine a washstand over there in the corner, Rowland. Sort of—sort of finishes it off, eh? Useful little affairs, washstands. No home should be— How about the bathroom, Mrs. Magoon? Adjacent or thereabouts, I presume?"

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"One flight below, sir. It's a very nice bathroom, with an enamelled tub, sir. If you'd care to look at it——"

"By all means, ma'am, as we descend. You said the rent was——"

"Four a week, sir."

"Oh, no, indeed! For the school year, Mrs. Magoon."

"I said four a week, sir."

"And I said—Oh, I see! Four dollars a week! You will have your joke, eh? The lady has a sense of humour, Rowland. You can't deny it."

"It doesn't seem to me that it's worth that much," said Ira dubiously.

"Bless us, no!" said Johnston. "That was only her joke. Now, Mrs. Magoon, seriously, what do you ask by the month for this palatial apartment?"

"It's four dollars a week, young man, whether you pay weekly or monthly; although I have to insist on the bills not running no longer than a month."

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"No one can blame you. But you'll find my friend here very prompt, ma'am, in such matters. I have never known him to let a bill run longer than a month. You might almost call him finicky in money matters. Considering that, now, suppose we say three dollars a week, with——" he shot a questioning glance at Ira—"two weeks paid in advance?"

"I couldn't do it, sir," replied the landlady firmly, arms akimbo. "Three-seventy-five is my lowest figure, and nothing you could say——"

"I don't think I want the room, thanks," interrupted Ira. "I'd have to buy a good many things for it to make it comfortable. Much obliged, ma'am."

"Don't be hasty, old man. Think well. Rooms are scarce, as Mrs. Magoon will tell you, and at three and a half—"

"Three-seventy-five," corrected the landlady.

"You couldn't do better. I'll take you to a place where you can get anything you need for half of nothing and pay when you like. With another chair and a couch and a few pictures—why, you wouldn't know the place! He wouldn't know the place, would he, ma'am?"

"'Twould look better, no doubt. There's the washstand yet, sir, and it helps to fill up, so to speak."

"We-ell," began Ira, doubtfully.

"That's decided, then!" exclaimed Johnston gaily. "Have the room all ready in an hour, Mrs. Magoon. If you've got seven dollars where you can put your hand on it, Rowland, you might bind the bargain, eh?"

"If the lady wants to let me have it at three dollars and a half—"

"She does! Hasn't she said so? You said three and a half, didn't you, Mrs. Magoon?"

"I did not!"

"No? My fault! But you're going to, eh? Rather than lose a tenant?" Mrs. Magoon wavered. "Here it is the last day, ma'am. School begins tomorrow. I guess everyone's settled by this time. You wouldn't want the room to stay empty, now would you? Of course not! A bird in the hand, and all that, eh? Well, that's settled, what?"

Mrs. Magoon nodded without enthusiasm. "It's less than I ever took for it before," she said sadly. Then, brightening: "Maybe the young man would want his breakfasts in?" she asked hopefully. "Many of them does."

Johnston was shaking his head violently, but neither the landlady nor Ira saw it.

"Why, thanks, I—How much are breakfasts?" said Ira.

"Twenty-five cents, sir. Coffee and toast and two eggs or a bit of meat."

"Perhaps it would be more convenient than going out," mused Ira. "All right, ma'am, I'll take breakfasts."

"Fine! Come along, Rowland. Remember that Doctor Lane was very particular about having you let him know what you decided on. He will be anxious. Back in an hour, Mrs. Magoon."

"If you'd care to see the bathroom—" began Mrs. Magoon as they descended.

"Not now," said Johnston, shoving Ira along toward the next flight. "I'm sure it's absolutely perfect, ma'am." When they were once more on the street he turned sorrowfully to Ira. "You shouldn't have let yourself in for the breakfasts, old man," he said. "They're fierce. I tried to give you the sign, but you wouldn't look. Still, you can cut them out after a week or so. They all do."

"I dare say the room will look better when there's more in it," said Ira.

"Rather! You'll be crazy about it, old man."

"Or in it," said Ira drily. Johnston preferred not to notice the remark.

"And three-fifty isn't bad these days, either."

"I guess I'd rather pay her what she asked, Johnston. She says she never let it for so little, and —"

"Yes, but her memory's failing her. Johnny Grew had that room two years ago, and I happen to remember that he paid exactly three and a half for it. Besides, she'll make it up on the breakfasts. Now let's run around to Jacobs' and see what we can pick up. Better leave the buying to me, old man, for in spite of being a Maine Yankee, you're a mighty poor bargainer!"

"I'm taking up a lot of your time," Ira demurred.

"I like it. Besides, I've got nothing on until the five-twelve gets in." He was silent for a full minute, something so unusual that Ira viewed him in surprise. Then, with an odd lack of assurance, he said: "About that newel post now, Rowland. I—you see—"

"All right," said Ira. "I understand."

"Eh?" asked the other startledly. "Hold on, though! No, you don't, old man."

"All right. I don't care, anyway."

"But you mustn't think I took you around there on that account. Fact is, I'd quite forgotten about it." Johnston chuckled. "Guess if I'd remembered it I'd have stayed away. But when she sprang it on me, why—why, then I thought I might as well square myself." He looked uncertainly at Ira. "See what I mean?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well—well—Oh, hang it, Rowland! Now, look here. You don't need to take that room if you'd rather not. I guess I did sort of force your hand. We'll go back now and get the money and tell her it's off. Come on! I'd feel a lot better. Then we'll look somewhere else. Hang it, it was only a dollar, and I'm switched if I want to look like a piker for just a little old dollar! Come on back!"

But Ira shook his head. "When you know me better, Johnston," he said with a smile, "you'll find

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that it's awfully hard to make me do anything I don't want to. If I hadn't thought the room would answer I'd never have taken it, no matter what you might have said. I don't think it's palatial, but I do think it will do well enough, and if Mrs. Magoon lets you off about the newel post on my account I'm glad of it. I owe you that much, anyhow, for all your trouble. Just the same, I'm glad you didn't—didn't take me around there on purpose."

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"I didn't, honestly, old man. I'd forgotten all about it. But you're quite sure it's all right, eh? Sure you really want to take the room?"

"Certain sure."

"Well, you're a brick. I guess I'll drop around and pay Maggy her money, just the same. Any fellow ought to, I should think. I'll do it this afternoon while I've got it. Well, that's settled. And here's the emporium of our friend Jacobs."

"Open the door and tinkle the bell:
You want to buy and I want to sell!"

CHAPTER III

GETTING SETTLED

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Half an hour later Ira was the proud possessor— Now that's what comes of using phrases. It's a poor habit. As a matter of honest fact, no one could have been really proud of the articles purchased in Mr. Joseph Jacobs' Second-hand Emporium. First, there were the remains of a window seat. Ira had viewed it distastefully until Johnston—it had developed that his first name was Martin and that he was usually called Mart—assured him that with a hammer and four nails and a bit o' luck he could fix it as good as new. Then came a leather couch. The frame, springs and hair were quite serviceable, but the leather—well, Mart said it was a "crime," and we'll let it go at that. "But," he pointed out, "all you've got to do is throw something over it, old man, and no one will know. Haven't you some trifle like a Paisley shawl or a Persian rug about your person? Never mind, we'll find something. And five dollars is dirt cheap for it. Why, it's worth that much for fuel, and you want to remember that you've got a perfectly good grate to feed when Winter comes. We'll take it, Jacobs."

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The easy-chair was not as easy as it looked. About the only thing easy, except its appearance, was the price. It was one of those brown-oak contraptions with a back that let down to form various angles with the seat. Unfortunately each succeeding angle was more uncomfortable than the last. "Old Man Mission," observed Mart, "may have been a dandy carpenter, but he was a mighty poor comforter!" They picked up some hanging book shelves for sixty cents and two rugs only half worn out for a dollar apiece and, finally, an oak table-desk with a column of drawers at one side, one of which would open without the use of a jimmy. Leaving instructions to have the furniture delivered not later than five o'clock, they returned to "Maggy's."

Mart heroically paid Mrs. Magoon a dollar, much to that lady's bewilderment, and then they went up to the room. A decrepit walnut washstand was already in place, but Ira couldn't see that its presence added much to the apartment. They tried it in three places and at last returned it to its original position, restoring the casters which it had sprinkled around the room in its travels. Then Mart threw himself into the plush chair and stretched his legs out and viewed the room thoughtfully.

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"Better make a list of things to buy, old man," he advised. "All ready? Paper of tacks and a hammer—better get a real hammer and not one of those playthings; a hammer's always useful—, two brass curtain rods— By Crickey, we forgot curtains! Never mind, though, we'll get those at Alston's. We can get the rods there, too. And you'd ought to have a cloth for that table. Every fellow ought to have a cloth on his table, I should think. And—let's see—" He looked around the room inquiringly.

"I guess that's enough for today," said Ira. "The next thing is to get my trunk over from the station. I suppose there's an expressman around somewhere."

"Come on down with me at five and give your check to Harris. He does most of the school work and won't mind lugging it up two flights. Some of them expect ten cents more for that. Let's get cooled off a bit and then buy the curtains, eh? Curtains will make a lot of difference, I tell you! I'll borrow a yard-stick or something from Maggy and measure the windows."

When that had been done they sailed forth again. There was one excellent feature about Ira's abode, and that was its convenience to the shops. Alston's dry goods store was only a half block away, across School Street, and soon they were viewing muslin and scrim curtains which an obliging saleslady hung over big brass rods. Mart found that he might as well have spared himself the trouble of taking measurements, for the curtains were all the same length. They finally selected two pairs of what the young lady called "cross-barred muslin" and purchased rods and fixtures. Subsequently they visited a hardware store and bought the hammer and the paper of tacks and a small quantity of nails. When they got back to Number 200 Main Street they found an expressman struggling upstairs with the leather couch, followed grimly by the landlady who exhorted him at every step to "mind the plaster now!"

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When the new purchases were in place the room did look a lot better, and when Mart had, after much difficulty, put up the rods and pinned the curtains over them the two boys viewed the result with deep satisfaction. "It's the little touches that do it," proclaimed Mart. "Now when we get a cloth——"

But they had forgotten the cloth for the table, as well as the "drape" for the couch, and had also neglected to provide anything in the way of a cushion for the window seat. "But Rome was not built in a day," said Mart cheerfully. "I forget how long it took, but it was more likely a week. Now, in a week you won't know this place, Rowland. Got any pictures to hang on this lovely yaller paper?"

"No, but I can get some," answered Ira, regarding the paper distastefully. "Wish I could get enough to hide the walls entirely!"

"Put up half a dozen and hang a pennant over the door and stick a few posters around and you won't notice the walls at all. And if I were you I'd buy a can of brown paint and go over this border again. That colour on there now makes me sort of faint. What time might it be?"

"Twenty to five."

"Geewhillikins! Where's the afternoon got to? Here, I'll knock this window seat together and then beat it. Where's that hammer? Don't tell me—Oh, all right! Toss it over. Nails? Thank you, sir. Now then, you rickety, tumble-down, lob-sided bunch of boards, how do you go, anyhow? I say, Rowland, there's a leg missing! I didn't notice that, did you? Never mind. It won't matter if you don't sit on that corner, and some time you can nail a piece of board on there. Say, this thing is a regular Chinese puzzle! Know what I think? Well, I think he's gone and sold us parts of two different seats!"

But he wronged Mr. Jacobs, for ultimately the sections fitted together, and when they did the two boys looked at the result in silence and then burst into howls of laughter. The window seat had been built for a corner! No matter how they struggled with it it remained L-shaped! If half of it ran across a window the other half stuck out into the room at right angles like a sore thumb! Ira subsided on the bed and Mart sprawled himself on the floor and they laughed until they were weak.

"Well," said Mart finally, "either you've got to change your room or this seat, and I guess the seat's the easier. Now look here. If we turn this end around, so, and tack a couple of short boards on here——"

"Oh, don't!" begged Ira. "Don't spoil it! It—it's beautiful!"

"Oh, well, if you won't be serious," laughed Mart, dropping his hammer. "Let's leave it until tomorrow. I've got to meet Brad at five-twelve. Put your hat on and come along. Bring your trunk check, by the way. Hang it, quit laughing! Get a move on, you—you idjit!"

"Y-yes, but—but look at it, Johnston!" gasped Ira. "Isn't it—*funny*?"

"It's killing," agreed the other, grinning. "I say, why not leave it that way just for a joke?"

"I—I'm going to! I—I-like it!"

"Well, don't cry, old man! Pull yourself together! Here's your hat. Now come on. We've only got eight minutes."

The railway station was four blocks south and by the time Ira had arranged for the delivery of his trunk and rescued his suitcase from the parcel room those eight minutes were gone and the express was rumbling in. Mart left Ira at the waiting-room door, with instructions not to move until he returned, and was presently pushing his way through the throng of arriving students in search of his roommate. Ira, however, concluded that he would only be in the way. The chums would of course have lots to say to each other and he didn't believe that either of them would really be any happier for his presence. So, before the new arrivals had more than overflowed the platform, he was on his way uptown again, the heavy suitcase, into which at the last moment he had forced a lot of things that had been intended for the trunk, tugging at his arm. Station carriages, filled to capacity with merry youths, began to pass him before he reached Main Street and turned toward his lodgings, but he saw nothing of Mart.

He had a bath in the wonderful enamelled tub on the floor below and felt cooler and generally better for it. After he had returned to his room and made himself as comfortable on the bed as the hard, lumpy mattress would allow he heard the sound of arrivals. Voices and footsteps and the banging of doors came to him. Downstairs a spirited battle began for the possession of the bathroom. Across the hall from his closed door a youth with a strident voice sang loudly and opened and shut drawers most ungently. In spite of the noise, Ira, who had slept but poorly on the train the night before, drowsed off presently and knew no more until there came a banging at his portal. Half awake, he admitted the expressman with his trunk, paid for it in a stupor and then subsided on it to gather his faculties. His blinking gaze rested on the window seat and he began to chuckle at the perfectly idiotic way in which it thrust one decrepit end into the room. By that time he was sufficiently awake to find his key and open the trunk, after which he donned fresh underwear and his second-best suit of blue serge, spruced himself up and thought of supper. However, there was no great hurry about that, he concluded. Since he had decided to get his meals at the restaurants for awhile he was not required to observe regular hours. It was only a little past six, and there was his trunk to unpack and his things to find places for.

The closet, although short on hooks, was roomy. He made a mental memoranda to buy some hooks tomorrow and in the meanwhile "doubled up" with what there were. The bureau drawers

stuck abominably, but he at last conquered them and arranged his possessions within. Books, of which he had brought a good many, were equally divided between bookcase and shelves. (He wondered why he had bought the shelves until he remembered that he hadn't; that Mart Johnston had bought them!) By half-past six the nearly empty trunk was pushed out of sight in the closet, his few toilet things decorated the marble top of the bureau, sponge and toothbrush reposed on the washstand and, in short, he was settled.

The room really began to look a bit homelike, he concluded, viewing it critically from what would have been the hearth-rug had he possessed such a thing. He would have to get something to hide the tattered and torn leather on the couch, and a cloth for the hideous walnut table; and, of course, there was that ridiculous window seat! He had to smile every time his eyes fell on it, but for some reason it seemed quite the most companionable article of furniture in sight. He decided that he would find an upholsterer and have a good cushion made for it, and then he would buy some pillows. Probably, he reflected, he would fall over the protruding end of the crazy thing a dozen times in the next week. If only—

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And right there a brilliant idea struck him! "Why, of course!" he exclaimed. He tugged and pushed the oak desk alongside the end of the seat that ran out from the wall, restored the walnut table to its erstwhile position in the middle of the rug, placed the plush easy-chair beside it and there you were! That put his desk between the windows, with the light coming over his left shoulder very nicely, and made a back for the homeless end of the window seat. And it looked great! He was quite proud of that arrangement and went out in search of supper very cheerfully.

He found a lunch room around the corner on Linden Street and, probably more because he was really hungry than because the food was especially good, made an excellent repast, with an evening paper propped up against the vinegar cruet. It was nearly eight when he wandered back to his lodging through the warm, quiet evening. Most of the stores on Main Street were closed, but a few windows still threw floods of yellow radiance across the brick sidewalks. Doorsteps held family groups, quite as if Summer had not gone, and children played along the pavement. An old-fashioned lantern with a gas jet sizzling inside it hung above the door of Number 200 and threw a wavering, uncertain light on the four creaking steps. As Ira passed into the hall the door of the tailor's shop was open and he saw a little hunchbacked man of uncertain age and nationality working steadily and swiftly over a pressing board. On each floor a dim gaslight flickered, but for most of the distance each flight was in darkness and he made his way upwards warily, a guiding hand on the banister rail.

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Halfway up the second flight he heard Mrs. Magoon's voice. It sounded querulous, even a trifle resentful. The next moment another voice broke in angrily, and Ira reached the third floor and viewed an astounding scene. In the doorway of his room, seated determinedly on a small trunk, with a bag on his knees, was a boy of perhaps sixteen. In front of him stood Mrs. Magoon, her hands wrapped in her apron. At the sound of his footsteps both actors in the little drama staged on his doorsill turned their heads and regarded him, the boy with an expression of dogged defiance and Mrs. Magoon with very evident relief.

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CHAPTER IV

FOUND—A ROOMMATE

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"Now I guess you'll behave yourself," exclaimed the landlady triumphantly. "Here's the young man that's taken the room."

"He hasn't any right to it," declared the boy on the trunk, gripping the bag on his knees more firmly. "You gave me the refusal of it! I told you I'd be back! It's my room, and I mean to keep it!"

Ira looked inquiringly at Mrs. Magoon, but she silently referred him to the claimant in the doorway.

"What's wrong?" Ira asked of the latter.

"Why, I came here this afternoon and looked at this room and I asked this—this lady if she'd give me the refusal of it until evening and she said she would. I agreed to come back in any case and say whether I'd take it or not. And now, when I send my trunk here, she tells me she's rented it to you!"

"I gave him no refusal," exclaimed Mrs. Magoon irately. "He said he'd be back, yes, but he didn't know whether he wanted it or didn't want it. And I can't be losing the chance to rent my rooms while he's making up his mind."

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"Well, if you didn't have a refusal," said Ira mildly, "I don't see what claim you have. I found the room for rent and took it this afternoon, and paid two weeks in advance. I'm sorry, but I guess you'll have to look somewhere else."

"I have looked!" cried the other. "There aren't any rooms left. This is all there is. I've been all over the crazy place."

"Oh, I guess you can find one tomorrow," said Ira soothingly. "Why don't you get a lodging for tonight somewhere and then start fresh in the morning? I've got a list of houses here—"

"I've been all through the list. Everyone's full up. Anyway, this is my room, and I mean to have

it. She *did* give me the refusal of it, and she knows plagues well she did!"

"The idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Magoon in shrill tones. "Calling me a liar to my face, are you? If you don't get right out of here this very minute I'll call a policeman, I will so!"

"Wait a minute," counselled Ira. "He didn't mean it that way. Now I tell you what we'll do." He glanced across the corridor to where a door had just opened to emit a large youth who was now regarding them with his hands in his pockets and a broad smile on his face. "You let this chap and me talk it over quietly, Mrs. Magoon. We'll settle it between us. There's no reason to get excited about it, is there? Just you go on down, ma'am, and it'll be all right."

"There's only one way it can be settled," replied the landlady irately, "and that's for him to take himself and his trunk out of my house!"

"But there's no hurry, Mrs. Magoon. Besides, we're disturbing the others with all this racket. Shove that trunk inside, please, and we'll close the door first of all."

Mrs. Magoon grunted, hesitated and finally went grumbling off down the stairs, and Ira, taking affairs into his own hands, pushed the small trunk out of the way of the door, its owner grudgingly vacating his strategic position atop, and closed the portal, to the disappointment of the neighbour across the way.

"Now," said Ira pleasantly, "sit down and be comfortable. Try the armchair. What's your name? Mine's Rowland."

"Mine's Nead," replied the other, not very amiably. "Names haven't anything to do with it, though."

"Just wanted to know what to call you. Now, honest-to-goodness, Nead, did Mrs. Magoon say she'd hold this room until you had decided?"

"She did! If it's the last word I ever utter——"

"All right! And, if you don't mind telling me, how much were you to pay for it?"

"Thirteen dollars and a half a month."

Ira did some mental calculating and smiled. "That's about three dollars a week, isn't it?" he asked. "You're certain that was the price?"

"Of course I'm certain. Three dollars was all I wanted to pay, and I told her so. She wanted four at first. Four dollars for this—this old poverty-stricken attic!"

"Oh, I wouldn't be hard on it," said Ira pleasantly. "I like it pretty well."

"But it isn't yours! Now you look here, Boland——"

"Rowland. And don't let's have any melodrama, please. We can come to a settlement if we don't shout, I guess. What you agreed to and what Mrs. Magoon agreed to is no business of mine. That's between you two. She says the room is mine. You say it's yours. I've got it!"

"You haven't any right——"

"Well, there's the right of possession," chuckled Ira. "Mind you, I'm inclined to believe your account of what took place, because—well, I'm beginning to doubt Mrs. Thingamabob's—er—memory. But I think you left it pretty late to decide, Nead. If I'd been Mrs. Magoon I'd have considered myself released from that refusal by six o'clock; by seven, anyway. You couldn't have got here until half-past, I guess."

"I had to get something to eat and then find a man to fetch my trunk——"

"Yes, but you could have dropped around before and told her you'd take it. You see, Nead, if you hadn't wanted it, and she had stood by her bargain until nearly eight, she might not have rented it at all. There's that to consider."

"Oh, you make me tired! You talk like a—like a lawyer! She said I could have the room and I've come for it and that's all there is to it!"

"Well, what about me?" inquired Ira mildly.

"You can find another one. You can do what you told me to do. If you think it's so easy, just take a try at it!"

"If I thought you really had a right to this room I'd do it," answered Ira, "but I don't. At least, not a convincing one. Tell you, though, what I will do, Nead. I'll get Mrs. Magoon to fix up some sort of a cot or something and you can stay here until tomorrow. It's pretty late to go room hunting now and that's a fact. Or maybe she has another room that she will let you have overnight. We'll go down and ask her."

"But I tell you it's my room, Boland! I don't care whether you think I have any right to it or not. I know that I have. I know that I was given a refusal of it until evening——"

"What do you call evening?" interrupted Ira.

"Oh, if you're going to split hairs——"

"I'm not, but if I said evening I'd have some time like sunset in mind. The fact is, Nead, you didn't make sure that there was nothing better until just before you came around here. And if you had found anything better you would never have shown up here again. And you know that's so, too. I'm perfectly willing to share the room with you tonight, but I'm not going to get out of it. I'm sorry the misunderstanding happened, but it isn't any fault of mine. Now, what do you say to

making the best of things and bunking out here until morning?"

Nead observed Ira gloweringly, and for a long moment made no answer, and in that moment Ira had a good look at him. He was at least a full year younger than Ira, a thin, rather peevish looking youth with a poor complexion. His features were not bad, and he had rather nice eyes, but there was something unpleasant about his expression. He wore good clothes, but wore them carelessly, and Ira noted that his tan shoes looked as if they had not seen polish for many days. On the whole, Ira felt no enthusiasm about having Nead for a roommate even overnight.

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"Well, I'll stay here, I suppose," said Nead ungraciously. "But I'm not giving up my claim on the room. Tomorrow I mean to go to the Principal and tell him about it. I guess he will see that I get what belongs to me."

"All right! That's settled for the present, anyway. Now I'll go down and interview Mrs. Magoon. If she hasn't an empty room she can probably find us a cot or a mattress. You can come along if you like," he ended questioningly.

But Nead shook his head. "She will only get mad again if I go," he said. "Besides," he added, tossing his hat to the table and stretching himself more comfortably in the plush chair, "it's not up to me. I'm at home already."

"Glad you feel that way," replied Ira gravely. "I'll be back in a shake."

He found Mrs. Magoon more complaisant than he had expected. There was, she recalled, a cot in the attic, but he would have to bring it down himself. And having an extra person in the room would be fifty cents a day. Ira, however, gently but firmly negated that, pointing out that she had got herself into the fix and that it was nothing to do with him, and finally the landlady agreed to waive remuneration. Ten minutes later, not very enthusiastically aided by Nead, he had the cot set up. There was a rather sketchy mattress on it and Mrs. Magoon grudgingly furnished two sheets and a blanket. By that time Nead had got over his grouch to some extent and was displaying a few human qualities.

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"I thought I was going to have a room in one of the dormitories," he explained, divesting himself of his outer clothing and depositing it helter-skelter around the room. "I wouldn't have come if I'd known I had to room off the campus. Why, you can get a fine study in Leonard Hall for a hundred and twenty-five for the year, and that's only about three dollars a week. They ought to have enough dormitories here and not make fellows live around in dives like this. Gee, some of the prices they talked today would make your hair stand up! One place I went to asked six dollars for a room not half the size of this. It was furnished, though, which you can't say of this place. She's put some more things in here since I saw it, though."

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"Bought 'em myself," said Ira.

"Bought them! But they look second-hand!"

"N-no, I don't guess so. Third-hand, maybe, or fourth, but hardly second, Nead. Still, they're all right, aren't they? How do you like the window seat?"

"Window seat? Is that what you call it?" Nead laughed. "Say, what's the matter with it? Why does it shoot out like that?"

"It used to be straight," answered Ira soberly, "but it's rather old and has rheumatism. That explains the crook in it."

"Huh! It looks mighty silly. If you expect me to buy this trash off you you've got another guess coming."

"I don't, thanks. It's not for sale. Especially the window seat. I'm sort of fond of that." He chuckled. "It's so—so foolish looking!"

Nead viewed him in puzzlement. "Well, if you like foolish things, all right," he said finally, dipping into his bag for his pyjamas. "I don't, though. Say, where do you come from?"

"Maine. How about you?"

"Buffalo."

"Dakota?" inquired Ira blandly.

"Dakota! Of course not, you idiot! There isn't any Buffalo in Dakota. New York, of course."

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"There used to be. Maybe they're all killed now, though. Buffalo's quite a big place, I suppose."

"It's big enough, anyway. And it's the best city in the country."

"Sort of like this place, then, I guess."

"*What!*"

"Well, you said it was a city in the country, didn't you?" asked the other innocently. "And that's what this is. I'd call it that, at least."

"You go and see Buffalo some time," advised Nead disgustedly. "I guess you live in the country, all right." He grinned at the nightgown that Ira was getting into. "Don't they have pyjamas up in Maine?"

"Not many. There's a few raccoons left, though."

"Oh, gee, you're a smart guy, aren't you? Well, I'm going to turn in. Hope you'll find that cot comfortable, but it doesn't look it!"

"Oh, you're taking the bed, are you?"

"Sure," chuckled Nead. "It's mine, isn't it?"

"It's yours for tonight," was the answer. "If I have the nightmare, just yell. I usually wake up. Good night."

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Ira slept soundly in spite of the discomforts of that wobbly, creaking cot, and when he awoke the early sunlight was slanting in at the windows behind the new curtains. Across the room Nead was still asleep. Reference to his watch showed the time to be but a few minutes past six. Ira turned over stiffly and tried to slumber again, but after ten minutes of unsuccessful effort he gave it up, rolled over on his back, put his arms over his head, fixed his gaze on an interesting crack that travelled from one side of the ceiling to the other with as many ramifications as a trunk-line railway and faced the problem presented by the unconscious form on the bed.

There was a freshness and coolness in the morning air that made for well-being, and Ira felt extremely kindly toward the world, even including Nead and the pugnacious Gene Goodloe. He wondered whether the latter would see fit to follow up the little affair of yesterday, and remembered that he hadn't sent him word of his whereabouts. He would write Goodloe a note as soon as he got dressed. As far as he was personally concerned, he was ready to call quits. It was much too wonderful a day for fighting! Then he speculated about Mart Johnston and wondered whether Mart would look him up. He didn't care a whole lot. Mart was a cheerful sort of idiot, but he wasn't exactly restful! And Mart had so many friends, besides that chap "Brad," that it wasn't likely he would recall the existence of the boy who was thinking of him except, perhaps, to laugh at him. And, finally, there was Nead.

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Nead was a problem, and Ira scowled at the crack in the ceiling and tried to solve it. Perhaps, after all, Nead did have a good claim on that room. Ira tried to see the affair from Nead's point of view. It was rather puzzling. He didn't quite know what he ought to do. Of course, he might follow Nead's idea and leave the decision to the faculty, but it seemed a trivial affair to bring to its attention. Or he might—

He brought his gaze suddenly from the ceiling and stared blankly at the window for a moment. Then he turned and regarded the sleeping countenance of the boy across the room. In slumber Nead didn't look so unpleasant, he thought. And living alone would be, perhaps, rather lonesome. Certainly, could he have his choice of roommates the choice wouldn't fall of Nead, but he couldn't. And maybe Nead would improve on acquaintance. Ira had already discovered that first impressions are frequently erroneous. There was, too, the advantage of having someone share the expense, although Ira wasn't greatly concerned about that. He weighed the question for some time, lying in bed there, and finally made up his mind. He would make the proposition to Nead. If Nead wasn't agreeable, why, Nead could find another room. Ira considered that he would then have done all that was required of him. He plunged out of bed and, gathering up towel and sponge and soap, made his descent on the bathroom.

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CHAPTER V

SCHOOL BEGINS

[61]

It was all settled by the time they had finished breakfast. Perhaps the cheerfulness of the morning, or it may have been Mrs. Magoon's coffee, worked its effect on Nead, for that youth was far more amiable, and, while he did hesitate and seem a bit dubious for a moment, he ended by accepting the proposition. Ira found himself hoping that he wouldn't and took the other's hesitation as a good augury, but put aside all regrets the moment Nead made his decision.

"That's all right, then," he declared. "Now we'll have to make a dicker with Mrs. Magoon, I guess, for she'll want more for the room if there's two in it."

"I don't see why," objected Nead. "Anyway, we oughtn't to pay more than four a week."

"I think four would be enough," Ira agreed. "And what about breakfasts? She charges a quarter apiece, you know."

"And they're pretty punk, if this is a sample," said Nead. "The coffee's all right, but my chop had seen better days. Still, it's easier than hunting a restaurant. I thought maybe I'd eat in school. They say you get mighty good feed at Alumni Hall."

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"Well, we'll tell her we'll take two breakfasts for awhile. That will cheer her up, maybe. Shall I make the dicker?"

"Yes, she doesn't like me. And I don't like her. So that's even. What class are you going into, Rowland?"

"Third, unless I trip up. What's yours?"

"Second. Wish we were in the same. It makes it easier if you're with a fellow who's taking the same stuff. There's another thing, too; that bed's fierce. See if she hasn't got a better mattress."

"I was going to buy one," said Ira. "I guess hers are all about the same, don't you?"

"Well, make a stab," said Nead. "She may have one that hasn't been slept on twenty years."

What are the other fellows here like?"

"Don't know. I've seen only one, the fat fellow across the hall. There must be quite a lot of them, because she says she has all the rooms rented, and there are four rooms on each floor."

"Nine rooms altogether," Nead corrected. "There's one on the ground floor at the back that she rents. It's behind the spring-water place. I suppose there are two in some rooms. Must be twelve or fourteen fellows in this dive, eh?" [63]

"Maybe," agreed Ira, pushing away from the walnut table on which the breakfast tray had been placed. "Do you know any fellows in school?"

"No, do you?"

"Only one, a fellow named Johnston. I ran across him yesterday and he told me about this place. They call it 'Maggy's.' I'd been to about six before that and couldn't find anything I liked. Well, I'll go down and— Hold on, though! I must write a note first."

He got a tablet and pulled a chair to the desk, and after wrinkling his forehead a moment, wrote: "Mr. Eugene Goodloe, Parkinson School, Warne, Mass. Dear Sir: I have a room at Mrs. Magoon's, 200 Main Street, third floor back on the left. A note addressed to me here will find me and I shall be glad to meet any appointment you care to make. Respectfully, Ira Rowland." Then he enclosed it, stamped the envelope and dropped it in his pocket.

"That's what I must do, I suppose," remarked Nead. "I told my folks I'd write last night, but I forgot it. Guess I'll scribble a note while you're talking to the old girl downstairs. Let me use your pen, will you? Mine's in the trunk." [64]

"Sorry, Nead," replied Ira, "but that's something I won't do. I'll lend you about anything but my fountain pen."

"Oh, all right," said the other haughtily. "I've got a better one of my own. Just didn't want to look for it."

The interview with Mrs. Magoon was a long-drawn-out ceremony. In the first place, she was not eager to have Nead as a tenant. When she had finally agreed to it, she held out for four dollars and a half a week until Ira informed her that they would each want breakfasts. Four dollars a week was at last agreed on. In the matter of mattresses, however, she was adamant. More, she was even insulted. "That mattress has been on that bed for six years," she said indignantly, "and nobody's ever said anything against it before. Anyhow, I ain't got any better one."

"All right, ma'am. And how about another bed in there?"

"You can keep that cot, I guess. I ain't got another bed."

"But the cot's as hard as a board!" exclaimed Ira. "It hasn't any mattress; just a—a sort of pad!"

"Well, I don't know what I can do," replied the lady. "I can't afford to go and buy a lot of new things. It's all I can do to get along as it is, with rents as low as they are. That room ought to fetch me six dollars a week, it should so. And I'm only getting four for it. And the price of everything a body has to buy is going up all the time. I don't know what we're coming to!" [65]

"Suppose I buy a cheap single bed and mattress," suggested Ira. "Will you take it off my hands when I move out?"

"I might. It wouldn't be worth full price, though, young man, after being used a year or more."

"No, that's so. Suppose you pay me half what it costs me? Would that do?"

"Why, yes, I guess 'twould. But don't go and buy an expensive one. I wouldn't want to put much money into it."

"Well, I dare say I can get a bed for six dollars and a mattress for ten, can't I?"

"Land sakes! I should hope you could! You can get an iron bed for four dollars and a half that's plenty good enough and a mattress for six. You go to Levinstein's on Adams Street. That's the cheapest place. Ask for Mr. Levinstein and tell him I sent you. I buy a lot from him. Leastways, I used to. I ain't bought much lately, what with times so hard and rents what they are and everything a body has to have getting to cost more every day. I mind the time when—" [66]

But Ira had flown, and Mrs. Magoon's reminiscences were muttered to herself as she made her way down to the mysterious realms of the basement.

Nead flatly refused to spend any money for bed or mattress, but agreed to go halves on the furniture that Ira had already purchased and on anything it might be necessary to buy later. "You see," he explained, "it will be your bed, and I won't get anything out of it. Maybe I might swap mattresses with you if I like yours better, though," he concluded with a laugh.

"You just try it!" said Ira grimly.

He purchased the bed and mattress before first recitation hour, paying, however, more than Mrs. Magoon had advised. After testing the six-dollar mattresses Ira concluded that there was such a thing as mistaken economy! After leaving Levinstein's he remembered the letter in his pocket and dropped it into a pillar box and then hustled for school.

He was somewhat awed by the magnificence of Parkinson Hall as he made his way up the steps and entered the rotunda. It still lacked ten minutes of first hour, which was nine o'clock, and the entrance and the big, glass-domed hall were filled with groups of waiting fellows. He found a place out of the way and looked about him interestedly. The rotunda was a chamber of [67]

spaciousness and soft, white light. The stone walls held, here and there, Latin inscriptions—Ira tried his hand at one of them and floundered ingloriously—and there were several statues placed at intervals. A wide doorway admitted at each side to the wings, and into one of the corridors he presently ventured. There were three doors to his right and as many to his left, each opened and showing a cheerfully bright and totally empty classroom, and at the end of the corridor was a stairway leading to the floor above. About that time a gong clanged and, with a hurried and surreptitious glance at the schedule card in his pocket, Ira began a search for Room L. A small youth in short trousers came to his assistance and he found it at the end of the opposite wing. He had rather hoped to run across Mart Johnston, but it was not until he had taken a seat in the recitation room that he saw that youth several rows nearer the front. Mart didn't see him, however, for he was busily engaged in whispering to a good-looking, dark-complexioned fellow beside him whom Ira surmised to be "Brad." The whispering, which was general, suddenly died away and the occupants of the seats, fully a half-hundred in number, Ira judged, arose to their feet and began to clap loudly. Ira followed suit without knowing the reason for the demonstration until he caught sight of a tall, thin figure in black making its way up the side aisle toward the platform. Then he clapped louder, for the figure was that of Professor Addicks, and Ira already had a soft spot in his heart for the pleasant-voiced man who had spoken so kindly to him the day before.

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Professor Addicks bowed and smiled, standing very straight on the platform with one gnarled hand on the top of the desk. "It gives me much pleasure to see you young gentlemen all back here again and all looking so well," said he. "I trust you have spent a pleasant Summer and that you have returned eager for work—and play. Someone—was it not our own Mark Twain?—said that play is what we like to do, work what we have to do. But he didn't say that we can't make play of our work, young gentlemen. I can think of nothing that would please me more than to overhear you say a few years from now: 'I had a good time at Parkinson. There was football, you know, and baseball and tennis; and then there was Old Addicks' Greek Class!'"

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A roar of laughter greeted that, laughter in which the Professor joined gently.

"Oh, I know what you call me," he went on smilingly. "But I like to think that the term 'Old' is applied with some degree of—may I say affection?"

Clapping then, and cries of "Yes, sir!"

"Age, young gentlemen, has its advantages as well as its disadvantages, and amongst them is the accumulation of experiences, which are things from which we gain knowledge. I am old enough to have had many experiences, and I trust that I have gained some slight degree of knowledge. I make no boast as to that, however. In fact, I find that I am considerably less certain of my wisdom now than I was when I was many years younger. Looking back, I see that the zenith of my erudition was reached shortly after I had attained the age of the oldest of you, that is, at about the age of twenty-one years. Today I am far more humble as to my attainments. But, young gentlemen, there is one thing that I have learned and learned well, and that is this: each of us can make his work what he pleases, a task or a pleasure. Some of you won't believe that now, but you'll all learn eventually that it is so. And if you make your work a task you are putting difficulties in your own way, whereas if you make it a pleasure you are automatically increasing your power for work. If it is a pleasure you want to do it, and what we want to do we do with a will. Therefore, young gentlemen, bring sufficient of the element of play to your studies to make them agreeable. You go through hard and difficult exertions for the exercise of your bodies and call it fun. Why, then, pull a long face when you approach the matter of exercising your minds? If one is play, why not the other? A word to the wise is sufficient. I have given you many words. Let us consider the pleasures before us."

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There was no class work that day, and after they had had the morrow's lessons indicated and had listed the books required for the courses in Greek and Latin the fellows departed to gather again in another room before another instructor. By noon Ira had faced all his instructors, his head was swimming with a mass of information as to hours, courses of reading and so on, and he had made quite a formidable list of books and stationery to be purchased. He returned to Mrs. Magoon's and spent a half-hour filling in a schedule card, and then, as Nead hadn't returned, set off by himself to The Eggerly for dinner. Now that the big school dining room was open in Alumni Hall, The Eggerly was rather deserted as to students. The bulk of the patrons today were clerks and shopkeepers.

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After dinner he made various purchases of scratch-pads, blue-books, pencils and similar articles, bought several books at a second-hand store and paid a visit to the First National Bank of Warne. There he made a deposit of all the money he had with him save enough change to meet immediate demands, signed his name where the teller pointed and emerged the proud possessor of his first check book. By that time it was nearly three, and, having nothing especial to interest him, he crossed the campus, made his way around Parkinson Hall and past the little laboratory building and found himself facing the broad expanse of level and still verdant turf known as the Playfield.

There was some twelve acres here, in shape a rectangle, with one corner cut off by Apple Street, which began at the end of Linden Street and proceeded at a tangent to the Cumner Road, the latter forming the northern boundary of the field. Directly in front of Ira were the tennis courts, a dozen in all, of which half were clay and half turf. To the right of the courts was a quarter-mile running track enclosing the gridiron and beyond that were the baseball diamonds, three in number. A sizeable grandstand flanked the gridiron and a smaller one stood behind the home-plate of the 'varsity diamond. Already the playfield was well sprinkled with fellows. Several

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white-clad youths were practising flights over the high-hurdles, another was jogging around the farther turn of the track, the tennis courts were fairly well occupied and the football candidates were beginning to emerge from the nearby gymnasium and gather in front of the stand.

Ira stopped and watched the tennis for awhile and then gave his attention to the hurdlers. He had never seen hurdlers in action before and he looked on with interest while one after another went springing by with long strides and queer steps; stride, stride, stride, step and over; stride, stride, stride, step and over! Ira wondered what would happen if he ran up to one of those barriers and tried to stick one leg across and double the other one behind him. He chuckled at the mental picture he got! One of the hurdlers interested him particularly. He was a much shorter and chunkier lad than the others; in age probably seventeen. There was no useless flesh on him, but he was very solidly built and had more weight than the usual boy of his age. As a hurdler he was persevering rather than brilliant. He struck four hurdles out of the ten invariably, each time throwing himself out of his stride and just saving himself from a fall, but he finished through with a fine, dogged patience, rested and went at it again.

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"If," thought Ira, "I was selecting a fellow to win one of these hurdle races I wouldn't pick him, but if I was choosing a chap to—to hunt for the South Pole or take on a hard job and finish it I guess he'd be the one!"

When the hurdlers had picked up their sweaters and gone panting back to the gymnasium Ira turned toward the grandstand. By this time a half-hundred boys in football togs were assembled on the field, while twice that number were seated in the stand to watch the first practice of the year. Ira found a seat a little removed from the throng and viewed the gathering. Even as he turned his eyes toward the candidates their number was increased by the arrival of some eighteen or twenty others accompanied by a man of perhaps thirty years whose air of authority plainly stamped him as the coach. By his side was a strapping youth with broad shoulders, a slim waist and sturdy legs who was quite as plainly the captain. He had tawny hair, light eyes and a lean, sun-browned face that, without being handsome, was striking. He looked, Ira decided, like a born leader. And those shoulders and that deep chest and the powerful legs under the brown-and-white ringed stockings suggested that he was as capable physically as any other way. A rotund man in brown denim overalls pushed a wheelbarrow around the corner of the stand and from it unloaded a surprising amount of paraphernalia; a canvas bag containing a half-dozen scuffed footballs, many grey blankets, a water bucket and several shining new tin dippers, head-guards, several pairs of shoes, a bunch of leather laces, a nickel-plated horn with a rubber bulb attached and a leather case whose contents were not divulged that afternoon but which Ira later discovered to hold adhesive tape, bandages, phials and similar first-aid requisites.

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A tall, immaculate youth in street attire joined coach and captain. He carried a square of light board to which were held by a clamp a number of sheets of paper. Ira surmised correctly that he was the team manager. A short conference ensued between the trio and then things awoke to action.

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"First squad down the field," called the coach. "New candidates this way, please!"

The knot of players who had accompanied him on the field went off with a couple of the worn footballs, while the balance of the fellows gathered around. They represented all ages from fifteen to twenty, although there were but two or three who looked more than eighteen; and were of assorted sizes and of various builds. There were slim boys there and dumpy boys; undersized boys and overgrown boys; fat boys and lean boys; and boys who weren't anything in particular. All wore football togs of some description, many new, more old. Here and there Ira caught sight of a brown sweater with the white P followed by the insignia "2nd," and here and there a white sweater bearing the letters "P.B.B.C." in brown. But for the most part the candidates, perhaps sixty-odd in number, appeared to be tyros. What the coach said to them Ira was too far distant to hear, but he spoke for several minutes amidst respectful silence. Then the group broke up and a minute later the candidates had formed three groups at different parts of the field and were passing balls to each other.

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It wasn't an exciting sight, and after a half-hour Ira pulled himself from his sun-smitten plank and made his way homeward across the campus, loitering a little in the grateful shade of the buildings. He passed three or four groups of fellows studying, or at least making a pretence of studying, under the lindens, and always he was followed by curious and faintly amused looks. He didn't know it, however, and wouldn't have been troubled if he had known it. It certainly didn't occur to him that anyone could find anything unusual in his appearance now that he was wearing his blue serge. He had bought that suit in Bangor and he had the salesman's word for it that it was absolutely the last cry in fashionable attire and that it fitted him perfectly. Perhaps, however, the salesman had been nearsighted. Let us be charitable and think so; for the fact is that that blue serge suit was too short as to trousers, leaving a painful lapse between the edge of each cuff and Ira's low shoes—a lapse rather startlingly occupied by faded brown socks—and the coat was ungracefully long and fell away at the back of his neck. Possibly the waistcoat fitted as well as the salesman had asserted, but Ira wasn't wearing the waistcoat today. There is no gainsaying that, judged by the standard of the flannel-garbed youths under the trees, Ira's appearance was somewhat unusual at Parkinson.

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As he crossed Washington Avenue from the centre gate and entered School Street he found himself hoping a trifle wistfully that he would find Nead in the room, for he was beginning to feel a bit lonesome and out of it. But he was destined to disappointment, for when he opened the door the room was quite empty. There were, however, evidences of recent occupation, evidences both olfactive and optical. First, there was a distinct odour of cigarette smoke, and, second, there was

CHAPTER VI

THE ENEMY CALLS

The note proved to be from Mart Johnston.

"Where do you keep yourself? [he read] Come over to 16 Goss about five and play with us. Eternally and indestructibly yours, M. J."

Ira smiled over the message as he crumpled it up and dropped it into a waste basket. The temptation to accept Mart's invitation was strong, but he knew that he ought to at least get acquainted with some of the books piled there beside him. It wouldn't do to leave all the studying until evening. Anyhow, five o'clock was still three-quarters of an hour away, and—

And just then the odour of stale cigarette smoke assailed his nostrils again and he frowned. Of course, if Mart wanted to smoke cigarettes it was no one's business; at least, not Ira Rowland's; but Ira didn't hold with smoking for boys and he guessed he and Mart weren't destined to continue that acquaintance after all. He wasn't afraid that Mart would corrupt him, of course, but he didn't see any advantage to be gained by becoming intimate with fellows who smoked. Doubtless Mart was one of the "smart class" at Parkinson, and Ira wasn't "smart" and didn't want to be. No, on the whole he guessed he'd let Mart Johnston slide. He was a little bit sorry, for the gay-hearted chap with his queer phrases and ready laughter was certainly likable, and an existence containing only Nead as an intimate didn't look enticing. He didn't even know Nead's first name yet, he reflected—as he settled himself for study—and, in any case, he didn't believe that he could ever grow fond of that rather unpleasant youth. He supposed, though, that he'd get acquainted with other fellows after awhile. Amongst nearly five hundred there were surely some to become friendly with! After which encouraging conclusion he opened his Greek Reader, settled his elbows on the desk and his chin in his hands and resolutely began his task.

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Ten minutes later footsteps sounded outside and a knock came at the door. Ira marked his place with a finger and called "Come in!" For a moment Ira failed to recognize the boy who entered, although he knew that he had seen him. He was a finely built chap of eighteen or so, of middle height and with rather an engaging countenance. It wasn't until the visitor had nodded smilingly, closed the door behind him and greeted Ira with a careless "Hello!" that the latter recognised him as Eugene Goodloe. Today he was wearing tennis flannels and carrying a racket in his hand. Ira arose from his chair a trifle warily.

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"How do you do?" he responded gravely.

"Better than when you saw me last," answered the caller, his smile deepening. "Mind if I sit down? I've had three sets of tennis and I've been leading a lazy life of late. I'm about all in, Rowland."

"Of course! Have a chair!" said Ira, trying not to sound surprised. "I—er—Did you get my note?"

"Yes, a little while ago. That's why I'm here. I thought I might as well drop around and talk things over. Say, where did you learn to punch like that, Rowland? You nearly broke my jaw!"

"Why, in the woods, I guess. Sorry if I hurt you much. Maybe I hit harder than I needed to, Goodloe."

"Oh, that's all right. I had it coming to me. What do you mean by the woods, though? Oh, I know! You said you lived in a lumber camp, didn't you?"

"Not exactly," replied Ira, seating himself on a corner of the desk. "I don't live in a lumber camp, but I've spent some time in them. The lumbermen are mostly pretty handy with their fists. You sort of pick up fighting when you're around with the drive."

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"Guess I'd better spend a few months in the Maine woods," said Gene Goodloe ruefully. "Well, what's your idea, Rowland? Want to try it again?"

"Any time you say, thanks."

"Suits me. We'd better not advertise, though. Faculty's a bit down on scraps. I don't see why you and I can't just take a walk, say, tomorrow morning early, eh? Do you know where the brick-yards are, over across Apple Street? They aren't used nowadays and the fellows generally pull off their scraps there."

"I don't know where you mean," said Ira, "but I can find the place all right."

"Sure! Or you might meet me at the West Gate. It's on our way. Any time you say after six-thirty."

"Six-thirty will suit me. The West Gate's the one over that way, to the left, isn't it?"

"Yes. Of course, if you'd rather bring some fellow with you, I don't mind. I'll do the same, if you like. Only I don't see any use in having a crowd, what?"

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"N-no; and I don't think I know anyone who would go with me." He did think of Nead, but

somehow Nead didn't appeal to him in the rôle of second. "We can get along without help, I guess," he added.

"Sure! You may have to carry me home, or I may have to lug you back," chuckled Goodloe, "and I hope it'll be the latter way. No use in fighting rounds, is there? Just dig in and keep at it until we've had enough, what?"

"I think so."

"Good! And now that that's settled," said Goodloe, "I'd like to say that—well, I guess I want to apologise, Rowland, for anything I said yesterday that wasn't decent. I had a sort of a grouch, I guess."

"All right," assented Ira. "Maybe I was sort of flarey, too."

"No, you weren't," Goodloe laughed. "You were about as cool as they make 'em. Do you ever lose your head and get rattled?"

Ira smiled slowly. "I guess so—sometimes. I did yesterday."

"No one would have known it! Rather jolly room you've got here. All alone? Oh, I see you're not."

"No, there's a fellow named Nead in with me."

"Nead? Don't know him, I guess. But I thought you said you didn't know any fellow who'd act as second for you."

"Well, I did think of Nead, but—he doesn't—" Ira hesitated and his visitor laughed understandingly.

"Not the sort you want in a pinch, eh? Well, we won't Nead him. Rotten pun, wasn't it? So long, Rowland. I must be getting back to hall. Much obliged for that note, you know. Glad we got together so nicely, too. I guess there won't be any hard feelings, no matter who pulls down the purse! Six-thirty at the West Gate then. I'll be there."

Gene Goodloe nodded affably and took his departure, leaving Ira looking perplexedly at the door that had closed behind him.

"I wonder," thought Ira, "what there is to fight for? He says he was in the wrong and has apologised. I'm certainly satisfied. Then what do we scrap about in the morning?" But there was no satisfactory answer to that conundrum and he went back to his books. When, just before six o'clock, Nead came in, he had conquered his Greek lesson and had dipped into Algebra.

Nead viewed him contemptuously as he skimmed his hat across the room to his bed. "Gee," he said in disgust, "I hope you're not going to be a 'grind,' Rowland. That would be the limit."

"Hope not myself," replied Ira. "By the way, Nead, what's your other name, if you have one?"

"Humphrey."

"Thanks. Mine's Ira."

"There's not much choice between them, is there?" laughed Nead. "I was named for an uncle, my Mother's brother. How did yours happen?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I guess Father or Mother liked the name. I confess I'm not fond of it, but it might be worse. What have you been doing this afternoon?"

"Oh, moseying around. It's rather a dull hole. Played some pool over on Green Street with a fellow, for one thing."

"Who was he?" asked Ira.

"Search me. I ran across him there and he wanted to play and I took him on. He was a shark, too. I only got three games out of ten. Had perfectly rotten luck."

"One of the school fellows, was he?"

"Great Scott, no! He was a real player. Guess I could handle any of the school chaps at pool without much trouble. Say, there's a reception or something tonight at the Principal's. Sort of a shindig for the new chaps. You going?"

"I think so. One of the instructors said we ought to. By the way, who's your adviser?"

"Hale, Physics man. He looks like a pill. I've got a date with him at seven-thirty. Who's yours?"

"Mr. McCreedy, the Mathematics instructor. I'm to confer tomorrow at eleven-thirty. Where do we eat tonight?"

"Let's try the Owl Grill. This guy I played pool with says it's swell."

"Where is it?"

"A block this side of the station, on Maple Street. Want to start along pretty soon? I'm starved."

"I'm ready now," responded Ira, marking his place and closing his book. "Done any studying yet?"

"Me? No, I'll take a fall out of it tonight. It looks like a cinch. The Algebra's review stuff. I've had it already. And the Latin's easy, too. Guess German's the only thing I'll mind much. How about you?"

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"Looks stiff," acknowledged Ira. "I didn't expect to have to take French until next year. Languages were always hard for me. I've elected Greek instead of German. I don't see why a fellow needs much German, do you?" [86]

"I don't see why he needs any. Or French, either, for that matter. Latin's enough, I think."

"Really? But French is different from German. I mean, it's a sort of universal language—"

"Sure. I know. But why not learn it in college? That's time enough. My idea is that they try to teach you too blamed much at these big prep schools."

"A good many fellows don't go to college," said Ira. "I'm not certain that I shall."

"Gee, I wouldn't miss it! If it wasn't for going to college I wouldn't ever waste time at a prep school, believe me. College is fun, old man. You take my advice and go. Get a move on and let's start along. I could eat bent nails!"

The food at the Owl Grill proved excellent, but the prices were dismayingly high and the atmosphere of the place didn't please Ira. They ate in one of the little booths that lined the walls of the restaurant, which was a bright and attractive place of many lights and black-oak panelling and cheerful pictures of hunting and coaching scenes. But after the room had filled up Ira had an uncomfortable feeling of being in the wrong place. His modest order brought an expression of disdain to the waiter's face, and when he glanced out into the room and saw what most of the diners were surrounding themselves with he understood it. Humphrey Nead ordered as if quite familiar with that style of restaurant and bought far more food than he was able to eat and paid his check later with a lordly air. [87]

"Some place for a one-horse town like this, eh?" he asked, looking approvingly around. "I guess it beats eating in hall, what? Sometime I'm going to have one of those planked steaks like the fat guy over there has. Bet they cost about two dollars. They ought to have music here, though. We've got a place in Buffalo you ought to see, Rowland. It's got this beat a mile. Going to drink anything?"

"I guess not. I don't like tea much, and coffee at night keeps me awake."

"Gee, you're a greenie!" jeered Nead. "I meant a real drink, a glass of beer or something."

"I don't drink beer," replied Ira shortly. "And if you take my advice you won't, either."

"Piffle! I often have a glass of beer with my dinner. Don't be a pill!"

"What you do at home is different, Nead. You're not allowed to do it here, and if faculty found it out—"

"What faculty doesn't know won't hurt it," returned Nead flippantly. But Ira observed that he didn't order the beer. When they had finished, Nead wanted to sit there awhile and talk, but Ira wasn't comfortable and Nead grumblingly consented to leave. When Ira handed the waiter fifteen cents, which was the change from the dollar he had placed on his check, Nead looked even more disgusted than the waiter and ostentatiously tossed a fifty-cent piece on the cloth. [88]

"Did you see his look when you slipped him that tip?" he asked as they passed out. "It was a study. It doesn't do to be a piker in a place like that, Rowland. They remember it, and the next time you go there you don't get any sort of attention. It pays to loosen up sometimes."

"There won't be any next time for me," answered the other untroubledly. "I don't like the place. And, anyway, I wouldn't have tipped him more than fifteen cents. That's more than enough."

"Oh, sure! You don't *have* to give anything, but they expect it, you know, and they think you're a tightwad if you don't come across."

"What that waiter thinks of me doesn't worry me a bit," replied Ira, smiling. "It isn't a patch on what I think of him!" [89]

"Oh, he didn't do so badly," said the other carelessly. "I think it's a pretty decent dive for a town like this. They do know how to charge, though. A fellow couldn't eat there more than a couple of times a week, I guess."

"I couldn't. Suppose we look around and find a good boarding house, Nead?"

"Not on your tintype! No boarding house for yours truly! Guess I'll go to Alumni after a week or so. I'll be busted by that time," he chuckled, "and you can chalk it up at Alumni until the end of the term. It's nearly seven-thirty and I'll have to hustle over to Goss and keep that date with Hale. See you at the party, eh?"

"All right. I'll be there about a quarter past eight. Bye!"

Humphrey Nead turned into School Street in the direction of the campus and Ira kept on until he reached Number 200. As usual, the little tailor was hard at work under a flaring gas jet as Ira pushed open the outer door, and was humming a queer tune as he trundled the steaming goose up and down the pressing board. Ira fumbled his way up the dark staircase to the floor above and then went along the hall with more certainty in the dim radiance of the single bracket. As he passed the door of a room on the front of the house it opened suddenly and a tall form in a blanket dressing gown stood revealed in the light. [90]

"The Peloponnesian War was 430, wasn't it? Or was it 431?"

Ira, already startled by the sudden apparition, drew back in surprise. "I—What did you say?" he gasped.

"The Peloponnesian War," repeated the stranger in the doorway impatiently. "What was the date?"

"I'm afraid I don't remember," replied Ira apologetically. "But it was somewhere around there."

"Rather indefinite," said the other drily. "Thought you might know. Much obliged." He was gone and the door was closed before Ira could reply, leaving the dim impression of a thin, earnest face and a pair of big spectacles. Ira smiled as he climbed the next stairway. From the room across the corridor came the muffled strains of "Boola" punctuated by a sound that suggested the beating of a book with a ruler. Ira's smile became a grin. Evidently "Maggy's" was inhabited by some queer characters, he thought. [91]

There was barely time for a letter before eight o'clock and he lighted the gas and set to work. But after writing "Dear Dad" at the top of the sheet he leaned back and began to think of that encounter with Goodloe in the morning. He found that he entertained a sentiment of cordiality toward Goodloe and the idea of standing up to him and trying to flatten his nose for him seemed somewhat ridiculous. "If only he hadn't come around and called," thought Ira. "He seemed such a decent chap, and apologised so nicely! Wonder why he wants to fight. I'm sure I don't. Well, I suppose I'll have to go through with it. I guess I can lick him, all right, but I haven't got much enthusiasm for it. Still, if I don't make a fight of it he will probably mess me up considerable. I guess he's the sort that'll bore in and take a lot of punishment, too. Bother him, I wish he was in Halifax!"

After that there was not time left for the home letter, and he spruced up a bit and trudged through School Street and then along Washington Avenue, in front of what was known as Faculty Row, and found the Principal's residence, at the corner of the grounds, quite gay with lights within and coloured lanterns without. A thin stream of more or less embarrassed First Class fellows was ascending the steps and edging in to be greeted by Dr. and Mrs. Lane at the door of the big library. Ira liked Dr. Lane's looks and his hearty handshake and his deep and pleasant voice. The Principal was a man still slightly under thirty, of medium height and build, clean-shaven, with rather more of the executive than the pedagogue in his appearance. He held Ira in conversation a few moments and then passed him over to Mrs. Lane, a rotund, cheerful little woman who invited him to tea on Friday next at half-past four and asked him what church he attended. Ira was afterward in doubt whether he had accepted the invitation or not, but concluded that it didn't matter. He met Professor Addicks a minute later and was flattered to discover that the professor remembered him. The professor, although Ira didn't know it, always remembered everyone and everything. After that he met many other members of the faculty, many of whose names he promptly forgot, and talked, without being introduced, to a number of lonesome looking fellows whom he found standing around in corners or flattened against walls. Most of the guests were, of course, first year students, and Ira and some eight or nine others were the only older boys there. One small chap of fourteen whom Ira discovered in a niche between a door and a mantel in a back room mistook him for an instructor or something official, a misapprehension flattering but embarrassing. He caught sight of Nead once for a moment, but that youth was hobnobbing with a freshman in the hall and didn't see him. Refreshments were served in the garden at nine, and after demolishing a helping of ice cream and a slice of cake Ira slipped quietly away. It wouldn't do to stay up very late, since he had an important engagement at half-past six at the West Gate, and he had still to do some studying. What time Nead returned he didn't know, for he was fast asleep at half-past ten. [92]

CHAPTER VII

THE FIGHT

When Ira awoke the next morning an expression of Mart Johnston's came to him. "You've got a good day for it!" It certainly was a good day, for the early morning sky was cloudless and swept by a crisp breeze that held enough tingle as it came through the window to make him hurry a bit with his dressing. He managed to get through his ablutions and put his clothes on without disturbing Nead, and at twenty minutes past six he closed the door quietly behind him and went cautiously down the dim stairways. Main Street was for the most part still asleep, although a few yawning persons were opening stores for the day's trade. He found himself whistling a tune as he turned into Linden Street and realised that it was rather an incongruous thing to do under the circumstances. He ought, he told himself, to plan his battle and keep his mind on feints and leads. But the morning was too fine for that and he didn't feel in the least sanguinary. He would much have preferred a long walk into the country. [93]

There was no sign of Goodloe when he reached the West Gate, and he had begun to hope that that youth had overslept when he caught sight of him running down the steps of Williams Hall. Goodloe waved a greeting as he hurried up, still buttoning his waistcoat. [94]

"Sorry if I'm late," he said as he joined Ira. "I came mighty near missing it. Fred wouldn't let me set the alarm clock and I'm not much good at waking up myself. Say, it's a peach of a morning, isn't it? If we cut through here it's nearer, Rowland."

He led the way down a sort of lane beside an old white house on Apple Street and they squeezed themselves between the bars of a gate. [95]

"I suppose you went to Jud's reception last night?" asked Goodloe. "I went last year. He asked a lot of us over to give the glad hand to the new boys, but Halden—he was baseball captain last year—and a lot more of us made such inroads on the refreshments that we didn't get asked this time. I suppose Mrs. Jud asked you to tea?"

"Yes, she did. On Friday, I think it was. I'm not sure whether I said I'd come or not."

"It doesn't matter. She doesn't expect you. No one ever goes. Not more than once, anyhow. She makes you do things: sing or recite or do card tricks. She means well; in fact she's a nice little person, Mrs. Jud; but it's a nuisance. Ned Mailman went the first time he was asked and recited Casey at the Bat with the aid of an umbrella out of the stand in the hall, and knocked about sixty-eleven dollars worth of bric-a-brac off the mantel! Here we are!"

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They had crossed a field during Goodloe's chatter and now were making their way past the old workings of a brick-yard, skirting a clay pit that was half full of water and a tumble-down shed littered with broken bricks. Further on was a small building in a fair state of repair, save for the windows which had been practically denuded of glass, and to the back of this Goodloe cheerfully led the way.

"Out of sight of the world," he announced. "There have been more scraps pulled off here than you can shake a stick at. It used to be a brick-yard, but now it's a scrap yard." Goodloe removed his coat and waistcoat and hung them carefully from a nail against the side of the shed. "There's a nail for you," he said, pointing. "We don't get checks, but they'll be safe." He put his hat over his garments and drew his belt in another hole.

Certainly, reflected Ira, the place was private enough. The shed cut off all sight of the school, the street and the nearer houses, while in other directions a young growth of birch and oak which had sprung up since the yard's activities had ceased effectually screened them. The morning sunshine fell warmly on the little space of hard-trodden clay and the side of the shed, turning the weathered, grey boards of the latter to pale gold. Ira removed his coat and vest and hat and hung them beside Goodloe's. He didn't cinch in his belt because he didn't wear one, but he did shorten his suspenders a little.

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"I needn't tell you, I guess," observed Goodloe, "that it won't do to be seen around school with our faces messed up. After honour is satisfied we'd better look each other over and do the first-aid act. If faculty sees us with our eyes bruised it'll get to asking questions. All ready? Shake hands, do we? Fine! I suppose hitting in the clinches is barred, eh?"

"Just as you like," answered Ira.

"Well, it's more shipshape to break away, I guess. We might as well act like gentlemen even if it hurts us! Let her go, Rowland!"

Goodloe had been smiling genially thus far, and the smile on his face still continued now, but his eyes narrowed a little as he stepped warily back and raised his guard. Ira, for his part, experienced a strong desire to laugh, for the humour of the affair struck him harder than before. But he tried to look grave as he faced his antagonist and waited for the latter to begin. It soon became evident, though, that Goodloe was also waiting. In the course of the first thirty seconds of that remarkable meeting they each completed one circuit of the "ring" without offering a blow.

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"Come on!" said Goodloe encouragingly.

"Come on yourself," replied Ira grinning.

Goodloe grunted. "I suppose someone's got to start it," he muttered. He feinted with his right and landed a light tap on Ira's shoulder and danced away before Ira could reach him. He came back and they each sparred for an opening until Ira landed a weak left to the neck.

"Short," said Goodloe. "You're quick on your feet for a big chap. I'll have to watch you."

He rushed in and managed to reach Ira's chin, but the blow was half blocked and scarcely jarred the recipient, and Ira landed twice on the body before Goodloe retreated. [More circling then, each watching the other warily](#), and then a half-hearted rush by Goodloe that failed to beat down Ira's guard. Half a dozen quick blows were given by each, but the blocking was good and neither got home.

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More circling then, each watching the other warily

"This is a perfect farce," declared Goodloe mournfully. "You're not half fighting, confound you!"

"Neither are you," replied Ira, laughing.

They drew off by common consent, panting a little, but more from their circling than their sparring, and viewed each other. Goodloe shook his head discouragedly. "You'll have to do better than you've been doing, Rowland," he complained. "Can't you hand me one on the face? I can't do it all, you know."

"I don't see that you've done any of it yet," said Ira indignantly. "If you want to fight go ahead and fight. I'm not stopping you."

"Well, but—hang it, Rowland, I can't smash a fellow unless he does something to get me worked up! Why don't you start something?"

"Why don't you?"

"Why, it isn't my row!"

Ira burst out laughing. "Whose is it, then?"

"Yours, of course. You said you wanted to fight——"

"I said so! When?"

"Well, that note said so, then."

"I said I'd meet you whenever you liked," protested Ira. "You don't call that a—a challenge, do you?"

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"N-no, maybe not, but it sort of sounded as if you wanted to finish up the scrap we started, and I couldn't very well refuse, could I? If you didn't want to fight what the dickens did you get me out of bed for at this unearthly hour?" Goodloe sounded pained and pathetic.

"That was your suggestion," answered Ira. "I wasn't crazy about scrapping before breakfast, or any other time."

"Then—then you don't want to fight?" demanded Goodloe.

"I'm not a bit keen about it," laughed Ira. "I was only obliging you, Goodloe."

"Well, I'll be blowed! What do you know about that? Thunderation, I don't want to fight you! Why should I? I made an ass of myself the other day and got knocked down, but I deserved it, and I've said so. You—you're quite sure you don't want to go ahead?"

"Quite, thanks. I'd rather have some breakfast."

Goodloe grinned. "So would I," he said heartily. "Tell you what, Rowland. We'll go down to The Eggery and have some coffee and cakes and a few trimmings. What do you say? I don't believe I want to go to dining hall this morning."

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"All right. That suits me. Let's get there. I'm as hungry as a bear!"

"Me, too! Say, it looks to me as if we were a couple of silly chumps!" Goodloe chuckled as he handed Ira his hat. "For the love of Pete, don't let this out or we'll be a regular laughing-stock! If Fred Lyons ever got onto this he'd never let up on me!"

"Is he the football captain?" asked Ira as he pulled his vest on.

"Yes. We room together. You ought to know him, Rowland. He's a dandy old scout. Tell you what! You run around tonight and meet him, eh? I wish you would. You'd like him. Come over about eight, will you?"

"Thanks, I'd like to. Now which is the shortest way to The Egger?"

Ten minutes later they were seated at opposite sides of a small table in the restaurant and no one of the patrons would have suspected them of having lately met on the field of honour. For they were talking as amicably as though they were old friends while they consumed their buckwheat cakes with maple sirup and drank their piping hot coffee. And afterwards, when they had supplemented the main part of the repast with three doughnuts apiece and had ordered more coffee, they still sat there chatting and laughing. [102]

"I wish," said Ira, at last approaching a question he had had on his mind to ask for some time, "I wish you'd tell me something."

"Will if I can," answered Gene. "Shoot."

"Well, it's about my—about that suit I had on the other day. I suppose it doesn't look just right, Goodloe, but what's the trouble with it?"

"Why—er—if you want the truth, Rowland, it's too small for you. It looks as if you'd grown about six inches since you got it."

"Oh! Yes, I guess I have. I've had it two years, about. I realise that my things don't look like what you fellows wear. I dare say even these aren't—aren't quite right, eh?"

"Well, I wouldn't want to say that," responded Gene cautiously.

"Well, are they? I thought they were yesterday morning, but they don't seem to look just—just proper."

"Perhaps they're a wee bit—er—skimpy," allowed Gene, evidently anxious not to hurt the other's feelings. "Did you have them made for you or—or just buy them?"

"I bought them ready-made. I never had a suit made to order. You see, Cheney Falls is just a village and the only tailor there would probably die of fright if you asked him to make a suit of clothes for you! I got these in Bangor. The man I got them of said they were fine; said they fitted perfectly. But I guess they don't, eh?" [103]

"Well, n-no, they don't, Rowland; not perfectly. If I were you I'd take them to a tailor here and let him take a fall out of them. If you want a suit built, try Dodge, on Adams Street, next door to the Music Hall. He does a lot of work for the fellows and is pretty good, and he doesn't charge terribly much, either."

"I guess I will," answered Ira. "I mean, have these doctored. Maybe I'll get me a new suit, too, later. How much does he charge?"

"Oh, he'll build you a mighty good one for thirty-five."

"Thirty-five!" exclaimed Ira. "Gee! These only cost eighteen!"

"Yes, but what Dodge will turn out will outwear that suit two to one and, besides, it'll fit you, Rowland. You won't have to pay the whole bill right away if you don't want to, only you mustn't tell faculty. It doesn't approve of the fellows running accounts."

"Oh, if I got it I'd pay cash, I guess."

"It's best to," agreed Gene. "I used to charge things all over the shop when I first came, but I was always scared that faculty would get on to it. Besides, I had a fierce time getting my bills paid off at the end of the year. Well, I must be starting back. Put your money up, please. This is my treat." [104]

"Oh, no! I'd rather not!"

"Can't help it, old man. As the challenged party I have the choice of weapons, and I choose to defeat you with cash." He had already seized Ira's check and so the latter gave in, although a bit uncomfortably. Still, the breakfasts had been only thirty cents apiece, so perhaps it didn't much matter. They parted outside, Gene reminding Ira of his agreement to call that evening, and went their separate ways. When Ira got back to the room he found Humphrey just starting out for breakfast.

"Well, what happened to you?" he demanded. "Been catching worms?"

"I got up early," replied Ira. "I've had breakfast."

"You have? What's the idea? Didn't you have enough dinner last night to hold you for a while?"

"Yes, but—it was a fine morning and—Say, we ought to get a cushion for that window seat today." [105]

"You get it," said Humphrey. "I'm going to be busy this afternoon. I've got a date with a fellow."

"All right. I'll try to get out of it cheap."

"You'd better. I don't intend to spend much money on this dive. It isn't worth it."

"Why, I thought it was beginning to look pretty nice," replied Ira. "When you get your pictures up—"

"Oh, it'll do, I suppose. Well, I'm off to feed. Don't want to come along, do you?"

"No, thanks. I'm going to do a little studying before first hour."

"I wish you'd do some for me. I haven't looked into a book yet. So long!"

Ira had plenty to keep him busy until three that day. He had a consultation at half-past eleven with Mr. McCreedy, his adviser, and in consequence made one or two alterations in his elective courses. The Mathematics instructor was a youngish man with a sort of cut-and-dried manner that Ira found unsympathetic. But the advice was good and Mr. McCreedy begged Ira to look him up frequently and not to hesitate to consult him on any matter at any time. In the afternoon—studies went easily enough as yet—Ira found himself at a loose end, although one could, of course, always "grind." But "grinding" didn't appeal to him on such a day, and he wandered around to the playfield again and looked on at football practice for awhile. Several fellows nodded to him, and some spoke, for he had made acquaintances in classroom and at the Principal's reception. But he met no one he knew well enough to talk to, and about four he returned to his lodging to get the measurements for the window-seat cushion. When he opened the door he was surprised to find that the odour of stale cigarette smoke still lingered, in spite of wide-open windows. There was a brief note from Humphrey asking him to meet him there at six for supper. He arranged at a furniture store for the cushion and then went back and finished that letter to his father. As he had a good deal to write, it was six o'clock before he had reached the last of the twelve pages. He waited until half-past for Humphrey and then, as that youth was still absent, sallied forth alone. He was quite as well satisfied, for Humphrey was inclined to eat bigger suppers than he needed, and Ira, after buying an evening paper, sought The Eggery and did very well at an expense of twenty cents. At half-past seven, having brushed his blue suit and his shoes and his hair, and changed his tie for one more after the fashion of those affected at Parkinson, he started out for Gene Goodloe's room.

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CHAPTER VIII

[108]

IRA DECLINES AN INVITATION

Goodloe roomed in Number 30, Williams Hall, the dormitory nest to Parkinson on the left, and Ira wandered around for several minutes before he discovered that there were two entrances and that he had selected the wrong one. Finally, a boy whom he encountered in the corridor set him right and Number 30 was eventually located on the second floor at the west end of the building. The door was ajar and his rap went unheard at first. Then someone called "Come in if you're good-looking!" and Ira entered to find the big room seemingly full of boys. As a matter of fact, though, there were only seven there, as Ira discovered presently when, having been welcomed by Gene and introduced off-handedly to the rest, he found a seat and an opportunity to look around. His entrance proved the signal for a general withdrawal, and all the visitors but one left, nodding carelessly to him from the door on their way out. The fellow who remained was the tall, dark-haired boy who had so kindly and readily interpreted the mystic "R & B" the day of Ira's arrival. He had, however, shown no sign of recollection on being introduced, and Ira had concluded that he had failed to recognise him. But when Fred Lyons had closed the door on the heels of the final departing caller, White—his was one of the few names Ira had remembered—turned to him with a smile and remarked:

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"How are you getting on with the rats, Rowland? Hope they're giving you your money's worth at Maggy's."

"What's the joke about rats?" inquired Fred Lyons before Ira could reply.

"Oh, we tried to put one over on Rowland the other day," replied Gene Goodloe. "He wanted to know what 'R & B' stood for on the list of rooming houses they give you and Ray told him it stood for 'Rats and Bugs.' We thought we'd got away with it at first, but now I'm not sure Rowland fell for it at all. Did you?"

"He did at first, didn't you?" asked Raymond White. "Say you did, Rowland, anyhow. Let us down easy."

"Yes, I did—at first," answered Ira. "You all looked so sober and—and truthful, you see."

"Truthful! Gee!" exclaimed White. "I guess you didn't take a good look at Gene!"

"Oh, that was when Gene got the lovely knockout, was it?" asked the football captain. "I'd like to have seen that. It would do me a lot of good to see Gene get what's coming to him."

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"Why don't you try to give it to me, you big bluff?" demanded Gene, truculently. "Why depend on—on outside talent?" He doubled up his fists and frowned formidably until his roommate stirred as though to get out of his chair. Then he put the table between them, and Fred Lyons grunted contemptuously.

"You see what a coward he is, Rowland," he said. "Hit him any time you like. He'll stand for it."

"Not from you, I won't! Just one more crack like that, you old stiff, and I'll come around there and put you over my knee!" Even Ira had to smile at the idea of Gene spanking his chum, who was a good three inches taller and bigger all around, and White laughed amusedly and asked:

"Why don't you flay him some time, Fred? It would do him good."

"I'm going to. I'm saving it up for him," answered Lyons. Then he turned to Ira and asked: "How are you getting on, Rowland? Things breaking all right for you?"

"Oh, yes, thanks. It's sort of strange yet, but I'm learning."

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"That's good. Take my advice, though, and choose your companions carefully. Avoid questionable company."

Ira nodded politely, secretly a little surprised until he caught the amused look on White's countenance. Then he, too, smiled doubtfully as Gene said:

"Oh, Rowland's able to look after himself. If he wasn't I wouldn't have asked him around here to meet you chaps. I might as well explain, Rowland, that you're quite at liberty to cut these fellows dead the next time you see them. I only wanted to show them to you so you'd know whom to avoid."

"Where are you hanging out?" asked Lyons.

"Mrs. Magoon's, on Main Street."

"Maggy's, eh? Not a bad place. She lets you do about as you like, anyway, so long as you pay your bills. They said last year that faculty was sort of frowning on Maggy's and weren't going to let the fellows go there any more. Who's in the house with you?"

"I don't know. I haven't met any of them yet. At least, not exactly. One of them gave me a scare last night, though." He told about the boy who had asked the date of the Peloponnesian War, and the rest laughed.

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"That was 'Old Earnest,'" said White. "He's been at Maggy's ever since he came here."

"And he will be there awhile yet if he doesn't stick to his courses," said Lyons. "He took up so many extras last year that he didn't have time for the required studies and flunked in a couple of them. He's a wonder! You'll find him amusing, Rowland, when you get to know him. He's our prize 'grind,' I guess."

"Rather handy having him around," observed White. "If you ever want to know anything all you've got to do is run down and ask Ernest Hicks."

"Yes," agreed Gene, "it's like the signs you see: 'Ask Hicks: he knows!'"

"He didn't know about the What-you-may-call-it War, though," said Fred Lyons. "I hope you were able to tell him, Rowland."

"I wasn't, though," laughed Ira. "I told him it was about the time he said, but he seemed to think that was too indefinite."

"I'll bet he did!" said Gene. "'Old Earnest' would have to know not only the year but the day of the month, and whether it was in the morning or the afternoon."

"Wonder why he didn't look it up," remarked White. "He has a library of encyclopedias and reference books about a mile long."

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"Maybe he'd forgot how to spell the word," suggested Gene. "I have!"

"Absolutely no criterion," said Lyons. "'Old Earnest' has forgotten more than you ever knew or ever will know, you ignoramus."

"Is that so? I'll bet you you don't know who the Peloponnesians were."

"Don't I? They were inhabitants of Peloponnesia. Ask me a hard one."

"Well, where was Peloponnesia, then?"

"Oh, about half-way between Cumner and Springfield," replied Lyons without hesitation. "Anybody knows that! By the way, Rowland, I don't remember seeing you out."

"Out?" asked Ira.

"Out for football, I mean. You're trying, of course."

"No, I'm not. I've never played football. I'd be no good, I guess."

"Great Jumping Jehosaphat, man!" ejaculated Lyons. "That'll never do! We've got to have you, Rowland. Why, if Driscoll knew there was a chap of your build who hadn't showed up he'd be after you with a gun. Seriously, though, Rowland, I wish you'd come out and have a try. We really do need husky chaps like you. You're built for a guard if any fellow ever was, isn't he, Ray?"

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"He certainly is," replied White. "What do you weigh, Rowland?"

"I don't know. I haven't weighed for a long time. About a hundred and forty-one or -two, I guess."

"A hundred and fifty-one or -two, more likely," said Lyons. "But you'll drop some of that. You're a bit soft, I'd say. Haven't you ever tried football at all?"

"No, and I've never seen it played but once. I never thought I'd care for it."

"Oh, but you will," replied Lyons confidently. "You're bound to, once you get a taste of it. I wish you'd promise to report tomorrow, Rowland. I'm not exaggerating a bit when I say that we need men the worst way. These chaps will tell you the same thing."

"We never needed them more," said White. "I could easily be a pessimist on the football situation, Fred. We've never started off with a bigger handicap."

"Oh, the fellows will turn out when they know they're really needed," said Gene comfortably. "You always have to coax them a bit."

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"I wasn't thinking so much of getting material," answered White gravely. "What's bothering me—or would bother me if I let it—is the indifference. No one, except a dozen or two of us who play, cares much this year whether we have a team or don't have one."

"You'll see them begin to sit up when you get started," said Gene. "I'll grant that football has rather soured at Parkinson, but any sort of a fairly decent team will find support."

"We've got to find support," said Captain Lyons grimly. "We haven't enough money to print tickets for next week's game. We need at least two hundred and fifty dollars to get to the Kenwood game. After that we'll be able to clear up our debts."

"Can't you get tick for things until then?" asked Gene.

"Yes, but if we do we end the season the way we did last year. There were only twelve hundred and odd admissions to the game last year and our share was a bit over five hundred after expenses were paid. And when we had settled all our bills, most of which had run all season, we had ninety-something left. Spring expenses took about sixty and we began this Fall with about thirty dollars in the treasury. We've already spent it and a few dollars more. Lowell is advancing money from his own pocket for next week's tickets. I've dug down once myself. The worst of it was that everything had given out together. Usually we start the season with half a dozen good balls and head harnesses and so on, but this year we were short on every blessed thing. The balls we're using now aren't fit to play with. I tried to get the Athletic Association to make us a donation, but Mr. Tasser said there was almost no money on hand, and what there was would be needed for other sports. I suppose he's right, but when you consider that until last year football has always paid for itself and everything else, except baseball, it seems sort of tough."

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"Wouldn't the students stand a small assessment?" asked Ira.

"They'd have to if they were assessed," replied Lyons, "but faculty won't allow it. The best we can do is ask for contributions, and that's what we will have to do. Lowell wanted to do it last year, but Simpson—he was manager—was certain that the Kenwood game would go big and we'd have enough to settle everything up and leave a start for this year. You see, Rowland, the trouble is that we've had four perfectly punk football years running. It's human nature, I suppose, to cheer for a winning team and turn your back on one that loses. Well, we've lost the Kenwood game three years out of four and tied it the other time, which was three seasons ago. Last year we started out nicely and won five or six games without a hitch. After that we had trouble. Our captain couldn't get along with the coach and it came to a show-down and faculty supported the captain, which, to my thinking, it shouldn't have, and Emerson left us about the first of November. Fortunately, we got Mr. Driscoll right away, but the fat was in the fire then, and ten coaches couldn't have pulled things together in time for Kenwood. So we lost again. And now the school is soured on football. It's tired of seeing the team beaten, naturally. I don't blame it altogether."

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"I do," said Gene warmly. "When a team's in trouble is when the school ought to stand back of it."

"Well, they stood back of us three years," said Lyons pessimistically, "and it didn't seem to do much good. There's a fine, healthy 'jinx' doing business around here, I guess."

"When does the meeting come off?" asked Ray White.

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"It isn't decided. We thought we'd better wait until we'd won a game or two—if we do. I'm glad we've got Mapleton and Country Day to start with. They ought to be easy."

"Another thing," remarked White, "is that we've got a punk schedule this year. We've dropped two of our best opponents."

"They dropped us, didn't they?" asked Gene. "You mean Harper's and Poly-Tech?"

"They didn't exactly drop us," said Lyons. "They wanted a guarantee bigger than we could promise. We simply had to let them go. Lowell wants to put down the season ticket price to two dollars so as to get more fellows to buy them, but I don't believe taking off a half dollar would make much difference. What we've got to do some way or other is get the school warmed up again. Of course one way to do it is to turn out a winning team, but—well, sometimes I wish someone else had the job. I can play football, after a fashion, but this thing of financing the team and worrying about the money end of it is too much for me!"

"It's hard luck, Fred," said Gene sympathetically. "But just you stick it out, old horse."

"Oh, I'm not going to quit. Don't worry about that. I'll still be playing football on the twenty-second of November if I'm playing it all alone. Only it does bother a fellow to have to wonder where the next batch of tickets is coming from and whether there'll be enough money at the end of the year to pay off the coach. Driscoll, by the way, has been bully about the salary business. We're supposed to pay him five hundred at the beginning of the season and five hundred at the end, you know, but he says we can let it all go until November. That'll help some!"

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"What gets me," observed White, "is why Tod Driscoll wants to fuss with a job like this, anyway. He ought to get three thousand dollars any day. He's good, Driscoll is!"

"I don't believe he will be back here next Fall," said Lyons. "Not at a thousand dollars, anyway; and it isn't likely we can pay more. I guess it will be a case of graduate coaching for us. Then—good night!"

"Aren't graduate coaches satisfactory?" asked Ira.

"They are if they know their business," replied Lyons, "but the ones that do are either drawing down good salaries coaching somewhere else, like Tom Nutting and Howard Lane, or they're too busy to give more than a fortnight to the team. You can't expect a man who is getting started in business to throw it up for two months to coach a football team. And you can't expect a man who is getting twenty-five hundred or three thousand coaching some other team to leave his job and come here for a thousand. Unfortunately, Rowland, the fellows who would come for a thousand aren't worth it. Good football players are plentiful, but good football coaches are as scarce as hens' teeth."

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"I wonder," mused Gene, "what would happen if every school coached itself. I mean, suppose it was agreed that no graduate was to have anything to do with the teams. What would it be like?"

"We'd all play punk football," responded White, "but we'd have just as much sport. And a heap less trouble."

"Schools wouldn't stick to the agreement," said Lyons. "They'd begin to sneak in fellows who weren't real students so they could take hold of the teams."

"Oh, come, Fred! There are some honest folks in the world," protested Gene.

"A heap of them, son, but when it comes to winning at games there's something a bit yellow about us. Fellows who wouldn't crib at an exam, will do all sorts of shady tricks to put it over a rival team. I guess it's because we want to win too hard. Still I'd like to see it tried out, that 'no graduate need apply' idea."

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"So would I," said White, "but I'd rather some other school started it."

"I'd certainly hate to see the scheme applied to track athletics," said Gene, shaking his head dubiously. "It wouldn't work there."

"Wouldn't work anywhere," declared Lyons. "Not nowadays. Wait for the millennium. I guess we've bored Rowland stiff with all this serious guff. We aren't always as dull as we are tonight, Rowland."

"You haven't bored me," answered Ira, smiling. "I've been interested. Care to know what I've been thinking, Lyons?"

"Why, yes."

"Well, I've been thinking that you're pretty lucky."

"Lucky! Who, me?"

"Yes. You see, you've got a fine, big man's-size job, and if you manage to make—what do you say?—turn out a good team and get the school to support it you've really done something worth doing, haven't you?"

"Gosh! Rowland's a regular Little Sunbeam," laughed Gene. "I'll bet you never thought of it in that way, Fred."

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"I never did." Lyons smiled and shook his head. "But there's something in it, Rowland. There's a lot in it, by Jove! Only thing is, you know, you've got to keep that in mind. If you don't you're likely to consider yourself in hard luck. I'll try to see the bright side of it, Rowland."

"I suppose that sounded cheeky," said Ira. "I didn't mean it to."

"Not a bit! And I wasn't sarcastic. I really do mean that I'll try to keep in mind that it *is* a big job and that it's worth doing. And," he added warmly, "I'm mighty glad you said it. It's going to help. But there's another way you can help, Rowland, if you will."

"How is that?"

"Come out and try for the team tomorrow. Will you?"

Ira hesitated. "I'd like awfully much to oblige you, Lyons, but I don't want to do it. I'm quite certain that I'd never be any good at football. I guess it takes some quality I haven't got. I don't believe a fellow ever makes much of a success at a thing he hasn't any—any inclination for. If you don't mind, Lyons, I'd much prefer not to."

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"If it's only not liking the game," said Lyons, "you can take my word for it that you will like it after you get to know it better, and—"

"It isn't that altogether. I'm not a very brilliant fellow at studying, and, of course I did come here to learn. I don't expect to go to college and so I want to make the most of this school. And I'm afraid that playing football would raise hob with studying. It does, doesn't it?"

"Not necessarily," answered White. "Fred manages to keep his end up without trouble, and so do a lot of others."

"Don't lie to him," said Lyons. "Football does play hob with your studies, Rowland. The only thing is that it lasts but a short while and it leaves you in mighty good shape to buckle down and

get caught up. But it's piffle to say that the two things mix well. They don't. I've always managed to keep up fairly well in my classes, but how it will be this year I don't know. Luckily, I've got a fairly easy term ahead of me. You do just as you think best about trying for the team, old man. We'd like mighty well to have you, and I think you'd make good, but if you think you'd better not, why, that's your affair. Only, if you change your mind in the next fortnight and see your way to giving us a chance to use you, come on out. We need men—I mean likely ones: we've got a raft of the other sort—and we can find a place for you somewhere or I miss my guess."

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"Seems to me," observed Ray White, "Rowland is rather losing sight of the question of duty."

"I don't think so," answered Ira, before Gene could interpose. "Seems to me my duty is toward my dad, who is paying for my schooling. After that to myself. Then to the school."

"Right," said Lyons heartily.

"It's a good thing every fellow doesn't look at it that way, then," grumbled White.

"If I thought I could help on the football team and still keep up my studies as I ought to I guess I'd join," said Ira. "I'd like to do anything I could to help. But I don't. Still, it's all pretty new to me yet and maybe after I've been here another week I'll have a better line on what's going to happen. Maybe I can tell then how much work I'll have to do." He got up, smiling apologetically at them. "I'm sorry if I seem unpatriotic," he added.

"Oh, don't mind Ray," said Gene. "He's a sorehead. And don't hurry off. The night is still extremely young."

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"Thanks, but I ought to be going. I'm glad to have met you all. Good night."

"Good night, Rowland," answered the football captain. "Don't let anything we've said bother you. Do as you think best. Only remember there's a trial awaiting you any time inside the next fortnight and help us out if you can."

Ray White got up and followed Ira to the door. "Sorry if I was peevish," he said, holding out his hand. "Forget it, Rowland. Get Gene to bring you up to my room some night, will you?"

CHAPTER IX

AN ULTIMATUM

[126]

Several days passed without incidents worth recording here. Life at Parkinson settled down into the groove that it was to follow for the next nine months and Ira found that his studies looked far less formidable on close acquaintance than they had at first. Ira had declared that he was not a brilliant fellow at studying, and he wasn't, but he had the gift of application and an excellent memory, which, combined, are half the battle. The courses he had feared most, Greek and French, were proving easier than English, which he had not troubled about. But third year English at Parkinson was a stiff course and Ira's grammar school preparation had not been very thorough. Greek he took to avidly, possibly because Professor Addicks was a very sympathetic teacher and managed to make his courses interesting. Mathematics came easily to him and his other studies—he was taking nineteen hours in all—were not troublesome. On the whole, he felt himself quite able to cope with his work, and wondered if he was not in duty bound to go out and save the destinies of the football team. Of course, putting it that way he had to smile, for he couldn't imagine himself of any more use on the gridiron than nothing at all! Only, he reflected, if it would give Captain Lyons any satisfaction to have him there, perhaps, since it seemed quite possible to play football without flunking at recitations, he ought to put in an appearance. At all events, he would, he decided, wait a few days longer. There was no hurry.

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For want of a better confidant, he put the case up to Humphrey Nead one evening. Humphrey told him he was silly not to grab the chance. "I wish," he said, "they'd beg me to come out for the football team. You couldn't see me, for dust! You're in luck, Rowly."

"Rowly" was Nead's compromise between "Say!" and "Rowland" at this time. Ira didn't like it overmuch as a nickname, but entered no protest. He was determined to make the best of Humphrey Nead as a roommate, and during the first week was careful to make no criticisms. When, however, he did criticise he did it effectively. The occasion was just a week after that first chance meeting with Nead. The latter had formed a habit of eating his dinners in the evenings downtown in the company of various "Jimmies" and "Billies" whose last names Ira never heard, or, hearing, forgot. Usually Humphrey didn't return to the room until nearly ten o'clock. Sometimes it was nearer midnight, although, to do him justice, those occasions were few. On this particular evening, Ira, returning at half-past seven from Mrs. Trainor's boarding house, where he had lately become a "regular" for dinners and suppers, found Humphrey stretched out on his bed, a book face-open on his chest and a dead cigarette between the fingers of a hand that hung over the edge. He was asleep. Although both windows were open the tobacco smoke still lingered. Ira frowned thoughtfully as he hung up his cap in the closet. Then, after a moment's indecision, he walked across to the bed and shook the sleeper awake.

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"Eh? Hello!" muttered Humphrey. "Must have fallen asleep." He yawned widely, blinked and stretched himself. "What time is it? Had your dinner?"

"I've had my supper," answered Ira.

"Oh, the dickens! I was going to get you to stand me a feed."

"Sorry. Look here, Nead, you'll have to stop that."

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"Stop what?" asked the other blankly.

Ira pointed to the cigarette still clutched in Humphrey's fingers. Humphrey brought his hand up and looked. A brief expression of dismay changed to a grin.

"Caught in the act, eh? 'Flagrante—' What's the Latin of it, Rowly?"

"Never mind the Latin," replied Ira grimly. "The English of it is that you've got to quit it in this room."

"Who says so?" demanded Humphrey, scowling.

"I say so. Faculty says so, too."

"Oh, piffle! Look here, faculty says you can smoke in your room if you're a fourth year man. If a fourth year man can smoke, I can. It's my own affair."

"Faculty allows fourth year fellows to smoke pipes in their rooms if they have the written consent of their parents. You're not a fourth year fellow, you haven't the consent of your parents and that isn't a pipe; it's a cigarette."

"Well, don't lecture about it. There's no harm in a cigarette now and then. Half the fellows in school smoke on the sly."

"I don't believe it," denied Ira stoutly. "I don't know one who does it."

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"Huh! You don't know very many, anyhow, do you? And you're such a nice, proper sort of chump that they wouldn't do it when you were around, I guess."

"Never mind that, Nead. This is as much my room as it is yours, and I don't like cigarettes and won't stand for them. We might as well understand each other now. Then there won't be any further rowing."

"Suppose I choose to smoke?" drawled Humphrey.

"Then you'll have to find another room."

"Yes, I will! Like fun! I suppose you'd go and tell faculty, eh?"

"I might, if I couldn't stop it any other way," returned Ira calmly. "But I don't think it would be necessary."

He viewed Humphrey very steadily and the latter, after an instant of defiant glaring, dropped his gaze uncertainly.

"Rough-stuff, eh?" he sneered. "Well, you're a heap bigger than I am, and I guess you could get away with it. Anyway, I don't care enough about smoking to fight."

"Then I think I'd quit," said Ira. "What's the idea, anyway, Nead?"

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"Oh, just for fun," answered the other airily. "Haven't you ever done it?"

"Once," said Ira, with a fleeting and reminiscent smile. "I guess every fellow tries it once. I didn't like it, though."

"Of course not. You have to keep at it." Humphrey laughed. "Gee, I was a wreck after my first attempt!"

"Seems to me that anything that has that effect on you can't be especially good for you," said Ira.

"Oh, a fellow doesn't want to just do the things that are good for him. There's no fun in that. Smoking cigarettes is like—like playing hookey when you're a kid. You do it because it—it's a sort of adventure, eh?"

"I suppose so," agreed Ira. "Well, you've had your adventure, haven't you? You've got all the fun out of it. What's the use of keeping it up?"

Humphrey gazed at Ira thoughtfully. "Gee, that's a new idea," he chuckled. "Never thought of that! Maybe you're right, old scout. Guess I'll quit cigarettes and try something else. Burglary or—or murder, maybe."

"Well, don't practise at home," laughed Ira. Then soberly: "I wish you'd agree to call it off on the cigarettes, though, Nead."

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"Oh, when you ask me nicely like that," answered the other, "I don't mind, I guess. But I won't stand being bullied." He blustered a bit. "You can't scare me into doing things, Rowland, and you might as well learn that first as last."

"I don't want to scare you or bully you," answered Ira. "Sorry if I went at it wrong."

"Well, you did," grumbled the other. He sat up and ran a hand through his rumpled hair. Then: "Tell you how you can square yourself, Rowly," he said. "Lend me a quarter, like a good chap, will you? I'm stony."

"Of course. But you don't mean, really, that you've got no money?"

"Sorry to say I mean that exactly," replied Humphrey with a grin.

"But—but you've been here only a week! What have you done—"

"With my wealth?" prompted Humphrey as the other hesitated. "Well I've dropped about six dollars playing pool with those sharks down at the Central, and I've bought a lot of food and I've paid for a year's subscription to the 'Leader'—didn't want the silly paper, but a fellow cornered me—, and I've—oh, I don't know! Money never sticks around me very long. But you needn't worry about your quarter, because I've written home for more. I told mother I was taking an extra course in poolology and it was expensive!" He chuckled. "She'll understand and come across."

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"I wasn't worrying about my quarter," answered Ira. "I was wondering what you expected to do for meals until the letter comes."

"Well, I sort of intended going around to Mrs. Thingamabob's with you tonight and signing on there until—for awhile. But you didn't show up and I fell asleep."

"Unless you arrange for regular board," said Ira, "Mrs. Trainor will make you pay at every meal. You'd better let me lend you enough to see you through until you hear from your folks. How much will it take?"

Humphrey looked vastly surprised and a trifle embarrassed. "Why, that's mighty decent of you, old scout!" he exclaimed. "But can you—I mean——"

"I can let you have five dollars," said Ira, "if that will do."

"Honest? It won't make you short? But I'll give it back to you by Saturday. I wrote yesterday."

"I can't do it tonight," said Ira. "I'll have to get it out of the bank. But here's thirty-five cents you can have."

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"Right-o! Thanks awfully, Rowly! You're a brick. Sorry if I talked nasty." He got up from the bed, viewing the cigarette stub whimsically. Then he scratched a match, lighted the cigarette and exhaled a cloud of smoke into the room. "Good-bye forever!" he exclaimed tremulously, and, turning to the window, flicked the cigarette out into the night. "Now for burglary!" Whereupon he picked up the coins Ira had put on the table, planted his cap rakishly over one ear, winked expressively and hurried out.

Ira, arranging his books for study, wished somewhat ruefully that he hadn't jumped to conclusions by connecting the cigarette odour with Mart Johnston that time. He had met Mart two days before and that youth had passed him with a very cool and careless nod, evidently resentful because Ira had not accepted the invitation to call.

"I guess, though," thought Ira, as he seated himself at the desk and sucked the end of a pencil, "he doesn't care very much."

Gene Goodloe he saw every day, sometimes only long enough to exchange greetings with, sometimes long enough for a chat. But he hadn't been back to Number 30 Williams yet, nor had Gene, in spite of promises, called at "Maggy's." Captain Lyons and Raymond White were always genial when he met them, but it didn't look much as if the acquaintances with those fellows were likely to expand. Several times Ira watched football practice, and, while he failed to discover anything about the game to captivate him, he viewed it with more interest since meeting Fred Lyons and learning what a difficult task the latter was undertaking. That Lyons had not exaggerated the attitude of the school toward the football team was made plain to Ira by the comments he heard at practice. It seemed the popular thing to speak with laughing contempt of the team and the football situation. The "Forlorn Hopes" was a favourite name for the players, while it seemed to be a generally accepted conclusion that Parkinson would go down in defeat again in November. All this made Coach Driscoll's efforts to get additional candidates doubly difficult. Some fellows did go out, from a sense of duty, and at the end of the first week of school there were nearly eighty candidates on the field. That number looked large to Ira until he overheard one of the instructors remark to another one afternoon: "A most discouraging situation, isn't it? Why, four years ago we used to turn out a hundred and twenty to a hundred and fifty boys, I'm afraid it will be the same old story again this Fall!"

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The first game took place Saturday afternoon and Ira paid his quarter and went to see it. It wasn't much of a contest, and even he, as ignorant of the game as he was, could discern that neither team covered itself with glory during those two twenty-minute halves. It seemed to him that had all the Parkinson players done as well as Captain Lyons or the fellow who played full-back or the one who was at quarter during the first half the story might have been different. But those three stood out as bright, particular stars, and the rest didn't average up to them by a long shot. Ira, by the way, was interested to find that the quarter-back—inquiry divulged his name to be Dannis—was none other than the youth who had so earnestly and unsuccessfully practised hurdling that day. Dannis ran the team in much the same spirit, but with far more success. He was not very big, and he looked rather heavy, but he had a remarkable head on his shoulders, and was quite light enough to make several startling runs and was a live-wire all the time that he remained in the contest. When, in the second half, another candidate for the position took his place the difference was at once discernible in the slowing down of the game.

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While most of the fellows turned out to look on, enthusiasm, when there was any, was distinctly perfunctory. Still, that might have been laid to the game itself, for interesting features were few and far between. Dannis got away several times for good gains and showed himself a remarkably elusive object in a broken field, but as nothing much depended on his success or non-success there was scant reason to enthuse. Mapleton was outclassed from the first and that Parkinson did not score more than the twenty points that made up her final total was less to Mapleton's credit than to the home team's discredit. A game in which one contestant takes the lead in the first five minutes of play and is never headed is not very exciting at best, and Ira walked back to the

campus after the game with his estimate of football as a diversion not a bit enhanced.

If Parkinson deserved any credit for winning from her adversary by a score of 20 to 0, she certainly didn't get it. "Just the way we started off last year," Ira heard a fellow remark on the way back to the yard. "Ran up about half as many points as we should have on Cumner High School and then played worse every game for the rest of the season."

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"We ought to have scored forty on that team today," replied his companion. "A team with any sort of an attack could have torn our line to fragments. Why, as it was our centre just fell apart every time anyone looked at it!"

"Lyons didn't do so badly," said the other. "And neither did Wirt. But 'The' Dannis was the whole shooting match, pretty nearly. I don't see why they wanted to put Basker in in the last half. He isn't a patch on 'The.'"

"I suppose Driscoll wants to bring him around for second-string man. You'll see all sorts of combinations tried out for the next month. And they'll all be about equally punk, too, I guess. What the dickens is the matter with the team nowadays, anyway? Is it the coaching or the leading or what, Steve?"

"Search me! All I know is that it's rotten. Has been for three years. I don't think it's the coaching. This chap Driscoll looks like a good one. Everyone says that. And Fred Lyons is all right, too. There isn't a fellow in school that can boss a job better than Lyons. I guess it's a plain case of chronic slump!"

Ira wanted very much to speak out and tell them that possibly some of the fault for the team's lack of success was due to them. "If," he said to himself as he watched the two boys turn off toward Sohmer Hall, "you'd stop thinking the team was poor maybe it wouldn't be. No team, I guess, can do much if no one believes in it. What is needed here is a change of heart! I suppose every fellow connected with the team realises that the school is laughing at him, and I guess that doesn't help much. Seems to me there ought to be a way to change things, to get the fellows back of the team again. But—I wonder how!"

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CHAPTER X

ON THE FOURTH SQUAD

[140]

"How much does a football suit cost, Humphrey, and where do you buy it?"

Humphrey looked up from his book and smiled quizzically across at the enquirer. "Hello!" he said. "Going to the rescue of the dear old school after all, Rowly?"

Ira nodded slowly. "It sounds sort of silly, I guess," he replied, "but I've decided to have a try at it. I don't believe for a minute that they'll keep me more than one day, but Lyons wanted me to try it, and—well, I guess that's the least I can do. Someone ought to do something for the team besides 'knock' it. Where do you get these things you wear?"

"Wherever they sell 'em. There's a store a block or so over towards the common where they have footballs and things in the window. Don't remember the name, but you can't miss it."

"How much do you have to pay for a regular outfit?"

"Never bought one, Rowly. The only time I played football it was just kid stuff, and we wore whatever we had. You might ask our fat friend next door. He's on the team—or trying for it."

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"Duff? I don't know him well enough, I guess. Do you think ten dollars would do it?"

"Well, hardly, Rowly! Why, shoes cost four, I suppose. And then you have to have trousers and stockings and jacket and sweater—"

"I've got a sweater," interrupted Ira. "I wish I knew someone who had some things they weren't using. I hate to spend a lot of money for something I may not need after two or three days!"

"You don't seem to think very well of your chances," laughed Humphrey. "But, say, why don't you ask someone? I'll bet there are plenty of outfits you could buy or borrow. How about that chap Goodloe? He might know of someone."

"That's so. I think I'll ask him."

"The only trouble," chuckled Humphrey, "is that another fellow's togs will probably be too small for you. Maybe you could have them let out, though."

"I sort of wish I'd stop growing so fast," said Ira sorrowfully. "Everything I get is too small for me after a few months. The tailor is fixing both my other suits, but I dare say by the time he gets them done he will have to start over again!"

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This conversation took place on the Sunday evening succeeding the Mapleton game. That it was Sunday explained Humphrey's presence at home, for he spent most of his evenings in or around the Central Billiard Palace, so far as Ira could make out. Humphrey had heard from home and was once more in funds. He had promptly returned Ira's loans and paid his share of the furnishings, laughingly explaining that he wanted to keep his credit good as he would probably

have to borrow again soon. Ira wished that he would spend less time in the town and more in the third floor back room at Maggy's, for there were already indications of impending trouble between Humphrey and various instructors. But Ira decided that Humphrey had better learn his own lesson from experience. Humphrey was not the sort one could offer suggestions to, no matter how excellent or well-meant they might be. Of late the roommates had got on very well. Ira was certain that there had been no more cigarette smoking in the house and was fairly sure that Humphrey had given up the habit entirely. Perhaps it was because Ira was getting used to the other, but it seemed to him that he could detect an improvement both in Humphrey's manners and appearance. When the latter wanted to be pleasant he could be very pleasant, and at such times he was rather a likable sort.

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Ira went across to Williams as soon as breakfast was over the next morning and found both Gene Goodloe and Fred Lyons at home. When he had explained his mission both fellows dived into closets and trunks and in about three minutes Ira was outfitted. Fortunately, the pair of well-worn trousers were Fred's, for had they been Gene's they would never have answered. The jacket was practically new, one that Gene had purchased two years before with visions in mind of making his class team. It didn't lace quite close across the chest, but answered well enough for the present. The shoes were Fred's, and save that each had one or more cleats missing, were in very good shape. The brown jersey, with leather pads at elbows and shoulders, was Gene's, and, while it fitted a bit too soon, promised to conform in time to the physical proportions of the new wearer. A pair of stockings alone was wanting. Fred found some, but after exposing the heels he discarded them. However, stockings were a small item, and as for a sweater, Ira had a perfectly good one that had never been worn. It wasn't brown, but Fred said that wouldn't matter a bit.

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The only trouble obtruded when Ira broached the subject of price. Neither boy wanted to consider payment. "Why, the things aren't worth ten cents," declared Gene. "I'd never use mine, and Fred's got more togs at the gym than he can wear!"

"But I can't just—just walk off in them," protested Ira. "I'd rather buy them, if you don't mind."

"But we do mind!" said Gene. "We'd blush to take money for them. Look at Fred. He's blushing already!" Ira couldn't detect it, however, and resolutely draped the garments over the back of a chair as he took them off.

"I guess I'll have to buy them at the store then," he said regretfully. "I'm awfully much obliged to you, but I can't take them unless you let me pay for them."

"Oh, don't be a silly chump!" begged Gene. But Fred interposed.

"If you feel that way about it, Rowland, why, we'll take your money, of course. A couple of dollars will settle with me and I guess Gene won't want more than a dollar."

"A dollar!" jeered his roommate. "He can have them for fifty cents."

"I guess I'd better make an offer," said Ira soberly. "The trousers aren't so new as the other things. I'll give you a dollar for them. And I'll give two dollars for the shoes, fifty cents for the shirt and fifty cents for the jacket. Will that do?"

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"Suits me," said Fred.

"Me, too," answered Gene. "And, say, Rowland, I've got a lot of other things I wish you'd look at. Need a nice Winter overcoat? Or a few pairs of shoes? Or—say, what'll you give for the furniture just as it stands?"

"Dry up, Gene," growled Fred. "I'm glad you're coming out, Rowland. Practice is at three-thirty. If you don't find time to get stockings don't bother about them. We'll find some for you at the gym."

"Thanks, but I'll get a pair this morning. What shall I do when I get there this afternoon?"

"Report to me, please, and I'll look after you. And, say, Rowland, don't get discouraged if it seems a good deal like drudgery at first. Stick it out, will you? There is a good deal of hard work in it, and coming out a week late will make it a bit harder. But you'll like it as soon as you get used to it."

"Yes, just as soon as you've broken an arm or a leg," said Gene cheerfully, "you'll positively love it, Rowland!"

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When Ira had gone out, his purchases draped over his arm, Fred said mildly: "What's the good of trying to make him feel uncomfortable, Gene? He wanted to buy the things, so why not let him do it if it was going to make him any happier?"

"I'll bet he didn't feel as uncomfortable as I did," answered the other. "I felt like a second-hand clothes dealer. I didn't want his old dollar. Besides, he hasn't much money, I guess, and it seemed a shame to take it."

"Folks who don't have money, Gene, are the ones who are touchiest about accepting presents," observed Fred wisely. "I hope we can do something with that chap," he added as he gathered his books together. "If he can be taught he'll be a prize."

"Why can't he be taught? If you think he's stupid you're dead wrong, Frederick dear. He's got a heap of horse sense, that kid."

"I know. I don't mean that he's stupid. Only—well, some fellows can learn about everything except football. I don't know why it is, but it's so. Maybe football requires a certain sort of instinct—"

"Oh, piffle! You football fellows think the game's something sort of—of different from everything else there is! You make me tired! It's a sight harder to run the half-mile than it is to play a dozen football games!"

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"It might be for you," answered Fred, dryly. "To the limited intellect an easy task always seems the harder. Good morning!"

"Listen, you big galoot! You use Rowland right. Hear me? If you don't I'll lick you!"

"What you say goes, Gene," answered Fred airily from the doorway. "I'll wrap him in cotton wool the very first thing!"

"Yes, take the stuffing out of your head," retorted Gene triumphantly.

That afternoon, feeling queer and conspicuous in his unfamiliar attire, Ira slipped out of the gymnasium and joined the stream trickling to the gridiron. That the football togs made a difference in him was proved when he passed Raymond White near the grandstand. Ray viewed him carelessly and looked away without recognition. Then, dimly conscious of a likeness to someone he knew, Ray looked again and turned back.

"Hello, Rowland!" he exclaimed, laughing. "By Jove, I didn't know you! So you're out, eh? I'm awfully glad. I sort of thought you'd get the fever after watching a game or two. Well, you'll like it. See if you don't."

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Ira didn't think it worth while to explain that instead of having acquired the football fever, he had, on the contrary, decided that his first opinion of the game was the correct one and was there that afternoon more because of a sense of duty than anything else.

"Are you looking for Lowell?" continued Ray. "He isn't out yet, I guess. What are you trying for? Or don't you know that?"

"No, I don't. What I think I'd rather do is hold one of those iron rods along the side," laughed Ira. "I was told to report to Lyons, but I don't see him around."

"No, he isn't here yet. Pick up one of those balls back of you and we'll pass a minute."

After two attempts to catch and throw the erratically behaving pigskin it dawned on Ira that he had even more to learn than he had suspected. However, following Ray White's instructions, he presently learned to stop the ball with both hands and body instead of treating it like a baseball, and to wrap his fingers about it so he could throw it within a few yards of where he meant it to land. There wasn't much time for passing, however, as coach, captain and manager arrived together very shortly, and Ira, rather conscious of his strange togs, approached the group.

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"Oh, here you are!" greeted Fred Lyons. "Coach, this is Rowland, the chap I was telling you about. Shake hands with Coach Driscoll, Rowland. And Manager Lowell. You might give Lowell your name and so on. He's full of questions."

Ira shook hands and, while De Wolf Lowell put down his name, age, class and so on, was conscious of the coach's intent regard. When Lowell was satisfied Ira turned inquiringly to Captain Lyons, but it was the coach who took him in hand.

"You've had no experience at all, Rowland?" asked Mr. Driscoll in a somewhat sceptical tone.

"No, sir."

"Funny! A chap with your build ought to be playing long before this. What have you done? Baseball? Track? What?"

"I've played baseball a little. That's about all."

The coach reached out and closed his fingers inquiringly over Ira's forearm and then pressed his knuckles against the boy's chest. "Where'd you get those muscles, then?" he demanded.

"I don't know, sir. Maybe in the woods. I've swung an ax sometimes, and I've ridden a saw."

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"Ridden a saw? What's that?"

"Why," replied Ira, smiling, "when a kid like me, or a new hand, takes hold of a cross-saw they say he 'rides' it. 'Just you keep your feet off the ground, sonny, and I'll ride you' is what the old hands tell you."

His audience laughed, and Coach Driscoll remarked: "Well, I guess you got down and walked sometimes, Rowland! You've got some fat on you that you don't need, but we'll work that off. Put him on the scales after practice, Lowell, and see that he doesn't come down too fast. Have you had your examination?"

Ira shook his head. "For what, sir?" he asked.

"For football—or anything else. I guess it's all right for today, but you'll have to see Mr. Tasser tomorrow and he will fill out a card. If he finds you all right for football—as he will, I guess—show your card to Lowell. Now, then, let's see. You'd better join that fourth squad over there. Learn to handle the ball the first thing, Rowland. It'll take you two or three days to get acquainted with it, I guess. Don't be in a hurry to get on. I'll look you up again in a day or two."

"I'll take you over," said Fred Lyons. "Do we scrimmage today, coach?"

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"Oh, I think so. You fellows didn't work very hard Saturday from what I saw!"

Fred smiled as he crossed the field with Ira in tow. "We worked hard, all right," he said, "but we worked rotten, too! Did you see Saturday's game, Rowland?"

"Yes. I suppose you wouldn't call it a very good one, would you?"

"Punk! Here we are. Oh, Cheap! Will you take Rowland in your squad, please? He's new at it, but willing to learn. How's it going?"

"Fair," replied the boy addressed. "Some of these fellows think that thing's an egg, though. They hate to be rough with it for fear it'll break. Fall in there beyond Webster, Rowland, will you? Hug the ball when it comes to you. You can't bust it!"

A tall youth sidled along to make room for Ira and during the next twenty minutes he learned a lot about the uncertain disposition of a football. They passed it in a circle and then in a line, and after that Cheap, a freckle-faced, tow-haired youth with a short temper and a fine command of sarcasm, stood in front of them and tossed the ball to the ground and it was their duty to fall on hip and elbow and secure it. Falling on a dribbling ball is not the easiest thing in the world for a novice, for the ball does the most unexpected things, such as bounding to the right when you think it is going to jump to the left, or stopping short when you think it will come on. On the whole, Ira comforted himself with the reflection that he met with more success than many of the squad even if he didn't do as well as a select few. Practice at starting followed, and for ten minutes they raced from a mark at the instant that Cheap snapped the ball. Then they were coached in picking the ball up without stopping and in catching it on the bound as it was tossed in front of them. By that time Ira was drenched in perspiration and was extremely short of breath. Finally, they were formed again into a ring and the ball was passed from one to the other as before, the boy at the right throwing it at the next fellow's stomach and the next fellow making a "basket" for it by raising one leg, bending his body forward at the waist and holding his hands apart. If he was successful the ball thumped against his stomach and his hands closed about it. If he wasn't, it leaped away to the ground and he had to fall on it. Ira discovered that day why his brown jersey was padded at elbow and shoulder!

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Cheap strolled off to the side line, leaving them to continue the exercise without him, whereupon conversation went around with the ball. "I'm getting sick of this," said the fellow at Ira's right as he gave the pigskin a more than ordinarily vicious drive at Ira's stomach. "We were at it five minutes before you came."

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"I guess I'll dream of it tonight," laughed Ira breathlessly, passing the pigskin along to his left-hand neighbour.

"If you don't it'll be a wonder," growled the other. "I did for two or three nights. Cheap makes me tired, anyway. He's a regular slave-driver. If we don't get something else tomorrow I'm going to quit."

"You said that last week," remarked a small youth beyond him. "So did I. But we're still here. Change!"

He started the ball around in the other direction and the fellows shifted to meet the new order. Presently Cheap returned, watched disapprovingly for a minute and then called: "That'll do, squad! You're fine and rotten! On the run to the bench, and put your blankets on!"

Trotting half the length and width of the field seemed to Ira the final insult, but he managed to reach the substitutes' bench without falling by the way and sank on to it with a deep sigh of gratitude. The rest of the practice time was spent by his squad and one other in watching the half-hour scrimmage. Then came the return to the gymnasium, showers and a leisurely dressing, during which nearly every muscle in Ira's body ached protestingly.

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But after he had eaten his dinner he felt, in spite of his soreness, particularly fit, and found himself looking forward to the next day's work with a sort of eagerness. It wasn't so much that he expected to enjoy it as that he was curious to know whether he would survive it! He did survive it, however, although when he rolled out of bed in the morning he had to groan as his stiff muscles responded to the demands put on them. He underwent an examination at the hands of the physical director, Mr. Tasser, at noon, and was put to all sorts of novel tests. Mr. Tasser was not very communicative. His conversation consisted entirely of directions and non-committal grunts. While Ira donned his clothes again the director filled out a card with mysterious figures and symbols, and it was when he handed the card to Ira that he attained the zenith of his loquacity.

"Very good," he said. Then he grunted. And after that he added: "Better than the average. Lower leg muscles weak, though. Twelve pounds overweight, too. Good morning."

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Practice that afternoon, which was no different from the day before except that it contained a strenuous session of dummy tackling, left Ira lamer than ever, so lame that he couldn't go to sleep for some time after he was in bed. And the next morning he groaned louder than before when he tumbled out. He wondered what they would say or think if he begged off for that one day's practice! But when he had been up and about awhile he found that the lameness had miraculously disappeared, or most of it had, and it didn't come back again that Fall! He was given easier work that afternoon, for Billy Goode, the trainer, informed him that he was losing too fast.

"Tain't good to drop your weight too suddenly, boy. You do some handling today and run the field a couple o' times at a fast trot and come in. That'll do for you."

Oddly, Ira somehow resented being pampered and was inclined to grumble when, having had thirty minutes of kindergarten work and trotted twice around the oval, he was remorselessly despatched to the showers. That, having dressed, he did not return to the gridiron to watch his companions disport themselves shows that so far as football fever is concerned Ira was still free

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from contagion. Instead, he went to his room and put in an extra hour of study which shortened his evening's duty by that much and allowed him to do something that he had had in mind to do for some time, which was to call on Mart Johnston.

CHAPTER XI

IRA RENEWS AN ACQUAINTANCE

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Martin Johnston and Dwight Bradford occupied what at Parkinson was known as an alcove study. To be correct, it was not the study that formed an alcove, but the bedroom. There were only a few of such apartments in Goss Hall and those who had them were considered fortunate. Number 16 proved to be rather a luxurious place. There was a good deal of furniture, most of it black-oak, the chairs having red-leather cushions and the study table being adorned with a square of the same brilliant material. One side of the room was lined with bookcases to a height of about five feet and the shelves were filled and a row of books overflowed to the top. Many pictures were on the walls, a deep window seat, covered in red denim, was piled with pillows and there was a dark-brown wool rug with a red border on the floor. The alcove, just big enough for two single beds and a night stand between, was partly hidden by red portières. At first sight, as Ira paused in the doorway after being bidden to enter, the room was disconcertingly, almost alarmingly, colourful.

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"Evening and everything!" said a voice from beyond the light on the table, and a chair was pushed back. Then Mart's form emerged from the white glare. "Hello!" he said. "How are you, Rowland? Glad to see you. Meet Mr. Bradford, Rowland. Brad, you remember my speaking of Rowland?"

A second youth, who had been lying on the window seat, arose and came forward to shake hands. He was a nice-looking fellow of eighteen, broad of shoulder and deep of chest. Ira recognised him as one of the substitute ends he had seen in practice. He had a pleasant, deep voice, a jolly smile and a firm, quick way of shaking hands. Ira fell victim to Bradford's charms then and there.

"Awfully glad to meet you, Rowland. Yes, I remember you said a lot about this chap, Mart. It was Rowland you landed in Maggy's, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Sit down, Rowland. How's everything going?"

"Very well, thanks."

"That's good. Toss your cap anywhere. Brad won't like it, but never mind." Mart's words were amiable enough, but it was evident to the caller that he was not forgiven for his indifference, and so, as he thrust his cap into a pocket, he decided to make an explanation.

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"I guess you thought it was funny I didn't look you up," he began. But Mart waved carelessly.

"Not a bit! Not a bit, Rowland! I never thought of it."

Ira, glancing at Bradford to include him in the conversation, saw a flicker of amusement cross that youth's face.

"I'd like to tell you why," he went on. "It—it makes me out rather a chump, I guess, but—well, anyway, it was like this." And Ira told about finding Mart's note and the odour of cigarettes at the same time and of connecting both with Mart. "Of course," he concluded, "any fellow has a right to smoke, but I don't believe in it, and I sort of thought that if—you were that kind—I mean—"

"Got you!" exclaimed Mart. "Say no more, Rowland! All is understood and all is forgiven! Brad, we're going to like this frank and unspotted child of nature, aren't we?"

Brad laughed softly. "I certainly admire Rowland's decision," he replied. "And his courage in explaining. It's always so much easier not to explain, Rowland."

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"I'm afraid I haven't done it very well," said Ira doubtfully.

"You have, old man!" declared Mart. "Beautifully! And you have covered me with confusion and filled me with remorse. Brad," he added gravely, "from this time forth tempt me not. I'm through with the filthy weed. I shall empty my cigarette case into the fire. And if you take my advice you'll do the same."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ira. "I didn't know—I'm awfully sorry—"

But Mart waved again grandly. "Not a word, Rowland! We quite understand. You have convinced me of the error of my way. And I sincerely hope and pray that Brad, too, will see the light."

But Brad was smiling broadly and Ira concluded relievedly that Mart was only joking. "I might have put my foot into it horribly," he said, with a sigh of relief.

"Well, you didn't, so don't worry," replied Mart. "We don't smoke much here. Of course, Brad's a senior and enjoys his pipe after dinner—you doubtless noticed the odour—and I sometimes puff a cigar in the evening. I find it soothes me and aids digestion. I smoke two on Fridays, on account of having fish for dinner. I never could digest fish very well."

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"Oh, dry up, Mart," laughed Brad. "Rowland will believe you. He's looking shocked."

"Not he! You can't shock him. I tried it. I say, Rowland, how's the funny window seat?"

"It isn't so funny now. I put the desk against one end of it and it looks quite fine."

"You spoiled the effect. I'm sorry. What's this fellow like, your roommate? The one who contaminates the air with cigarette smoke?"

"Need? Oh, he's all right. He doesn't do it any more."

"Really? What did you say to him?"

"I just—just told him he mustn't. He was very decent about it."

"I'll bet he was!" laughed Mart. "I can see you." He jumped up, folded his arms across his chest and bent a stern look on Ira. "'Smead, this must cease. I cannot have the pure atmosphere of this apartment polluted with your vile cigarettes. Do you realise that it is a dirty and unhealthful habit? Let me beg of you to have done with it. Think of your future, Smead, of your unsuspecting family at home, of your own welfare, and pause on the brink of destruction. And I may add, Smead, that if you don't pause, I'll knock your block off!' Wasn't that about it, Rowland?"

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"Not quite," laughed Ira. "I didn't have to offer to fight him, because he was very nice about it."

"Irrefutably! *But* if he hadn't been I can guess what would have happened to Smead," chuckled Mart.

"His name is Nead," Ira corrected.

"Need? Well, a friend in Need is a friend indeed. Asterisk. See footnote. 'Vide Bartlett's Familiar Quotations.' What are you doing to pass the long Winter evenings, Rowland?"

"I went out for the football team the other day," was the reply.

"Of course!" exclaimed Brad. "I knew I'd seen you around somewhere, Rowland. If you'd been in togs I'd have recognised you. How is it going?"

"I don't know much about it. They've had me in the awkward squad for several days and I guess I'm no more awkward than when I began."

"That's something," said Mart. "Now Brad here is much worse after three years than he was when he started. Aren't you, Brad?"

"Sometimes I think I am! What are you trying for, Rowland?"

"Me? Oh, I don't know. Whatever they say, I guess. I wasn't keen about doing it, but Fred Lyons said I ought to try, and so I did. Things don't look very easy for Lyons and the others and I thought that if they really could find a use for me I might as well go out."

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"Wish there were more like you," said Brad. "I've been trying to get Mart started, but he hasn't your sense of duty."

"Duty!" scoffed Mart. "That isn't duty, that's Rowland's fine, old New England conscience. He comes from Vermont——"

"Maine, please," said Ira.

"I mean Maine, and that's where they make them. I come from New Jersey, you see, and we don't have consciences."

"Haven't you ever tried it?" asked Ira.

"Football?" Mart shook his head. "No, I never felt reckless enough. I play a little baseball and some tennis and a bit of hockey and can swing a golf stick, but beyond that I don't participate in athletics."

"They don't allow us to take part in more than three sports," explained Brad, "and that's Mart's difficulty. If he went in for football he'd have to give up either baseball, hockey or tennis. And as he thinks he is needed on those teams he hesitates."

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"I do more than hesitate," replied Mart. "I stand immovable. There are plenty of fellows who can play football. Let them go out and save the country. I'm busy."

"I don't see how you could play football, too," said Ira. "But I guess there are plenty of fellows who could and won't. I don't know much about things here yet, but it seems a pity to me that the school doesn't take more interest in the team."

"No one can blame you," said Mart flippantly. "Football at Parkinson, Rowland, is one of the lost arts. It's like dragon's blood vases and—and Tyrian purple and Rembrandt paintings. We live in the past, as it were. Football vanished from Parkinson about the time the battle of Bunker Hill took place on Breed's Hill. That's a funny thing, by the way. Why do you suppose they fought the Bunker Hill battle where they did? My idea is that Mr. Breed offered them more money and fifty per cent of the moving picture rights. Mr. Bunker must have been frightfully peeved, though, what?"

"Football is in a bad way here, Rowland, and that's a fact," said Brad, "but it only needs one successful season to put it on its feet again. And I'm hoping hard that this season will do it. We've got a pretty fair start as far as material goes. I mean, we've got quite a bunch of last year's fellows back. The trouble is we can't seem to get out new material. They just won't come. Fred has fits and talks about calling a mass meeting and all that, but Driscoll says he can build a team of what he's got; that he'd rather have fifty fellows who want to play than a hundred who don't."

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And I think Driscoll's dead right."

"Yes, you think anything Driscoll says or does is right," jeered Mart. "If he told you to stand on your head for an hour in the middle of the field and wave your legs you'd do it."

"Perhaps. Anyway, he's a good coach. He showed that last year."

"By letting Kenwood lick us?"

"By not letting her lick us worse than she did, son. When Driscoll took hold everything was at sixes and sevens. The other coach had gone off in a huff and half the team were for him and half for the captain and there was the dickens to pay generally. Well, Driscoll stepped in and paid no attention to anything that had happened. When the captain tried to tell him about the fuss he just said: 'I don't want to hear anything about it. I'm here to turn out a football team. What happened last week or yesterday doesn't concern me in the least. I'm beginning today. Now then, let's get at it.'"

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"Well," said Mart, "I hope he justifies your belief in him, old chap. Personally, I don't like the way he brushes his hair. I never yet saw a fellow with a cowlick who amounted to a hill of beans. Did you, Rowland?"

"I don't think I ever noticed."

"Well, you study it and you'll find I'm right. Who do you know? Met many of the fellows yet?"

"Not a great many. I guess I know twenty or thirty."

"Twenty or thirty! Geewhillikins! I'd say that was going some. You're a good mixer, Rowland. I'll bet I didn't know ten when I'd been here a month."

"Who were the other nine?" asked Brad, drily. "I was one."

"You! I didn't count you at all! You said you knew Gene Goodloe, I remember, Rowland. He's a good sort. And of course you know Fred Lyons."

"Yes, a little. I've been pretty busy so far and haven't been around much."

"Busy? What do you find to do?"

"Study, for one thing," said Ira smiling.

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"My fault! I forgot you had a conscience. Well, a certain amount of study does help one. That's what I tell Brad, but he won't listen. Advice with Brad is like water on a duck's back, in one ear and out the other."

"I guess I'd better go back and do some more of it," said Ira, pulling his cap from his pocket.

"Walk around! It's early yet. Well, if you must go——"

"I hope you'll come and see us again," said Brad. "Come some time when Mart's out so we can have a chat."

"I like that!" cried his chum. "Gee, I never get a word in edgeways when you're around. I'll leave it to you, Rowland. Who's done most of the talking here this evening?"

"I'm afraid I have," laughed Ira. "Good night. I—if you'd care to come and see me some time I'd be glad to have you. My place isn't very much, though. Still, if you'd care to—And I'd like you to meet Nead."

"Very glad to," replied Brad. "We'll drop around some evening. Good night, Rowland. Don't forget your way here."

"Good night," said Mart. "I'm sorry you must go, Rowland, but at least I can smoke my cigarette now. Come again and bring your dog!"

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When Ira reached the first landing at Maggy's a sudden glare of light shot across the dim hall and he saw the tall form of "Old Earnest" silhouetted in his doorway.

"Do you know—" began a voice.

"Oh, yes: B.C. 431 to 404," said Ira.

"Eh? What are you talking about?" exclaimed the voice startledly.

"Why, the Peloponnesian War!"

"Pelop—Huh! Who cares about——!"

The door was slammed irately and Ira stumbled his way up in the gloom, chuckling.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE LINE-UP

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Country Day School came Saturday and put up a good fight, but was defeated by the score of 7 to 3. Ira witnessed that contest from the bench and found more interest in it than in the Mapleton battle because he wanted very much to have Parkinson win. He felt certain that a defeat would make much more difficult the already discouraging task ahead of captain and coach. Then, too,

there was a personal side to it. He was, to a limited extent, a member of that brown-legged team, and, naturally enough, he preferred to be associated with success. But he just couldn't get up any real excitement, even when, in the third period, Country Day scored that field-goal and took the lead, or when, ten minutes later, Parkinson, with Dannis back to yelp and drive, marched from the enemy's forty-yard line to her nine and then tossed a forward-pass over to Ray White. Of course, now that he knew what it was all about—or some of it!—and realised how hard the brown team was working on that thirty-yard march, he found more interest, but, unlike some of the others around him, he was able to sit quietly on the bench without squirming, didn't make funny noises in his throat when Wells fumbled a pass and, in brief, kept his heart beating away at its normal speed. But he *was* glad when it was over and Parkinson had won, and he said as much to Logan, a substitute end, with whom he walked back to the gymnasium.

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"I'm glad we won it," he said in a quietly satisfied tone. "Aren't you?"

Logan turned and viewed him quizzically. "Are you really?" he asked. "Just like that, eh? Well, if I were you I'd try to restrain my enthusiasm, Rowland. Over-excitement is bad for the heart!"

"Over-exci—Oh, well, I guess I haven't been here long enough to get very excited about it. I was just thinking that maybe the school would be pleased and be more—feel better disposed toward the team."

"The school!" scoffed Logan. "Who cares what the school does? We play our own game." With which somewhat cryptic remark he kicked open the door and hurried in to get undressed before the showers were all occupied.

The next Monday Ira was taken from the seclusion of the fourth squad and handed over to the none too tender mercies of a large, red-faced youth of nineteen named Neely. Dave Neely looked Ira up and down almost, as Ira felt, compassionately. "Oh, all right," said Neely as though disclaiming further responsibility, "get in with that gang there and see what you can do. You can't be worse than most of them, I suppose. What's your name?"

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"Rowland."

"What makes you think you want to play guard, Rowland?"

"Nothing. I mean, I don't want to play guard, especially."

"You don't!" growled Neely. "Then what are you doing here?"

"Coach Driscoll told me to report to you. He didn't tell me what I was to do. But I'd just as lief be guard as anything."

"Suffering cats!" groaned Neely. "And this is what happens to a peace-loving citizen like me! Have you ever played guard?"

"No." Ira shook his head, smiling a little in sympathy with Neely's outraged feelings. "I haven't played anywhere. I'm just beginning."

"Fine! I can see that you're going to be a huge success. Well, all right." Neely waved a hand wearily. "Cut across to that gang and do what you see them do. Only for the love of Mike, try to do it better!"

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The "gang" alluded to consisted of some ten or a dozen boys who were divided into two lines. They faced each other and, when one of their number stooped down and trickled a ball back between his wide-spread legs immediately crashed together and lunged and pushed and shoved and gave a good imitation of a small riot. Most of the linesmen were older than Ira, and several of them were larger. He couldn't find a place to station himself and was still hesitating when Neely arrived, almost on his heels.

"Move up one, Buffum, and let this man in there. You're a guard, Rowland. The other side has the ball. Now get through."

The man nearly opposite Ira grunted and trickled the pigskin away. Ira was watching him intently and would have continued to watch had not the youth in front of him plunged into him and sent him reeling back. Dave Neely's face became apoplectic. "Didn't you see you were in the gentleman's way, Rowland?" he demanded with heavy sarcasm. "Why didn't you lie down and let him go over you?"

Ira regarded him doubtfully. "Should I have stopped him!" he asked.

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A roar of laughter arose from the panting players and Neely's countenance became even redder. "Should you have—Oh, no! Oh, dear, no! Not if it's too much trouble, Rowland! This is just a little light exercise, you know. Nothing of consequence. We're just whiling away an idle hour. Why, you—you—Look here, don't you know anything about the duties of a linesman?"

"I'm afraid not, but if you'll tell me—"

"Oh, I'll tell you! Listen now. That brown oblate spheroid, or whatever the scientific name of it is, is a football. Those fellows in front of you are attacking. When you see that football snapped you want to get through and go after it. You have other duties, but that's enough for now. Get through! Get through! Try it now."

Away trickled the ball, the lines crashed together and—Ira was lying on the ground four yards behind the opposing line with the ball snuggled to his chest! Neely stared a moment. Then, seeing the grins on the faces of the others, he chuckled. "All right, Rowland," he called. "Let him up. You needn't bother to fall on the ball just now, but that *is* the way I want you to get through. That was all right. Now, then, Tooker, what happened to you?"

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Tooker looked puzzled and shook his head vaguely. "I guess he caught me napping," he replied. "You *guess* he did! You *know* he did! Try it again."

Ira didn't get by the next time, for his opponent was prepared, but he gave Tooker all the work he could stand, and Neely grunted approval. They kept at it for some twenty minutes longer, one side playing on defence and then the other. Ira discovered things from watching the rest and Neely instructed between each charge. After that they had ten minutes with the machine, a wooden platform having a padded rail on one side and four small and absolutely inadequate iron wheels beneath. Having loaded the platform with half the squad, Neely set the rest at pushing it ahead with their shoulders set against the rail. It was punishing work for the chargers, only partly compensated for when it became their part to ride and watch the others push.

Work with the linesmen continued for a week without much variety. Always the afternoon started with tackling practice on the dummy and ended with a jog around the field. Ira made progress and Neely no longer viewed him with an air of patient fortitude. In fact, Neely was rather pleased with him and more than once said so. Almost anyone save Ira would have been all perked up by that commendation, and would have had hard work concealing the fact. But Ira only looked mildly gratified and said simply that he was "glad if he was any use, thanks!" [175]

The Cumner High School game went to Parkinson, 18 to 7, and was quite an exciting event if only because of the numerous fumbles and misplays which were about evenly divided between the contending teams. Cumner was light and fast and Parkinson heavier and decidedly slower. A wet field aided the home team by handicapping Cumner's speedy backfield. All three of Parkinson's touchdowns resulted from steady line-plunging—diversified by fumbles of the wet ball—and Cumner scored by the overhead route, tossing a long forward-pass across the line in the third quarter. Cumner kicked her goal, while Cole, of Parkinson, missed each attempt. The brown team suffered several injuries that afternoon, for a slippery field invariably takes its toll of the players. Donovan, left guard, sprained his knee badly, French, a tackle, pulled a tendon in his leg and Cole, first-string right half, got a nasty bruise on his head. Cumner, too, sustained injuries, but none were serious. [176]

Ira went back with Gene Goodloe to Williams that evening after a lecture in the auditorium and found Lyons and several football fellows present. He had entertained the notion that the afternoon's victory was something to be mildly proud of, but after listening, in silence for the most part, to the conversation he saw that he had been far too optimistic. Parkinson had committed every sin in the football category. Everyone agreed on that. The line had been slow and had played too high, the backfield had lacked punch and the ends—well, the least said of the ends the better! Everyone was inclined to be very gloomy, and the injury to Donovan didn't seem to cheer them up any! Ira went home at ten o'clock realising that football was not merely the pastime he had believed it to be, but something terribly earnest and important, a little more important, evidently, than mid-year examinations or—or a presidential election! He shook his head and sighed as he climbed the stairs at Maggy's. It was beyond his comprehension, he concluded.

They put him in a line-up one afternoon the next week and he struggled for some ten or twelve minutes in a perfectly hopeless effort to outplay Brackett, of the first squad. Perhaps he shouldn't have expected to get the best of a veteran like Brackett, but he was, at all events, rather disappointed when he was taken out and sent hobbling off to the showers. He hobbled because someone had ruthlessly stamped on his foot and he had a suspicion that one or two of his toes were crushed and broken beyond repair. Also, his head was still ringing from the hearty impact of someone's shoe. He was relieved to find that, although red and swollen, the toes were apparently intact, while, as for his head, that responded to cold water and rest. [177]

"Football," said Ira to himself as he limped down the steps on his way to the town, "is a funny sort of game. You work like the dickens five days a week so you'll be able to 'play' on the sixth. Only I don't call it playing exactly, at that. Well, if I don't get killed I suppose I'll manage to get through the season. Unless, that is, they realise, as I do, that I'm no earthly use to them. I sort of hope they'll let me go before I break something worse than a couple of toes!"

But it didn't seem to be their plan to let him go, for two days later, when the first real cut came and the fourth squad ceased to exist, Ira was still kicking his heels on the bench during scrimmage. It seemed to him that Coach Driscoll had let many a better player depart in peace, and he wondered why he was retained. The second team had been made up for nearly a fortnight and Ira had been rather relieved at not being relegated to it. If, he argued, they put him on the second he might prove just good enough to be kept there for the balance of the season, while, if they kept him out for the first it was very likely that after awhile they would recognise his deficiencies and let him off. He was willing to stay there and do what they asked him to do just as long as he was wanted, but he always entertained the hope that some fine day Captain Lyons would gently and kindly inform him that they had decided to worry along without him. [178]

He was given instruction in catching punts, something at which he failed to distinguish himself, and was glad to find that the course was merely a sort of "extra" and intended to qualify him for an emergency rather than to fit him to play in the backfield. Of course, if Driscoll had said: "You go in for Dannis, at quarter, Rowland," he would have nodded and gone, just as he would have done had he been nonchalantly informed that he was to play right end or centre. But he did secretly hope that, failing to drop him, they would let him continue to play in a guard position. Without flattering himself, he felt that he could play guard fairly well if he wasn't opposed to some wonder like Brackett or Donovan. Ira's estimate of himself as a football player was modest those days, for, although he frequently received commendation, he concluded that folks were just [179]

being nice to him and "letting him down easy." Once when Fred Lyons said warmly: "Rowland, you're certainly shaping, old man, wonderfully!" Ira looked mildly gratified and said "Thank you" and secretly liked Fred better for being gracious to a "dub" like he.

After that first cut Ira could count on playing a few minutes every afternoon. Sometimes he was opposed to the first squad men and sometimes he was lined up with the first against the second team. When the latter event happened he usually gave a fairly good account of himself, always, in fact, when he played at left of centre, for then he was opposed to a rather light and seedy chap named Faulkner, and he could do about as he liked with Faulkner. If they played him at right guard—and they didn't seem to care much which side of the line they put him—he had his work cut out, for Johns was a hard, fast fellow to stand up to. As the days went by Ira began, rather to his own surprise, to look forward to those more or less brief periods of play. After all, there was something exciting about a physical encounter like that, something very interesting in matching his wit and brawn against the wit and brawn of another. Such times as he gave a good account of himself, Ira went back to the gymnasium and, later, to his room, in quite a glow of satisfaction. The glow didn't last long, however, and he always ended by laughing at himself for caring whether he or Johns had emerged victor in the struggle. [180]

Parkinson met her first reverse when she went away and played Phillipsburg Academy. Phillipsburg had won from Kenwood by one score the week before and Parkinson was anxious to defeat her. Perhaps Fred Lyons was more anxious than anyone else, for it seemed to him that a victory over a team which had lately defeated Parkinson's special rival would convince the school at large that the brown team was worthy of support. But it was not to be. With Donovan out of the game, the left side of the Parkinson line was unbelievably weak. Buffum did the best he could, doubtless, but Buffum was not a Donovan and never would be. Cole was not called on until the beginning of the third quarter, by which time Phillipsburg had a lead that Parkinson couldn't wear down. Coach Driscoll thrust a veritable army of substitutes into the fray in the final ten minutes, but all to no purpose. Ira had his baptism by fire that chilly, blowy October afternoon, and did neither better nor worse than the player he succeeded. Phillipsburg already had the game on ice by a score of 19 to 9, and as she played entirely on the defensive during most of the final period, Ira had little chance to distinguish himself. He played through six minutes, most of which was spent by him, or so he thought afterwards, in running up and down the field. Phillipsburg punted every time she got the ball, with the one thought of keeping the adversary outside her twenty-five-yard line. Parkinson nearly forced another score on her in the last three minutes when a forward pass from Wirt went to a Phillipsburg player and he had almost a clear field ahead of him. Dannis, however, managed to pull him to earth just short of the ten-yard line and when the home team had exhausted two downs in a vain attempt to puncture the brown line, her try-at-goal went a few inches wide of the upright. In the end 19 to 9 was the result, and Parkinson went home with trailing banners. [181]

CHAPTER XIII

A CONFERENCE

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As it happened, an unusually large number of fellows had accompanied the team that day, and in consequence a great many disappointed and disgruntled youths returned to Warne and a late supper and recited discouraging stories of the contest. Those who had remained at home shrugged their shoulders and said: "Well, what did you go for? You might have known!"

Fred Lyons was too downcast to make an effort to put a good face on the matter. As for Coach Driscoll, it was hard to say what his feelings were, for he looked and acted the same in success or failure. De Wolf Lowell, the manager, declared that Driscoll was beastly unsatisfactory, since he "always looked untroubled and you never could tell whether he wanted to kiss you or kick you!" The defeat could not have come at a more inopportune time, for the *Leader*, which appeared on Fridays, held that week an appeal for funds for the football team. It was a well-worded appeal, signed by the four class presidents and Manager Lowell, but it failed of its purpose very largely. In the course of the next week or so enough small contributions materialised to enable the team to struggle along for the moment, but the amount donated was only a drop in the bucket when viewed with the season's expenses in mind. [183]

There was a consultation Sunday evening in Coach Driscoll's room attended by coach, captain and manager. The coach's attitude was one of polite indifference when the matter of finances was reached. "It isn't in my province," he explained calmly. "That may sound heartless, fellows, but if I have to worry about money I can't give the undivided attention to my real business that it requires. I'm here to turn out a good team, and I mean to do it if it's any way possible. I can't do it if my mind is disturbed by questions of receipts and expenditures. Whatever you decide I'll agree to, and I'll do anything in reason to carry the play through, but you mustn't look to me for schemes."

"If we don't get some money," said Lowell dismally, "there won't be any use for a team."

"That's up to you," replied the coach, smiling.

Lowell looked doubtfully at Fred, and the latter nodded agreement. "The coach is right, old man. It isn't his funeral. We've got to find a way out ourselves." [184]

"Then, for the love of lemons, let's get something started," said Lowell impatiently. "Canvas the school, go through it with a fine-tooth comb. There's no other way. If we called a meeting it would end in a farce."

"I don't think so," said Fred. "We'd have the class leaders with us and a good many others. We could get them on the platform and have them speak. Whatever we do, though, we must wait until we've won a game."

"That's all very well, but suppose, we lose again Saturday!"

"We won't," replied Fred confidently. "We can beat High School without trouble. The only thing is that it won't be much of a victory when we get it! I wish it was Musket Hill next Saturday instead of High School."

"We can't wait much longer," protested the manager. "We need coin, Fred. We owe so many bills now that I'm ashamed to walk through town! Hang it, the money's here. Why can't we get hold of it? If it was the baseball team that needed it the fellows would fall all over themselves passing it out!"

"We're not popular," said Fred, with a grimace.

Coach Driscoll, who had listened tranquilly to the discussion, took his pipe from his mouth and viewed it thoughtfully. "I wouldn't count too much on a win next week," he said. "I'm planning to use a good many second-string fellows Saturday." The pipe went back again and he viewed Fred untroubledly.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Lowell. "That'll never do, Coach!"

"Is it necessary?" asked Fred dubiously.

The coach nodded. "Very," he answered. "The subs have got to taste blood if they're going to be any use. Just putting them in for a few minutes at the end of a game doesn't do much good. I want to start with practically a substitute line-up Saturday; Bradford, French, Buffum, Conlon maybe, and so on. You can start if you like and Dannis had better run them: and we'll keep Wirt in the backfield. I don't say that we won't win even with that bunch. I don't know much about the High School team. But I wouldn't consider it a foregone conclusion, fellows."

"That means waiting another week," said Lowell disgustedly.

"No, we'll go ahead whatever happens," said Fred. "Look here, we'll start things up tomorrow. Call a mass meeting for next Saturday night in the auditorium. I'll see Knowles and Hodges. You get after Sterner and young Lane. Tell them we'll want them to sign the notices and to say something at the meeting. Who else can we count on?"

"You'll speak; and Mr. Driscoll?" Lowell looked inquiringly across at the coach and the latter nodded. "And I will, too, if you want me to. Perhaps I'd better. I can tell them facts, give them figures and so on. How about Gene? He's Track Captain. Wouldn't he count?"

"Gene can't talk much," replied Fred. "I mean he isn't much of a speaker in public. Still, he will do his best if we ask him. I wish we knew of someone who really had the gift of the gab, someone who could get them started."

"How about you, coach?" asked Lowell.

But Mr. Driscoll shook his head. "I'm no spellbinder," he replied. "I'll talk, but don't expect eloquence, Lowell."

"Well, we'll just do the best we can," said Fred. "What time can you come around tomorrow? We'll have to draw up some notices to post and another to put in the *Leader*."

"I'll see my men in the morning and meet you at your room at half-past one," answered Lowell. "I'm glad we're going to get something started at last. I'm getting white-headed over it!"

"Through?" asked Mr. Driscoll. The others nodded. "Then let's take up another subject." He reached to the table and lifted a notebook to him. "We've got forty-odd men out now and we don't want them all much longer. I think we'd better make a final cut a week from Monday. We can tell how some of the green ones size up in the High School game. I wish I'd asked Billy Goode to come around here tonight. He's got dope on some of these chaps that I don't know."

"How many shall we keep?" asked Fred.

"Twenty-eight or thirty are enough. Run your eye over that list and see how it strikes you. I've crossed the names I mean to drop."

"Sumner?" asked Fred doubtfully as he went down the list.

"Don't need him. We've got five half-backs without him. He will be better next year, but he isn't 'varsity material yet."

Fred nodded and went on. Presently: "Rowland?" he questioned.

"Y-yes," answered the coach hesitantly. "I wasn't certain about him, though. If I were certain Crane would keep coming I'd drop Rowland, but Crane's pretty poor sometimes. What do you think?"

"I'd keep him," said Fred. "Rowland's a mighty steady player, and considering that he didn't know a football from a ham sandwich three weeks ago I think he's done remarkably."

"Yes, he has. I only questioned him because we don't want a lot of deadwood around. Cross him

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off, Lyons. If Donovan doesn't come around we may need him."

"Al? Isn't he going to? I thought he was coming back tomorrow."

"So he is, as far as I know, but a fellow who gets hurt once is twice as likely to get it again. I'm always leery of them after they once come a cropper. I've seen it happen so often. We'll keep Rowland and be on the safe side. The boy is a worker and would make a corking guard if he put his mind on his work. The trouble with him is that he acts as if he was attending a tea-fight instead of football practice!"

Fred laughed. "He's too good-natured, I guess."

"It doesn't do to be too good-natured in football," replied the coach drily. "But I don't think it's that so much, as it is that he doesn't take it seriously. I watched him the other day in practice and he smiled the whole time!"

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Fred handed the list back. "The others are all right, I think," he said. "Maybe we'll want to make changes after Saturday's game, though. Is there anything more tonight, coach?"

"Not a thing. You fellows go ahead with your meeting and try to make a hit with it. Let Lowell attend to as much of it as he can. That's his business, I guess. If you get it on your mind too much you will be falling off in your play. And we don't want that. Save him all you can, Lowell. We may need him."

Beginning on Monday, Ira's services were constantly in demand. Donovan returned to his position at left guard on the first team, but he was used very carefully and most of the time Tom Buffum had his place. That brought Ira into the substitute squad and he and Crane alternated opposite to Buffum, or, in the usual scrimmage, against Johns after Donovan and Buffum had had their chances. Ira played hard and fast and used his head, but in the final analysis there was something lacking, and not even Coach Driscoll could put his finger on that something. One day he called Ira to him on the side line and questioned him.

"Well, what do you think of it, Rowland?" he asked pleasantly.

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"Of what, sir?"

"Football work. Find it interesting?"

"Oh, yes, sir, quite. I like it better than I expected to. But I'm still pretty green at it, I guess."

"Why, I don't know," replied the coach slowly. "You've come pretty fast for a beginner. Do you feel yourself that you're still green?"

"Well, I—realise that I don't know as much about the game as I should. The other fellows seem to always know just what to do. I sort of—sort of blunder along, I guess."

"What is it you think you don't know?" asked the coach.

"I can't say exactly. I suppose it's lack of experience that I mean. There's so much more in it than I realised, sir; in the game, I mean."

"Yes, there's a lot in it, but all you need to know is how to play the guard position, Rowland. Don't worry yourself too much about the game as a whole. Play your own position as well as you can and leave the rest to the others. Which of the fellows are you most afraid of?"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of any of them," replied Ira placidly.

"I didn't mean it just that way," corrected the coach, hiding a smile. "I meant which one do you find it hardest to play against?"

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"Johns," was the prompt reply.

"Johns?" The coach's voice contained surprise. "But Johns isn't the player that Buffum is."

"No, I guess not, sir, but Johns—well, I don't know; I think he plays *harder* than Buffum."

The coach looked mystified. "Harder, eh? Look here, isn't it just that you yourself don't play as hard against Johns as you do against Buffum or Donovan? Maybe Johns has got you scared."

"It might be that," answered Ira. "Anyway, I'd rather tackle Johns."

"But you just said you found him harder!"

"That's the reason, I guess," laughed Ira.

"Hm. Well, you go in there now and see what you can do to Johns. Hold on! Wait till the play's over. Just forget that Johns is Johns and see if you can't put it over on him, Rowland."

But Ira didn't put it over on Johns. For the ensuing ten or twelve minutes they played each other to a standstill and neither could have fairly claimed supremacy. Coach Driscoll, watching at intervals from the side line—he had a way of absenting himself from the field for long periods before jumping in and reading the riot-act—frowned in puzzlement. "I wonder," he muttered once, "what the result would be if Johns handed him a jolt under the chin! What that boy needs is to get warmed up to his work. He's too calm!"

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The announcement of the mass meeting appeared on the different bulletin boards on Tuesday and occasioned plenty of interest but small enthusiasm. "'Football Mass Meeting,' eh?" Ira heard one fellow remark in front of the board in Parkinson. "Suppose they want us to shell out. Not for mine, thank you. Let them win a game once."

"Oh, a dollar won't hurt us," observed his companion carelessly. "I guess they're pretty hard

up.”

“I paid perfectly good money for a season ticket,” answered the first speaker, “and that’s enough. I haven’t had my money’s worth so far and don’t expect to. They’ll have to tie me and take it away by force if they get any dollar from me!”

“Where’s your patriotism?” jeered the other. “You’re a nice piker, you are!”

“Patriotism be blowed! Where’s their football team, if it comes to that? Why should I give good money to support a bunch of losers and quitters?” [193]

“Oh, pshaw, if they’ll beat Kenwood I don’t care how many games they lose.”

“If!” sneered his companion. “Well, they won’t. Not that bunch. I’d give them *two* dollars if they would.”

“They’d fall dead if you did,” laughed the other boy. “You never gave two dollars to anyone in your life, you tightwad!”

The second- and third-string players had the call all that week and on Thursday it became rumoured about that Coach Driscoll was to start the game with the Warne High School team with a substitute line-up and a deal of speculation ensued among the substitutes. Ira was interested, but not greatly. Buffum would play right guard, of course, and Brackett left. If substitutes were needed there were Tooker and Crane. He couldn’t conceive of getting into the battle save, perhaps, for a scant five minutes after the result had been determined. On Friday there was only signal work for the subs, but the first-string players and the second held scrimmage as usual. To his surprise, Ira was not called on when Donovan was released, Fuller, a third-string tackle, falling heir to the position, and, very naturally, playing it badly. [194]

It was not until half-past two on Saturday that the line-up was given out. The squad was getting into togs in the locker-room of the gymnasium when Coach Driscoll arrived, a little earlier than usual, and proved the rumour correct.

“We’re going to make a cut next week,” he announced, “and some of you fellows are going to leave us. Which of you stay and which go depends largely on how you show up this afternoon. You’ll all have a chance to play before the game’s over. Any of you who want to keep on must show something. It’s your last chance. We’re going to beat High School and we’re going to do it with the subs.”

And then he read the line-up, and Ira’s surprise was considerable when he found himself slated in Brackett’s place at right guard. Of the regulars only Captain Lyons and Quarter-Back Dannis were to start.

“Don’t,” added the coach, “fool yourselves with the idea that if you get in trouble I’ll put the first-string men in to pull you out. It isn’t being done this season. You’ll win this game or lose it on your own merits. Now go ahead and show that you’re just as good as the regulars. Take them out, Captain Lyons!” [195]

High School was already at work when the brown-stockinged players reached the field and the stands were filling with an audience that threatened to test their capacity, for High School had plenty of friends and admirers, many of them of the gentler sex. The light dresses of the girls, together with a multitude of red-and-blue pennants and arm-bands, made the scene unusually bright and colourful, and for the first time Ira felt something very much like stage fright. But there wasn’t much time to indulge it, for they were at once hustled out of blankets and sweaters and set to work at warming up, and almost before Ira had limbered his muscles decently a whistle called them back to the bench. And then, three minutes later, while High School cheered mightily, Fred Lyons kicked off.

CHAPTER XIV

HARD KNOCKS

High School had the advantage of a longer preliminary season than her opponent, having already taken part in six contests, and in consequence what she lacked in weight—for she was a light team—was made up to her in experience. The first period resulted in a good deal of wasteful effort on both sides. High School yielded the ball soon after the kick-off and Parkinson started with line-plunging plays that took her from her own twenty-nine yards past the middle of the field and well into the opponent’s territory. Hodges, Little and Pearson, the substitute backs, showed good ability and were hard to stop. It was a fumble that finally cost them the ball and High School started back from her thirty-six-yard line with a series of running plays that for awhile fooled the Parkinson ends and backs and put the ball on the home team’s forty-yard line. During the rest of the twelve-minute quarter the pigskin passed back and forth across the fifty yards with slight advantage to either side. The Parkinson supporters grumbled because the team didn’t open up and try the High School ends instead of invariably yielding the ball after an unsuccessful fourth down plunge. But Dannis was in command, and Dannis generally knew what he was up to. [197]

During that first period Ira found the going rather easy, for his opponent played a stupid game. It was only when, on attack, he had to try conclusions with the opposing centre that he had difficulty. That centre, although a comparative youngster, was, as everyone agreed afterwards,

“some player!” He had no trouble standing the Parkinson centre, Conlon, on his head, to use the phrase, and it was his ability to do that that led to the first score which came a few minutes after the teams had changed places.

Dannis had intercepted a forward-pass just behind his line and zigzagged to the enemy’s thirty-eight. From there, in four rushes, Little and Pearson alternating, the pigskin had gone to the twenty-seven. Hodges had failed to get away outside right tackle and had lost a yard. With eleven to go on second down, Dannis had skirted the Red-and-Blue’s left and, behind good interference, had placed the ball near the twenty-yard line just inside the boundary. The next play had gone out and gained a scant yard, and Little, crashing through the right side of the High School defence, had just failed of the distance. Then, with the ball nearly opposite the goal-posts and eighteen yards away from them, Captain Lyons had dropped back for a try-at-goal. Conlon’s pass had been rather poor, the ball almost going over the kicker’s head, and possibly the knowledge of the fact had unsteadied him for a moment. At all events, the opposing centre had brushed him aside, avoided Pearson and leaped straight into the path of the ball as it left Lyons’ foot. It had banged against his body and bounded back up the field, and a speedy back, who had followed through behind the centre, had gathered it into his arms on the second bound and raced almost unchallenged for some seventy-five yards and a touchdown from which High School had kicked an easy goal. [198]

Perhaps that handicap was just what Parkinson needed to make her show herself, for, after Lyons had again kicked off and the opponents had been held for downs and had punted back to Little, the brown team started with new determination. By that time Ira’s competitor had recovered from his slump, doubtless heartened by those seven points on the score board, and Ira had his hands full. Dannis thrust the backs at right and left of centre and Ira was busy trying to make holes or to keep the left of the High School line from romping through. Pearson was the best gainer through the line, and once he got almost clear and rushed twenty-two yards before he was brought down. Little and Hodges worked the ends for smaller gains and Dannis pulled off a twelve-yard stunt straight through centre on a fake pass. Parkinson was halted on High School’s twenty-five and the Red-and-Blue recovered seven of the necessary ten yards before she was forced to punt. Little caught near the side line and got back eight before he was run out of bounds. With the ball on the thirty-four, Dannis attempted a quarter-back run, but lost two yards. Hodges faked a forward and made six around right end and Little got the rest of the distance off right tackle. Near the fifteen yards, with four to go on third down, Hodges threw across the lines and Bradford caught on the eight. From there the ball was pushed over in three plays, Little scoring the touchdown. Lyons kicked the goal from a slight angle. [199]

High School was given the ball for the kick-off and a short lift dropped it into the arms of Pearson near the twenty-yard line. The Red-and-Blue showed demoralisation then and her line went to pieces during the next dozen plays. Parkinson crashed through almost at will and had reached the enemy’s twenty-one when the whistle blew. [200]

There was some criticism in the locker-room between halves, but Coach Driscoll found little fault, on the whole. Ira, who had been rather roughly used, had a piece of plaster applied to his nose and arnica rubbed into his right ankle. Conlon was horribly messed up and was, besides, angry clear through. The knowledge that he had been outplayed disgruntled him badly, and he spent the time when he was not in the hands of the rubber or trainer in glowering by himself in a corner.

Both teams presented new talent when the third quarter started. For Parkinson, Basker had taken Dannis’s place, Little and Pearson had retired, Crane was at left guard in place of Buffum, and Logan was at right end. High School had one new back and two new linesmen. Ira’s opponent was still on hand, however, and viewed him darkly as they lined up after the kick-off. Ira was as yet unable to view the struggle as anything other than a somewhat rough amusement, and the other boy’s evident ill-will puzzled him. He soon found, though, that his opponent held a different idea of the matter in hand. The High School left guard was not viewing the affair as a pastime, and the fact was brought home to Ira very speedily. The other fellow did not actually transgress the rules, but he approached so close to the borderland between fair and unfair use of the hands that Ira found himself at his wit’s end to protect himself from punishment. Almost anyone else would have lost his temper and fought back, but Ira kept his smile and took his medicine. By the time Parkinson had reached scoring distance once more he was pretty badly used up. He wondered what would happen if he called the umpire’s attention to his opponent’s tactics, and was tempted to see. But he didn’t. It seemed too much like acting the baby. Lyons, playing beside him at tackle, saw what was happening and hotly told Ira to “give him what he’s asking for, Rowland!” And, as Ira didn’t, Lyons took matters into his own hands on one occasion when the opportunity presented itself to him and considerably jarred the High School left guard by putting his shoulder under that youth’s chin. Fortunately for Lyons, the umpire didn’t see it. But the compliment didn’t alter the left guard’s tactics and Ira was sniffing at a bloody nose and looking dimly through one eye when, after three plunges at High School’s line had failed, Lyons dropped back and put the pigskin over the bar for the third score. [201]

Fred went out then, Hodsdon taking his place, and James went in for Hodges. High School kicked off to Basker and the substitute quarter was run back for a loss of four yards. A fumble a minute later was recovered by Mason, at left half, on Parkinson’s twelve yards. Two attempts at the line gained but six and Basker punted to midfield. A smash at the Parkinson right side went through for five yards and Ira, who had been mowed down in the proceeding, felt so comfortable on the ground that it didn’t occur to him to get up until someone swashed a wet sponge over his face. When he did find his feet under him he was extremely glad of the support of the trainer, and [202]

when he found himself walking toward the bench he didn't even protest. There was, he felt subconsciously, something radically wrong with a game that allowed the other fellow to "rough" you at pleasure and forbade you to "rough" him back. Someone lowered him to a bench and draped a blanket around his shoulders, and someone administered to his half-closed eye and added another piece of plaster to his already picturesque countenance. And after that he was sent off to the gymnasium, receiving as he went a scattered applause from the friendly stands.

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Coach Driscoll used twenty-four players that afternoon, and the score of the game in the next morning's *Warne Independent* looked a good deal like a section of a city directory. But in spite of putting two whole teams into the field the coach failed to capture the game, for, in the last three or four minutes of play, High School performed a miracle with a sadly patched-up eleven and worked the ball down to Parkinson's twenty-two yards and from there, plunging once, grounding a forward-pass once and trying an end run that was stopped, she lifted the pigskin across the bar and tied the score at 10 to 10! And Fred Lyons, dragging tired feet up the gymnasium steps, remarked sadly to De Wolf Lowell: "Father was right!" Lowell, himself downcast and disappointed, not knowing that Fred had Coach Driscoll in mind, found the remark frivolous and senseless and only grunted.

"Well, what in the name of common sense has happened to you?" demanded Humphrey Nead as Ira trailed into the room about five. Ira smiled tiredly and gingerly lowered himself onto the erratic window seat.

"I've been playing football," he answered. "Didn't you see the game?"

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Humphrey shook his head. "I did not," he answered. "But if they all look like you it must have been a fine one! Who won?"

"Nobody. It was a tie. Ten to ten."

"Great Scott! Do you mean that you tore your face into fragments and ended where you began?"

"Something like that. Only, of course, we all had a pleasant time, Nead, and got a lot of nice exercise. It's a remarkable game, football."

"Are you sure you've been playing football?" asked Humphrey, grinning. "Sure you haven't been in a train wreck, Rowly?"

"Quite sure, thanks. I played opposite a fellow who probably invented the game. Anyway, he knew a lot of stunts I didn't. He had more ways of using his hands without being seen than you can imagine."

"Oh, that was it!" Humphrey frowned. "What did you do to him?"

"Nothing much. Lyons said I ought to, but what's the good of having rules if you don't stick to them? I tried to keep from getting killed and barely got off with my life. I don't think he got through me more than three times, but he certainly made it difficult for me! The last time he came through very nicely, though, and when I came to I was on my back and the trainer was trying to drown me with a sponge full of water. After that they lugged me off and sent me home. I didn't see the rest of it, but I heard they tied up the game in the last quarter. I guess Fred Lyons is awfully disappointed. You see, there's the meeting tonight."

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"It'll be a frost," said Humphrey. "I've heard a lot of the fellows say that they weren't going. Here, you'd better let me doctor you a bit, Rowly. That eye's a sight! Who stuck the plaster all over you?"

"Billy Goode. I do look sort of funny, don't I?" Ira observed himself in the wavy mirror above the bureau. "I'd laugh," he added, "only it hurts my mouth!"

"You were a silly ass not to go after that butcher," growled Humphrey. "I wish I'd been playing against him! What was his name?"

"I don't think I heard it. Hold on, don't take that plaster off!"

"Shut up and stand still! You don't need half a yard of the stuff there. Where are those scissors of yours? There, that's something like. Oh, hang it, it's bleeding again! Reach me the towel. Are you going to the meeting?"

"I don't know. Yes, I suppose so. Lyons wouldn't like it if we didn't all go. That eye looks bad, though, doesn't it? Guess I'll get some hot water and bathe it."

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"Hot water be blowed! Cold water is what you want. Here, I'll pour some out in the basin and you get to work."

"Why didn't you go to the game?" asked Ira, as he sopped a dripping wash cloth to his eye.

"Oh, I had something better to do."

"Pool, I suppose," sniffed Ira. "You do too much of that, Nead."

"Well, you miss your guess, old top. I was out with Jimmy Fallon on his motorcycle. Say, that's sport, all right, Rowly! Sixty-five miles an hour sometimes, and everything whizzing past so quick you couldn't see it! I wish I could afford one of the things."

"You'll break your neck if you go rampaging around on one of those contraptions," said Ira. "It isn't safe, Nead."

"Huh! That sounds fine from a fellow whose face looks like a beefsteak! You don't see any black

eyes or broken noses on me, do you?"

Ira laughed. "You've got the best of the argument," he replied. "But some day you'll come home with a broken neck if you're not careful. Where'd you go?"

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"Springfield. Took us forty minutes to go and less than that to get back. A motor cop tried to chase us once, but never had a chance. We left him standing."

"Who is Jimmy Fallon?"

"He works in Benton's cigar store. He's a corker, Jimmy is."

"He must be if he spends his time racing policemen. I suppose you think you're going to play pool tonight."

"Surest thing you know, sport!"

"Well, you're not. You're coming with me to the mass meeting. And you're going to——"

"Yes, I am! Like fun!" jeered Humphrey.

"And you're going to clap your hands at the right moment and pull for the football team," continued Ira, regardless of the interruption. "Also, Nead, you're going to subscribe liberally to the cause."

"Nothing doing, Rowly! I've got a date with some of the fellows downtown. Anyway, I couldn't subscribe to the cause, as you call it, having but about a dollar and a half to my name and needing that for more important things, old top."

"Broke again?" asked Ira.

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"Pretty nearly. I've got a dollar and sixty-two cents, or something like that. Want to borrow a hundred, Rowly?"

"No, thanks. But I'll stake you to a couple of dollars so you can put in your coin when they pass the hat."

"All right. You put in a dollar for me and let me have the other now."

"You can put it in yourself. You'll be there."

"Nothing doing!"

"This is something special, Nead," said Ira, seriously, speaking through the folds of the towel. "I want you to go with me. It won't matter if you miss one evening at the billiard place."

"But I don't want to go to your old meeting," expostulated Humphrey. "It's nothing in my young life! You give them a dollar for me and tell them I wish them well."

"No, we want all the fellows we can get. You'll be wanting to borrow in two or three days, Nead, and I shan't want to loan to a fellow who won't do a little thing like this to oblige me."

"Oh, don't you worry, old top. There are other places to make a raise."

"Maybe, but I don't believe you want to try them. I'll be back here about half-past seven and the meeting's at eight. We'd better start fairly early so as to get good seats."

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"Gee, a fellow would think you were going to the movies," scoffed Humphrey. "What fun is there in listening to a lot of idiots talk about the football team? Are you going to speak, too?"

"Me?" asked Ira startledly. "Thunder, no! I couldn't speak a piece!"

"Then I won't go," laughed Humphrey. "If you'll make a speech, Rowly, I'll take a chance."

"Guess I'm the one who'd be taking a chance," replied Ira. "How does this eye look now?"

"Dissipated, old top, dissipated! But it's a bit better. Well, I guess I'll run along and feed. Want to donate that dollar now, Rowly?"

"N-no, I don't believe so."

Humphrey frowned and paused irresolutely by the table, hat in hand. "You're not in earnest about that, are you?" he asked. "I mean about holding out on me if I don't go to the meeting."

"Yes, I am, Nead. You're wanted at the meeting and I'm asking you to go as a personal favour to me."

"Rot! I don't see how it affects you any, whether I go or don't go. It isn't your picnic."

"Why not? I'm on the team, fighting and bleeding for the cause." Ira felt tentatively of his nose. "Bleeding, anyhow. Naturally, I want the thing to be a success. Besides, Nead, they've got to raise some money if they're going to last the season out. Shall we say about twenty minutes to eight?"

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"Say what you like," laughed Humphrey, "but don't look for me, Rowly. I've got something to do tonight. Bye!"

"Bye," answered Ira. When the door had closed he smiled gently. "If he doesn't go with me I miss my guess," he murmured as he donned his vest and coat and slicked his hair down with a wet brush. "I suppose it's a poor business, buying him like that, but you've got to suit your method to your man." With which bit of philosophy he observed his disfigured countenance dubiously and turned out the light.

CHAPTER XV

PARKINSON HAS A CHANGE OF HEART

Humphrey was waiting when Ira returned from supper. "Thought I might as well go along and see the fun," he observed carelessly.

They reached the auditorium, on the second floor of Parkinson Hall, in good time but found it already half-full. A dozen rather conscious-looking fellows stood or sat about the stage: Fred Lyons, De Wolf Lowell, Gene Goodloe, the four class presidents, Steve Crocker, baseball captain, and several whom Ira didn't know. Mr. Driscoll, followed by Billy Goode, the trainer, came in a few minutes later and joined the assemblage on the stage. There was a good deal of noise in the hall, for everyone was talking or laughing. It was evident not only that about every fellow in school was to be on hand but that they were here principally with the idea of finding amusement. Ira and Humphrey found seats on the left about midway between the stage and the green swinging doors with the oval lights at the other end of the auditorium. By five minutes to eight all the seats were occupied and a fringe of boys lined the wall at the back. Ira saw several of the faculty in the audience: Mr. Morgan, Mr. Talbot and Mr. Tasser. Their presence was easily explained since they were the faculty members of the Athletic Committee. [212]

At eight by the big, round clock over the stage, Hodges, fourth class president, who had evidently accepted the office of chairman, arose and the noise quieted to furtive scraping of feet or coughing. Hodges explained unemotionally the purpose of the meeting and introduced Lowell. The best feature of Hodges' introduction was its brevity, and the best feature of the manager's talk was doubtless its strict attention to facts and figures. He undoubtedly showed conclusively that the Football Association was sadly in need of funds; the figures which he paraded proved it; but figures and facts are dull things and by the time he had finished the quiet had gone. Many fellows were whispering behind their hands and many others were frankly yawning. Ira knew that they needed stirring up and hoped that the next speaker would do it. But the next was Fred Lyons, and although Fred wanted very much to make an appeal that would reach his audience, he failed most dismally. Perhaps it was because he wanted to do it too hard that he couldn't. His earnestness was convincing enough, but it so closely approached solemnity that it was better calculated to produce tears than enthusiasm. Fred apologised for the poor showing made by the team in recent years and made the mistake, possibly, of placing a share of the blame on the lack of support supplied by the school. No audience cares to listen to a recital of its shortcomings unless it is in a particularly sympathetic mood, and this one wasn't. Fred asked the school to get behind the team, to believe in it and to aid it. [213]

"It's your team and it will do what you want it to if you will give it support. It can't win without that support. We've got good players and a fine coach, and we're all eager to do our best, fellows. But we need your help, moral and financial. Manager Lowell has told you how we stand regarding money. Last season was a poor one financially and we started this year with a practically empty treasury. So far we have managed to worry along from one game to the next, but we need a lot of supplies, we owe money for printing and we owe Mr. Driscoll half his salary. What Lowell didn't tell you is that he has dug into his own pocket several times, just as I have, for that matter, in order to keep going. Comparatively few season tickets have been taken this year, nearly eighty less than last, and the attendance at the games, with one exception, has been poor. We need money, fellows, quite a lot of money, and I'm hoping you will give it to us. And we need even more; to feel that you are behind us and want us to come through. If you will do your part we'll do ours, every one of us, players, coach, management and trainer. I think that's all I have to say. Thank you." [214]

Fred sat down amidst a salvo of applause, but Ira somehow knew that his address had not carried conviction and that the applause was for Fred personally rather than for his appeal. And Fred's countenance said that he realised the fact.

Coach Driscoll spoke briefly, dwelling on the ability of the team and the spirit of it and paying a tribute to Captain Lyons that again brought applause. He ended by echoing Fred's request for support and stepped back to a hearty clapping of hands. Gene Goodloe did his best, but Gene was sadly out of his element. His embarrassment was so evident that it brought a ripple of laughter, and Ira had hopes. But Gene made the mistake of resenting it and finished his remarks amidst a deep and discouraging silence. Others followed, but the first speakers had, so to say, sounded the tone of the meeting and each succeeding speaker seemed more lugubrious than the last. Feet shuffled impatiently and many eyes were fixed longingly on the doors. A few of those near the entrance had already slipped away. The meeting was proving long-drawn-out and dismal to a degree. Audible remarks began to be heard, such as: "Pass the hat and call it a day!" "Question, Mr. Speaker! Question!" "Let's have a song!" It was Hodges who, recognising the attitude of the audience, tried to induce Billy Goode to say something. But Billy resolutely refused to be dragged from his chair, even though the audience, scenting possible relief from the dead solemnity of the proceedings, clapped loudly and demanded a speech. In the end, Hodges gave the trainer up and took the floor himself. [215]

"Well, you've heard us all, fellows. You know what is wanted of you. So let's get down to business. We've got some slips here and some pencils and some of us are going to pass them around to you in a minute. I hope every fellow will contribute. The Association needs about three hundred dollars to get to the Kenwood game with. That means that some of us must give liberally. But before we start the collection perhaps there's someone that would like to say

something. If there is let's hear from him. Debate is open."

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No one, however, seemed to have any message to deliver, although there was plenty of whispering and subdued laughter. Finally, though, a tall, lean youth with an earnest manner arose at one side of the hall and cleared his throat nervously. Hodges recognised him and sat down.

"Who's the giraffe?" whispered Humphrey. Ira shook his head.

"Mr. President—er—Chairman, and Fellow Students," began the earnest one. "I've listened carefully to what has been said and as near as I can see it doesn't amount to much." Some applause and a good deal of laughter rewarded him. "This football team of ours needs money to go on with, they tell us," continued the speaker, encouraged by the applause, "but I ask them: Why? This is an age of efficiency, gentlemen, and when something is proven inefficient it is discarded. Seems to me this football team has proved itself about as inefficient as anything could be. Seems to me a football team's excuse for existence is—er—is winning games. If that's so, this football team of ours stopped being efficient three years ago. I ask you what use there is in contributing money for the benefit of something that has outlived its usefulness. I claim that it's poor business, gentlemen. I maintain——"

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But he didn't get any further, for the audience was laughing and shouting its applause by that time. At last someone had waked them up! The idea of discarding the team appealed to their sense of humour and while the tall youth went on making faces and waving his hands the audience gave way to hilarity.

"Good scheme! Discharge the team!"

"Pay 'em off and let 'em go!"

"No wins, no wages! How about it, Fred?"

On the stage the fellows were smiling, but not very comfortably. Fred Lyons was whispering to Lowell, and the latter was shaking his head helplessly. Somewhere in the back of the hall a second speaker was demanding recognition and there was a general craning of necks as Hodges rapped for order. Someone pulled the long-necked youth to his chair, still talking and gesticulating.

"Mr. Chairman!" began the new speaker, "I want to say that most of us fellows would support the football team if it would show itself worth supporting. Isn't that so, fellows?"

Laughing agreement arose about him.

"That team hasn't won anything worth winning for so long that no one remembers what it was they won. They talk about wanting three hundred dollars. Well, maybe they do. But I say let them show something first. This school is just as loyal to its teams as any school, but it wants something for its money. I say let's give the team a hundred dollars now and tell them to earn the rest!"

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"That's right!" someone called. "We're from Missouri!"

A young, second class fellow jumped up and declared in a thin, high voice that he "seconded the motion." Hodges rapped for silence.

"No motion has been put. If you want to put a motion we will vote on it. But I must say that many of you are wrong when you think this is a vaudeville show. Please try to talk sense. Are there any more remarks?"

There were several, but they weren't serious and the speakers didn't stand up. Hodges looked slowly around the hall and then turned toward the table beside him.

"If there aren't," he announced, "we will proceed with the purpose of the meeting."

"Mr. Chairman!"

"Mister—" The chairman paused, at a loss, and Fred Lyons whispered across to him—"Mr. Rowland?"

Ira, on his feet, conscious of Humphrey's wide-open mouth and of the four hundred and more curious gazes, moistened his lips and took a deep breath. He had acted quite on impulse, which was something he seldom did do, and he was still a bit surprised to find himself standing there facing the meeting.

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"Shoot!" called someone, and many laughed.

"Mr. Chairman and—and fellows," began Ira slowly, "I——"

"Louder!" came a demand from the back of the auditorium.

Ira made a new start, facing so that he could make himself heard at the back of the hall. ["I want to tell a story," he said.](#)



"I want to tell a story," he said

"Naughty! Naughty!" cried a facetious youth.

Ira smiled. "It's about a horse race. Down in Maine, where I come from, there was an old man who owned a horse." There was a nasal twang in his voice that brought chuckles from many and smiles of anticipated amusement from more. "She wasn't much of a horse, fellows. She was about fourteen years old, and her front knees sorter knocked together and she had the spring-halt in the left hind leg and she was blind in one eye and couldn't see any too well outter the other. And she was fat and she was lazy because this man I'm telling about didn't use her except to drive to the village once a week in an old rattletrap buckboard to get a pound of coffee and a sack of flour and so on. Well, one time when he was in the village he saw a notice about a trotting meeting to be held at the Fair Grounds a week or so later. So all the way home that day he talked it over with Old Bess and she switched her tail and flicked her ears and between them they decided to enter the race. So he went in to the village again and put down his entry fee and borrowed an old sulky of Peters, the blacksmith. It wasn't a very good sulky to look at, but Peters put a new rim on one wheel and tied some baling wire around it here and there and the old man hitched it on back of the buckboard and fetched it home. And every day after that you'd see him and Old Bess jogging along the turnpike.

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"Well, it came the day of the meeting and the old man and Bess went to the Fair Grounds. There was a heap of betting going on and the old man he strolled around and strolled around and pretty soon he'd met about everyone he knew and he didn't have a red cent left in his pockets, and he calculated that if Old Bess won he'd be about fifteen hundred dollars to the good, because everyone he laid a bet with gave him perfectly scandalous odds. When it came Old Bess's time he drove out on the track and everyone howled and the judges got down out of the stand and asked him to go away and keep the peace. But he wouldn't listen to 'em and so they had to let Old Bess start. And that's about all she did do. Once on a time she'd been a pretty good trotter, but that was a long way off, and maybe the old man didn't realise it. There was just the one heat for Old Bess. When the other horses started she switched her tail once or twice, looked around over her shoulder and jogged away. Pretty soon they met the other horses coming back, but Old Bess didn't take any notice of 'em. She just jogged on. And after awhile a man came running up to them and asked wouldn't they please get off the track because they were starting the next heat. And so the old man he turned Old Bess around and she jogged back. And that's all there was to it. But one of the men that had laid a bet with the old man was sorter sorry for him, guessing he was just about cleaned out, and he said: 'Old Man, ain't you got nary sense at all? Didn't you know that horse o' yourn had spring-halt and epizootics and was knock-kneed in front and fallin' away behind?' 'Why, yes,' replied the old man, 'I knowed that, I guess.' 'An' you knew she was fourteen or fifteen years old, didn't you?' 'Ought to, I lived right with her all the time.' 'An' you knew she was stone-blind in one eye, didn't you?' 'Yes, I knowed that, too.' 'An' you knew she was too fat, anyway, didn't you?' 'I sorter suspected it.' 'Well, then why in tarnation did you bet on her for?' 'Well, I'll tell you,' says the old man. 'She's *my* horse, an' what's mine I stands back of. An' win or not win, she's the finest horse an' the fastest trotter in the State o' Maine! Get ap, Bess!'"

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Ira sat down.

The clapping and stamping and laughter might have been heard across on Faculty Row. It went on and on, and Hodges, smiling broadly as he pounded his gavel, might just as well have been hitting a feather bed with a broom-straw!

“Get up!” urged Humphrey. “Go on! They want more!”

“There isn’t any more,” said Ira, smiling. “And they don’t need any more.”

And maybe they didn’t, for it was a vastly different gathering that scrambled for the slips of paper and put down figures and names. Perhaps tomorrow or still later some of them would regret the size of the figures, but just now they were in the mood to be generous, for Ira’s story had succeeded where all the rest of the oratory had failed. They still chuckled as they passed the slips along and were still smiling when the pledges were dumped on the table. Among them was one which bore the inscription “\$2.00—Humphrey Nead.”

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The meeting broke up then, but most of the audience waited until those on the stage had hurriedly reckoned up the pledges, and when Hodges held up his hand for silence and announced the total to be three hundred and forty-one dollars they cheered loudly and long. And when Steve Crocker pushed past Hodges and called for “a regular cheer for the Team, fellows, and make it good!” the result indicated that Parkinson School had experienced a change of heart!

CHAPTER XVI

[224]

IRA PLANS

Ira escaped that night from the gratitude of those in charge of the meeting, but he had to face it next day. Fred Lyons was almost tearful and Gene slapped him on the back repeatedly and Manager Lowell shook hands with him earnestly on three separate occasions. And at least three of the class presidents if not all of them—Ira became a bit confused eventually—congratulated him and told him he had saved the meeting. Later, between recitations, he was waylaid on the steps of Parkinson by a youth with glasses and a long, thin nose and asked to join the Debating Society.

“But I couldn’t make a speech to save my life,” declared Ira.

“You’d learn very soon, Rowland. Any fellow who can tell a story as you did last night has the making of a public speaker. In my own experience—” and the president of the Debating Society managed to give the impression that he had spent a lifetime on the rostrum—“I have found it much more difficult to tell a story or anecdote effectively than to deliver an argument.”

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Ira managed to escape by agreeing to “think it over” and let the other know his decision when the football season was done.

For several days he experienced the treatment that falls to one who becomes suddenly prominent. He had the feeling that fellows looked after him as he passed and spoke his name in lowered tones. It wasn’t unpleasant, but it made him a little self-conscious, and Ira didn’t exactly like to feel self-conscious. Fellows who usually nodded to him on campus or gridiron now fell into casual conversations, during which mention was generally made of the football meeting, if not of his share in it. At the field, too, there were signs of a new consideration, or else Ira imagined them. Coach Driscoll, who never referred to the meeting in Ira’s hearing, nevertheless gave more attention to the substitute guard, and the same was true of Fred Lyons. It seemed to Ira that one or the other always had an eye on him, was always offering criticisms or suggestions. It was flattering, no doubt, but it made him a little nervous at first, and his playing suffered a bit. Even Billy Goode got the habit of hovering over him like a fussy old Mother Hen, just as he hovered over such celebrities as Captain Lyons or “The” Dannis or Billy Wells or numerous others whose welfare might be considered a matter of importance. Several times Ira was “pulled” from play merely because he was a little short of breath or had developed a momentary limp. He usually protested weakly, but Billy never listened to protests. He was an extremely decided trainer.

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Another event traceable to Ira’s participation in the football meeting occurred the Tuesday evening following. Neither Fred nor Gene had so far accepted Ira’s invitation to his room at Maggy’s, nor had Mart Johnston repeated his visit, but on the evening mentioned Fred, Gene, Mart and Brad turned up, and, as Humphrey was also at home for some inexplicable reason, the room’s seating accommodations were severely tested. Mart displayed the famous window seat and told humourously of their bewilderment when, on putting it together, they had discovered that it formed a right angle. Ira saw that the visitors viewed Humphrey both curiously and, perhaps, a trifle dubiously at first, but Humphrey was quite at his best tonight and by the time Gene had disappeared down the stairs and subsequently returned with a supply of rye bread sandwiches and hot frankfurter sausages the entente cordial was firmly established. They had a very merry evening, and talked of more subjects than could be set down here. Once Gene asked Ira about the story of Old Bess, and Ira explained that he had heard it told several times in a lumber camp.

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“‘Fritzy’ Smart used to tell it,” he said. “‘Fritzy’ is about seven feet tall and all angles, and he talks out of one side of his mouth—like this.” Ira mimicked him. “‘Fritzy’ could make that story last a quarter of an hour and used to get up and give an imitation of Old Bess trotting down the track so you could almost see her. I was afraid I strung it out too much, although, at that, I left

out most of the details that 'Fritzy' gets in."

"It wasn't a bit too long," said Fred. "You had us sitting on the edges of our chairs. I guess as a story it doesn't amount to so much, Rowland, but it was certainly corking the way you told it."

"Half of the fun," chuckled Brad, "was the way he hit off the Down-East dialect. The fellows around me were doubled up half the time."

"Anyway, it did the business," declared Mart. "It was just the thing for the moment. I had a nice little speech all framed up myself, but——"

"You!" scoffed Brad. "You couldn't make a speech if your worthless life depended on it!"

"Run around! Run around! I taught Cicero and Billy Sunday all they ever knew! William Jennings Bryan was one of my first pupils!"

"Making a speech is no fun, anyway," sighed Fred. "I made a awful mess of it the other night, and I knew it all the time and couldn't seem to help it."

"Well, you did sound a bit sepulchral," agreed Gene. "I wanted to stick a pin into you or something."

"You made a nice little address," said Mart kindly. "I liked your speech, Gene. It was so short."

"It would have been shorter if I'd had my way," Gene grumbled. "For that matter, every fellow that spoke sounded as though he was just back from a funeral and didn't expect to live long himself! We were a merry lot!"

"If those slips had been passed around before Rowland here leaped nimbly into the breeches—I mean the breach—you'd have collected the munificent sum of nine dollars and thirty-seven cents," said Mart. "I already had my hand on the seven cents."

"And I'll bet you kept it there," laughed Brad.

"You guess again! I subscribed for such a vast sum that I won't get square with my allowance until Spring. And it was all your fault, Rowland. You and your Old Bess! If I run short I'll be around here to borrow, so keep a little something handy."

"Seen any more of 'Old Earnest,' Rowland?" asked Fred.

Ira replied that he hadn't, and Mart was for inviting him up. "He's a good old scout, Hicks is, and he'd love to sit in and listen to our enlightening discourse I should think." But the others vetoed the proposal and shortly after the party broke up.

Humphrey was somewhat impressed with the visitors, although he pretended to make fun of them when they had gone. "That fellow Johnston is a regular village cut-up, isn't he?" he asked. "I guess a fellow would get fed up with him pretty quick. Does Bradford room with him?"

"Yes, in Goss. They have a corking room. We'll go around some night, if you like."

"Oh, I haven't time for those 'screamers,' thanks." "Screamers" was a word evidently of Humphrey's own devising and was used by him to indicate anyone who "put on side."

"I don't think you can call those chaps 'screamers,'" said Ira mildly. "They aren't snobs, anyway."

"Lyons acts as if he wanted to be," Humphrey sniffed. Then, after a few moments of silence, he said: "I don't see how you got acquainted with that bunch, anyway. I don't. I never meet up with anyone at school except pills!"

"Want to know the real reason?"

"Yes," answered Humphrey, with a trace of suspicion, however.

"Well, you don't give yourself a chance, Nead. You train with that bunch of loafers in the town and it takes all your time."

"Loafers! Don't call my friends names, please. They aren't loafers. Every one of them has a steady, respectable job, Rowland."

"Y-yes, when they work, but it seems to me they're a lot like a fellow who used to live in my town. He sat in front of the grocery most all day, or, if it was Winter, he sat inside. He had a steady, respectable job, too, but he didn't work at it much. He was a maker of wooden shoes."

"Oh, piffle," grunted Humphrey. "The fellows I know work just as hard as anyone."

"All right, but they always seem to be able to get away for a game of pool," answered Ira drily. "If you'll cut loose from them, Nead, and get acquainted with fellows of your own age and—and class, you'll be a lot better off. Why, thunderation, you might as well be a day scholar for all the school life you get!"

"I get all the school life I need," answered Humphrey grumpily. "All those fellows like Lyons and Johnston and Goodloe talk about is football and baseball and rot like that. They make me tired."

"No, they don't, and you know it," replied Ira calmly. "You'd be glad to know a dozen fellows like them. And you're going to, too."

"How am I?"

"Why, you're going to cut down your evenings at the Central Billiard Palace, or whatever it's called, to two a week, for one thing. And you're going to keep away from there entirely in the

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daytime, for another thing. And you're going to pay a few visits with me for a third thing."

"Like fun I am!" But Humphrey couldn't disguise the fact that the programme held attraction for him. "I don't talk their sort of baby talk," he added sourly.

"You'll learn. It isn't hard. We'll run over tomorrow evening and see Johnston and Bradford."

Humphrey was silent a minute. Then: "I promised to do something tomorrow night," he said doubtfully. [232]

"All right, we'll make it Thursday, then. One night's as good as another for me. By the way, how did it happen you were around here tonight?"

"Oh, I thought I'd stay at home." Then, after a moment: "Fact is," he went on, "I'm broke, and there's no fun going down there and just looking on."

Ira pushed himself back from the table, crossed his legs and observed his roommate thoughtfully, drumming gently on his teeth with the pen in his hand. Humphrey grinned back a trifle defiantly.

"Know what I think?" asked Ira finally. "I think you need a financial agent, Nead, a sort of guardian to look after your money affairs. How much do you get a month?"

"Fifteen dollars regularly. If I want more I usually get it. My mother ponies up now and then and dad is generally good for an extra fiver."

"Then you have at least twenty a month, eh? Seems to me you ought to be able to scrape along on that."

"It does, does it? Well, it isn't so easy. Food costs a lot, for one thing."

"But you don't have to pay for your food out of your allowance, do you?" [233]

"Some of it. I get seven a week for board, but eating around at restaurants costs a lot more than eating in hall or at a boarding house, you see."

"Then why not go to Alumni or come with me to Trainor's? That's what you'd better do, I guess. Then, when you get your allowance you hand it across to me——"

"Help!" laughed Humphrey. "I can see myself doing that!"

"Why not? I'll hand a quarter of it back to you every week. If you need more than that I'll advance it, but I'll take it out of the next month's allowance. Then you won't have to write home for extra money every ten days or two weeks. Yes, I guess that's what we'll have to do, Nead. I'll put your money in bank with mine and you'll find that it will last twice as long. Tomorrow you come around to the boarding house and I'll get you started."

Humphrey stared dubiously. At last: "Oh, well, I'll try it," he said. "But if I don't like it I don't have to keep it up."

"No, but you will like it. Meanwhile, how much do you need?"

CHAPTER XVII

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THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINE

Parkinson played Musket Hill Academy the next Saturday at North Lebron and met her second defeat. As, however, Musket Hill was, with the possible exception of Kenwood, the most formidable adversary on the season's schedule, the school was not much surprised nor greatly disappointed. Of course, there had been a secret hope that the Brown would triumph, but to have done that she would have had to play a far better game than she had so far exhibited, and Coach Driscoll was not ready to speed up the team for the sake of a single victory. Parkinson played true to midseason form and so did Musket Hill, and as Musket Hill's midseason form was by far the better she took the contest. The score, 16 to 6, fairly represented the merits of the teams.

Parkinson was outplayed in three periods and held her own and no more in the fourth. By that time Musket Hill had accumulated a touchdown from which she had failed to kick goal and a field-goal, and had held her adversary scoreless although the latter had twice threatened to tally. Once Parkinson had reached the home team's twenty-two yards and had attempted a forward-pass across the line which had failed, and again, in the third inning, she had rushed the ball as far as Musket Hill's eighteen, where, held twice for downs, she had tried to put the ball over the bar from placement. Instead of going between the uprights, though, the pigskin went into the mêlée and was captured by the opponents. It was that failure of Right Half-Back Cole's that paved the way for Musket Hill's second score, for the fortunate youth who picked the ball from the ground got nearly to the centre of the field before he was stopped and from there it was rushed to the visitors' twenty-six and, when the brown line stiffened, was sent across the bar for three points. [235]

In the fourth quarter, Parkinson went bravely at it to retrieve her fallen fortunes, but a fumble by Basker, who had gone in for Dannis a minute or two before, gave the ball to Musket Hill on Parkinson's thirty-yard line and Musket Hill was not to be denied. She tore big holes in the brown line between tackles, favouring the centre for the last stage of the journey, and at last pushed her

full-back over. She brought her score up to sixteen by kicking a pretty goal from a hard angle. Parkinson wanted to give way to discouragement then, but Coach Driscoll sent back Donovan and Walker and replaced Almy with Conlon at centre, Almy having been injured in the final play of the drive, and somehow the Brown took on a new lease of life and acquitted herself rather heroically. And when, with some five minutes of playing time left, one of Basker's punts went over the head of the Musket Hill's quarter, Ray White dropped on it near the enemy's twenty-yards. Then the Brown pulled herself together in really superb style and showed an offence which, had it matured earlier in the game, might have written a different page in history. Parkinson went over the immaculate Musket Hill goal line in just five plays, of which three were mighty rushes by Wirt, one a delayed pass to Billy Wells for a slide off tackle and the fifth and last a straight plunge through the centre of the crumbling Musket Hill line by Cole. That final rush met with so little opposition that Cole went stumbling and falling half-way to the end line!

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But six points—Lyons failed at goal by a mere inch or so—while comforting, didn't alter the fact of defeat, and Parkinson went home through a cloudy, chilly evening with another dent in her shield. But the fact that the school had "come back" in its allegiance was proved well that afternoon, for the hundred-odd boys who had accompanied the team stood up in the stand after the battle was over and cheered again and again for "Parkinson! *Parkinson!* PARKINSON!"

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As it turned out later, Parkinson had sustained something more serious than a defeat that day. She had lost the services for most if not all of the balance of the season of Bill Almy, the centre. Almy had borne the brunt of the last half-dozen rushes made by Musket Hill when on the way to her final score and he had paid for it. They had taken him off groaning and half fainting, but it wasn't known until the next morning that he had broken a collar bone in two places! The attending physician seemed highly elated over that second break, but his enthusiasm was shared by no one else. There was hopeful talk of a pad later on and of Almy getting into the Kenwood game at least, but Coach Driscoll didn't deceive himself. On Monday afternoon he moved Conlon into Almy's place and looked around for a likely substitute for Conlon. His choice fell on Tooker, a guard, and Tooker was put through a course of sprouts that almost ruined an excellent disposition but failed to satisfy Mr. Driscoll. Crane, too, was given a chance to demonstrate that he was intended for a centre rather than a guard, and Crane failed quite as signally as Tooker.

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There was a time when "any old man," provided he had weight, bulk and strength, did well enough for the centre position on a football team, but that time has long since passed. Today the centre position is rightly called the pivotal position. A poor centre may do more to handicap a team than any other one player, and a good centre can do more to perfect it. He is the man that the team lines up about, and his spirit is, more frequently than is realised, the spirit of the whole eleven. In these days, instead of merely learning two passes, one to the quarter and another to the kicker, a centre must become accomplished in anywhere from six to a dozen, for each of the new formations requires its special sort of pass. Instead of being guardian only of the little piece of territory on which he stands, the centre today must be "all over the lot." He goes down the field with the ends under a punt, plunges into the interference on mass plays or end runs and must do his part when a forward-pass is tried. Nor is he less busy on the defensive, for he shares the responsibility for end runs and forward-passes and must help in blocking off the opponents going down the field under kicks. And, whether on offence or defence, he must handle the opposing centre and at all times use his head as well as his body. Consequently, an ideal centre must combine a good many qualities, as many if not more than any other man on the team. He must be steady, fast, intuitive and high-spirited. If he has weight besides, so much the better but some of the weight should be inside his head and not all below the neck.

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Ira had not been used in the Musket Hill game, but the following Saturday, after a week of longer and harder practice than had fallen to the lot of the team all season, he found himself at right guard when the third quarter of the game with Chancellor School began. Chancellor had not come up to expectations and the Brown had run up nineteen points in the first half and had the contest secure. Brackett had played at right of centre during the first half and Neely was supposed to be next in succession, but for some reason Coach Driscoll called Ira's name. Tooker had started at centre, but had lasted only through the first quarter and half of the second, and Crane had taken his place. Crane, while a fairly good substitute guard, was still quite at sea in the centre position and much of his work devolved on the guards. As Chancellor School was not yet acknowledging defeat; had a slow-moving but heavy line and was relying on rushes between tackles for the most part, Ira and Tom Buffum, the latter playing at the left of Crane, had their hands pretty full. Crane could be relied on to play his man on most occasions, but on the attack he was slow in recovering after the pass and it was usually Ira or Buffum who blocked the opposing centre. Any save ordinary passes to quarter or kicker were beyond Crane, and so most of the direct passes were eliminated. On getting the ball back to the kicker Crane was inclined to be erratic, but so far had not sinned many times. He worked as hard as he knew how, perhaps twice as hard as he would have had to work had he known his position better. For most of the third quarter he got on well enough, with the two guards sharing his duties, but when the period was nearly over he began to weaken and Chancellor discovered the fact very speedily. Play after play came through the centre of the brown line, in spite of the efforts of the guards and the backfield, and had there not been a fumble by a Chancellor half-back on the opponent's twenty-seven yards Chancellor would surely have scored. She recovered the fumble for a twelve-yard loss and began her rushes again, but the distance was too great and an unsuccessful attempt at a field-goal from near the thirty-five yards gave the ball to Parkinson.

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Cole tore off four yards and Wirt got two and then the latter was sent back to punt. Crane had been pretty badly used and what might have happened earlier in the game happened then. The

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pigskin flew away from him at least two feet above Wirt's upstretched hands and went rolling and bobbing toward the goal line. It was merely a question of whether a Chancellor end would get to it before it could be recovered. Something told Ira that the pass had gone wrong almost as soon as he had seen it vanish from Crane's hands, and he was tearing back nearly on the heels of the ball before his own backfield had more than sensed the catastrophe. Chancellor came piling through and her ends fought desperately to get around. Wirt was legging it back after the pigskin and several other Parkinson players had begun pursuit. But Ira's start had given him the advantage and he passed Wirt at full speed. The ball was trickling toward the five-yard line. Behind, pounded the feet of friend and foe as Ira slackened, caught the ball up, stumbled, recovered his gait and swung to the long side of the field. He might have played it safe by taking it over the line for a touchback, but the idea didn't occur to him. Instead, he pushed the ball into the crook of his left elbow as he had been taught to do, raised his right hand to ward off tacklers and plunged back the way he had come, circling, however, well over toward the further side of the field. [242]

Hasty interference gathered to his aid, but the enemy was abreast of him and stretching toward him as he reached the twenty yards. He avoided one tackler by dodging. Then two of the enemy faced him and escape looked impossible to the watchers. But he stopped short in his tracks, stopped for such a perceptible period that it seemed as if he was deliberately studying his chances, and then, just as the two pair of striped arms reached for him, he was off again, swinging on his heel, swerving to the left, leaving the enemy empty-handed as they staggered and rolled over the turf. After that only something approaching a miracle could account for Ira's escape. In evading the last danger he had thrown himself straight into the centre of the enemy horde. His interference, never very effective, was scattered now and he had only his own wits to serve him. But serve him they did. And so did his weight and strength, for twice he literally tore himself loose from Chancellor players when it looked from the side line as though he was stopped, and twice he bowled over an eager tackler by sheer weight and impetus. He deserved to carry the pigskin the remaining length of the field for a touchdown, after such an exhibition, but we don't always get what we deserve—when we deserve it. Ira still had the Chancellor quarter to reckon with, and that canny youth had refused to be drawn up to the line and was waiting just short of the centre of the field. [243]

Eager shouts urged the runner on and behind him brown legs and striped legs sped desperately. Ira changed his course a little toward the nearer side line and the quarter edged in to meet him. Then they came together. The Chancellor quarter tackled surely and Ira's attempt to get past him failed. But then, with the quarter hanging to his hips, Ira kept right on. The exclamations of dismay from the stands turned to shrieks of laughter, for the quarter-back, who, although smaller than the runner was of no mean size, dangled from Ira like a sack of meal, squirming, dragging, pulling! Five yards Ira gained. Then his plunging steps shortened, for the quarter had slipped his clutching arms lower until they were binding Ira's legs together. But even then he managed to conquer another two yards, and perhaps he would have gone on and on to the far-off goal line had not a ponderous Chancellor linesman reached the scene at the next moment and hurled himself on the runner. [244]

When they wrested the ball away it was just past the centre line and Ira had made a good forty-five yards in that plucky run. Fred Lyons hugged him as he helped drag him to his feet, and Basker shouted: "That's going some, Rowland! That's going some, boy!" and thumped what little breath was left in his lungs away. That ended Crane's session and Conlon went in at his position. After that Parkinson took the ball forty-eight yards without losing it and shot Cole across for the fourth score. When the whistle shrilled Billy Goode summoned Ira out and sent him trotting back to the gymnasium and Neely came into his own. Ira was not at all pained at being taken out, for he had had a pretty busy fifteen minutes and was glad enough to get under a shower. He was dressed and out of the building before the others returned and only heard the final score at supper time.

Coach Driscoll had put in too many substitutes in the fourth period, he was told, and one of them—some said Cheap and some said Mason—had fumbled a pass near goal and a Smart Aleck Chancellor youth had fallen on the ball. It had taken the full allowance of downs to get the ball over, but they had done it, and the final score stood 26 to 7. Ira was something of a hero at Mrs. Trainor's table that evening, but he must have been a disappointing one, for his account of his achievement had to be dragged from him piecemeal and sounded extremely flat as he told it. To his credit, it may be stated that he didn't look on his feat as at all remarkable and didn't feel at all heroic. Only rather tired. He fell asleep over his Latin about nine and was in bed ten minutes later. [245]

When he wrote home the next morning—it was a rainy Sunday and so eminently suited to the writing of letters and the balancing of bank books and the "getting up" on neglected studies—he did mention his part in the Chancellor game, but he didn't make much of it, first, because he didn't think much of it and, second, because his father didn't know as much about a game of football as Ira himself had known before coming to Parkinson!

On Monday Ira might have seen evidences of new respect in the looks and behaviour of his teammates, but he wasn't looking for them. It didn't occur to him that picking up a football and carrying it through the opposing team for a matter of forty-five yards could make any difference in his status. But there was a difference, and he was ultimately forced to perceive it. For awhile, however, he was far too busy. Coach Driscoll beckoned him from the bench before practice started. The coach had a quizzical smile on his face as Ira approached. [246]

"Rowland," he said, "that was a nice little piece of work of yours on Saturday, and it seems too

bad to find fault with you, but, my boy, you had no more business with that ball than a tramp with a cake of soap!"

"Oh!" murmured Ira. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Your duty was to play your position, no matter what went on behind. As it turned out you got away with it, but you might not have. It was Wirt's place to pick up that ball, or Basker's, but not yours. When you left the line you left a hole open for half the opposing team to pile through. If you'd made a slip they'd have brushed you and Wirt aside and had a touchdown in the shake of a lamb's tail. See it?"

"Yes, sir," agreed Ira sheepishly. "I'm afraid I didn't think of that."

"No, but those are the things you must think of, Rowland. You must use your head every minute. You're not likely to do the same thing again and we'll say no more about it. Aside from the fact that it was wrong at the start, Rowland, that was as pretty a piece of running in a broken field as I ever saw. And I was mighty glad to see one thing in especial: you didn't stop when you were tackled. I liked that. You got a good seven yards after Myers grabbed you, and when you did go down you went down the right way, toward the other fellow's goal. That may seem a small thing to you, Rowland, but if you put together all the ground lost during a game by men who give in too soon when tackled and who don't 'stretch' when they're down you'd have a fairly respectable slice of territory. All right. Now, here's something else. Do you think you could play centre?"

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"Centre?" Ira stared blankly. "I don't know, sir."

"Well, we've got an opening for a bright, industrious lad like you," said the coach, with a smile. "You'd have to work like the very dickens, Rowland, but I have a hunch that we can make a centre of you if you'll do your part. Want to try it?"

"Why, yes, sir, if you want me to."

"Hm! Your soul doesn't exactly crave it, I see."

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"I'd just as lief, Mr. Driscoll, but I don't know much about it. I'll be glad to try."

"And try hard?"

"Hard as I know how, sir."

"Well, we can't expect more than that, I guess. Anyway, we'll see in a few days how you shape up. Today you'd better study Conlon and try to see how it's done. Keep your blanket on and follow scrimmage from behind the line. Use your eyes, Rowland. Maybe we'll get you in for a minute or two at the end. Have you ever tried to pass?"

"No, sir, not as a centre."

"Well, it isn't hard if you put your mind on it. I'll turn you over to Basker when he gets through signal work. If you make good, Rowland, you stand a mighty good show of getting into the Kenwood game. And if you do that you'll get your letter."

"Yes, sir."

"Hang it, Rowland!" laughed the coach. "Don't you ever get enthusiastic about anything? Most fellows would be tickled to death at the idea of playing against Kenwood."

"I suppose I'd like it very much," replied Ira in a slightly puzzled tone. "I hope I'll be good enough."

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"If you're not, you won't get a chance," said the coach drily. "All right now. Join your squad. When you get through signal work report to me again."

Work like the very dickens Ira did, not only that day but every practice day following during the next fortnight. He was taught his duties in the line and he was taught to pass the ball in all of seven different styles and angles. It was Basker who did most of the coaching as to passing, although on one or two occasions Dannis took him in charge. Then Bill Almy, his shoulder and arm confined in a cast and a hundred yards of bandage—I'm accepting Almy's estimate—appeared and went at Ira unmercifully. There were half-hour sessions at odd times during the day and every afternoon he stayed on the field with the goal-kickers and, always with two, and frequently with three or even four, busy coaches about him, passed and passed and passed! Or he stood up and was pushed about by Coach Driscoll or he hurled his weight against the charging machine to a chorus of "Low, Rowland, low! Now! Push up! Harder, man! You're not working!"

Not working! Ira decided that he had never even suspected before what the word meant! And what haunted him most of the time was the bothering conviction that a whole lot of persons, including himself, were wearing souls and bodies out for no important result! Surely, if it came to all this bother it would be much more reasonable to let Kenwood win the game. Of course he realised that a victory for Parkinson would be very nice and would please everyone around him, especially Fred Lyons and Coach Driscoll, but it didn't seem to him that the game was worth the candle. Still, he kept his nose to the grindstone without a murmur, remained good-tempered in the face of many temptations to be otherwise and worked like a dray-horse. And, at last—it was the Tuesday following the game with Day and Robins's School—he was told that he had made good. "You'll do, Rowland," was what Coach Driscoll said briefly that day. "Rest up tomorrow. Thursday we'll give you a good try-out against the second."

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If he expected signs of delight, he was disappointed. For all that Ira said was: "Thank you, sir."

CHAPTER XVIII

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“OLD EARNEST”

Humphrey was “breaking into Society,” to use his own half-contemptuous phrase. That is to say, he had made two visits with Ira, had renewed acquaintances with Fred Lyons and Gene Goodloe and Mart Johnston and Dwight Bradford, and had shaken hands with perhaps a half-dozen others. He pretended to make fun of the proceedings, but was secretly very pleased. He was received politely by new acquaintances, more on Ira’s account than his own, for Ira had become a person of prominence now, and with a fair degree of cordiality by those he had met before. He had sense enough to show his best side, and behaved quietly and even modestly and let the others do most of the talking. Perhaps his best side was his real side. At any rate, Ira began to hope so then, and later in the year he became convinced of it. Humphrey didn’t give up his friends at the Central Billiard Palace all at once, but he did confine his visits to that place to two or three evenings a week. And Ira heard a great deal less of “Billy” and “Jimmy” and the rest of the billiard-hall crowd.

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Meanwhile, Ira had taken possession of Humphrey’s November allowance and Humphrey was having it doled out to him three dollars at a time. The first week he ran through his three dollars by Wednesday and Ira had to advance two more. But the next week Humphrey got along with the three, and after that he seldom had to ask for more. Boarding at Mrs. Trainor’s was the real solution of his financial problem; that and wasting less money on pool. Later in the year he became thoroughly interested in economising and eventually opened a banking account of his own. But that doesn’t belong in the present narrative.

With the end of the football season only about a fortnight away, Parkinson School became rampantly patriotic, and no one could have sanely found fault with its attitude toward the team. It was now as enthusiastically supporting the eleven as even Fred Lyons could wish. There were cheer meetings about every other night and the one principal subject of conversation whenever two or more fellows met was: “Will We Beat ‘Em?” “‘Em,” of course, were the Kenwood team, for no one particularly cared what happened to Day and Robins’ or St. Luke’s. Fortunately for discussion, there were plenty who believed or pretended to believe that Kenwood would repeat her last year’s performance and tie another defeat to Parkinson. Those who held that view had excellent grounds for their conviction, for Kenwood had passed, or, more correctly, was passing through a very successful season. So far the Blue had met with but one defeat, had seven victories to her credit and had played a 0 to 0 game with the State College Second Team. In fact, Kenwood had one of her Big Teams this season, if Kenwood was to be believed, and was pretty confident of a victory over the Brown. The Kenwood school paper caused a spasm of indignation throughout Parkinson by editorially calling on the Football Association to move the Parkinson game up the next Fall so that the blue team might meet in her final contest a foeman more worthy of her steel. *The Leader* replied scathingly to that impertinent reflection on the Parkinson team and printed a page of letters to the editor from “Patriot,” “Veritas,” “Indignant” and other well-known scribes.

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Theoretically at least, Ira had no time for interests or adventures outside football, for he was an extremely busy, hard-worked youth from the Monday succeeding the Chancellor game to the Thursday before the contest with Kenwood Academy. Nor, for that matter, did any other interests win his attention or other adventures befall him, if we except, in the first case, study—he had to do more or less of that—and, in the second case, a call from “Old Earnest.”

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Ernest Hicks would probably have been much surprised if anyone had connected him in any way with an adventure, for adventures didn’t lay within his scheme of life. But at a period when Ira’s days were made up of hearing, thinking and playing football, anything not connected with that all-absorbing subject possessed for him the attributes of an adventure. It was on a Friday afternoon, the Friday preceding the Day and Robins’ game, between his last recitation and the practice hour, that someone knocked on his half-closed door. He had heard footsteps on the stairs, but usually such footsteps went on to one of the other doors and he hadn’t looked up from the book he was studying. He said “Come in!” and rather expected to be confronted by the freckle-faced youth who called for and, in the course of time, brought back the laundry. But when the door opened it was “Old Earnest” who stood there, and Ira wonderingly slipped a pencil between the pages and arose.

“Have you got an encyclopedia?” inquired the visitor, his gaze, from behind the big, round lenses of his spectacles, roaming inquiringly about the room.

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“No, I haven’t,” answered Ira. “At least, only a small, one-volume one. I’m afraid it wouldn’t be of much use to you. I usually go over to the library.”

The visitor nodded. “Yes, you can do that.” He rubbed his chin reflectively with long, thin fingers and observed Ira dubiously. He was quite the tallest youth Ira had ever seen, and he was as thin and angular as he was tall. He had brown hair, which was worn rather too long and which looked sadly in need of brushing, grey eyes, a very sharp nose, a wide, thin mouth and a chin that came almost to a point. He looked to Ira as if he needed a square meal, or, rather, a whole series of square meals, for his face was as narrow as his body and his queer, nondescript clothes hung about him as though they had been fashioned at some far-distant time when he had weighed about three times his present weight. His coat was a plaid lounging jacket from which depended

by a few threads one remaining frog. The corresponding button had followed its companions into oblivion. His trousers were of grey flannel and his feet were encased in a pair of brown canvas "sneakers." Ira had glimpsed him frequently about the corridors of Parkinson Hall, but this present costume was not what he wore at recitations, which, as Ira reflected, was a fortunate thing for the sobriety of the classrooms!

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Hicks finally removed his gaze slowly from Ira, sighed and said dejectedly: "I'll have a look at it, I guess. It might give me what I'm after. Where is it?"

It lay in the centre of the desk, a cheap little limp-leather affair of infinitesimal print and a woeful lack of contents. Hicks shook his head as he opened it and ran his long fingers over the edges of the leaves. Ira saw, with a sort of fascination, that the tips of the fingers turned back almost at right angles under pressure. Hicks regretfully closed the book and pushed it from him. "What do you know about the Hamiltonian-System?"

"Not a thing," answered Ira cheerfully. "What is it?"

"It's a system of teaching languages. But who invented it? Was it James or William? And if he did invent it how does it happen that John Locke wrote about it a century before? Explain that if you can."

"I shouldn't want to try, thanks," laughed Ira.

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"Old Earnest" sniffed. "You couldn't. But did Locke himself originate it? Take his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, now. All through that you'll find evidence pointing to the contrary. Have you read it?"

Ira shook his head dumbly.

"You'll want to some day. It's a wonderful work. He applies the Baconian method to the study of the mind, you know."

"Really?" murmured Ira.

"Of course, it's not startling nowadays, but it must have been then. That knowledge results from experience and not from innate ideas is no longer novel. In fact, the whole Descartes theory can be knocked into a heap if you apply Locke's philosophy. He doesn't stand for dualism, you know. Nor do I. To say that the mind and body are heterogeneous substances is quite absurd. You agree with me, of course?"

"I might if I knew what the dickens you were talking about," replied Ira helplessly.

"Oh!" Hicks looked both surprised and disappointed. "Well—" He plunged his hands into the pockets of his cavernous trousers and looked about the room. "I used to visit a fellow up here two or three years ago. I forget what his name was. He was in my class, though, and he and I had a go at Friesian. We didn't keep it up, for some reason. I don't know if you ever studied it?"

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"No, I never did. Is it—did you like it?"

"I think so. I rather forget. Let me see, what was it I came for? Oh, yes that Hamiltonian-System! I'll have to go over to the library. It's a bother. I'm always having to go over to the library. It is was more central—"

"I'd be glad to look it up for you, if you liked," offered Ira. "But I'm afraid I wouldn't get it right."

"You wouldn't," answered Hicks calmly. "It doesn't matter. I do miss my own library, though. It was very complete."

"What happened to it?" asked Ira. "Er—won't you sit down?"

"Old Earnest" evidently didn't hear the invitation. At least, he paid no attention to it, but continued to stand there, hands in pockets, and ruminatively stared at the window. "I sold it," he said quite matter-of-factly. "Over a hundred and twenty volumes."

"But—but what for?"

"Why, I needed some money. You see, I had the misfortune to fail in the finals last Spring, and I hadn't planned on another year. It costs a good deal here. Food especially. I got sixty-two dollars for them. They were worth two hundred at least. There was a twelve-volume set of the Universal Encyclopedia and a copy of the first edition of Fanning's *Morals*. Some others, too. Valuable. He's still got most of them, and I'm hoping to get them back some day. I've bought five or six already. I wanted the encyclopedia, but he put an outrageous price on it. I miss it a great deal. Well, I'm much obliged for your information."

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He turned abruptly toward the door and shuffled across the room. Ira was tempted to remind him that he had obtained no information, but didn't. Instead: "Who buys books here?" he asked.

"Books? Oh, there are several. All robbers, though. I sold mine to Converse, on Oak Street. He will do as well for you as any of them. If you ever want to read that book of Locke's, I've got it."

"Old Earnest" passed out, closing the door behind him with a resounding crash. When he had gone Ira smiled at the closed door. Then he chuckled. Then, quite suddenly, he became serious and, seating himself at the table again, picked holes in the blotter with the nib of a pen for quite five minutes. And finally he tossed the pen aside with the air of one who has reached a decision, seized his cap and clattered down the stairs.

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Converse's Second-hand Book Emporium—it seemed to Ira that Warne's merchants exhibited a

marked and peculiar partiality to “emporiums” as opposed to mere “stores”—was not difficult to find, for the sidewalk in front was stacked with broken-backed books and old magazines. It was a dim and dingy place inside, and smelled of dust and old leather. The proprietor arose from an armchair before a small desk under a window and approached smilingly. He was a thin, stoop-shouldered little man in rusty black clothes and wearing a black skullcap. The smile was wonderfully benignant, but the little deep-set eyes looked crafty.

“I just wanted to look around,” said Ira.

“Of course! Certainly! Help yourself, sir. Is there any special subject you’re interested in?”

“N-no, I guess not.” Ira picked up a book from a shelf and examined it carelessly. “I might use a good dictionary, though.”

“I have a fine lot, sir. This way, please.” The proprietor led the way down one of the two dim passages and snapped on an electric light at the end. “Here we are! Big and little, sir. You’ll find the prices plainly marked in the front. Here’s a Webster Unabridged—”

“N-no, I think a smaller one—”

“Then a Student’s, like this.” He slapped the book on his hand and sent a cloud of dust into the air. “Only a dollar and a quarter, sir.”

Ira viewed it without enthusiasm. Finally: “I might give you fifty cents for it,” he said indifferently.

“Oh, dear, no, sir! I couldn’t do it, I honestly couldn’t! That’s one of the best dictionaries there is. I sell a great many of them to the young gentlemen at the school. Perhaps you are one of them?”

“Yes, but I couldn’t pay a dollar and a quarter for that,” said Ira, laying it down.

“Ah, but if you’re one of the young gentlemen from the school, sir, I’ll make a discount. We’ll say a dollar. Shall I wrap it up?”

“There’s no hurry. Perhaps seventy-five cents—What’s this? An encyclopedia, eh? Too bad it isn’t in better condition.”

“But it’s in very good condition indeed, sir,” protested the little man. “I bought that not more than a month ago from a gentleman who is most particular with his books. In fact, I took his whole library, a matter of—hm—something under two hundred volumes. Now if you wanted a rare bargain in a set of the Universal—”

“No, I guess not. I couldn’t afford it.”

“You don’t know, sir, you don’t know,” chuckled the man. “Just wait till you hear the price I’m going to make. You can have that set for ex-act-ly twenty dollars! And it cost, when new—”

“Yes, but it isn’t new,” interrupted Ira. “Twenty dollars, eh? I’ll wager you didn’t pay more than ten for it.”

“Ten! Ten dollars for a perfect set of the Encyclopedia Universal! My dear sir!”

“I might give twelve,” said Ira tentatively.

The man held up his dusty hands in horror. “You’re not serious!” he protested.

“Not very, because I don’t specially want them,” replied Ira. “What else is there here?”

“But—I tell you what I *will* do, sir, I’ll let you have the set for—let me see, let me see—eighteen-fifty! There, I can’t offer better than that!”

“Oh, yes you can,” answered the boy cheerfully. “You can say fifteen. But I’d rather you didn’t, for I might take it, and I oughtn’t to do it.”

“Hm. You’d pay fifteen, you think?”

“Well, I might. Yes, I guess I’d fall for it at fifteen. But—”

“It’s an awful thing to do, but times are hard and—well, take it!”

“Thanks,” laughed Ira, “but they’re a little heavy to take with me. I guess you’ll have to send them to me.”

“Hm: I’d have to charge a little for delivering them.”

“Suit yourself, but don’t charge me,” replied Ira. “I’ll write you a cheque if you’ll show me where the ink is. Oh, thanks. There you are, Mr. Converse. And the books are to go to 200 Main Street, Mrs. Magoon’s house.”

“Eh? You said 200 Main Street? Why, that’s where—hm—yes, of course! Very well, sir. Thank you. I hope you’ll remember me whenever you want anything else, Mr.—er—Rowland. Good afternoon.”

CHAPTER XIX

CALLERS

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Ira had just time to get to the field before practice began. The work today was easy, consisting principally of signal drill in preparation for the game with Day and Robins's School on the morrow, and Ira was put in Basker's squad and trotted around the gridiron for a good half-hour. Coach Driscoll had given them four new plays to learn and they were still far from perfect in them when time was called. The others went off to the gymnasium, all save a few kickers and Ira. Ira had still a session of passing ahead of him. On the practice gridiron the second team was playing Warne High School and, from the few brief glimpses Ira caught of the contest, getting beaten. To his satisfaction, several of the quasi-official assistant coaches went off to watch the second team game, leaving only Basker and Almy to deal with him. Coach Driscoll was hard at work with the goal-kickers.

Ira did very well this afternoon, and even Basker, who was a critical youth, said so. They kept him at it until it was almost too dark to see, by which time everyone else had departed and the second team field was deserted. "I guess Driscoll will put you in tomorrow for awhile," observed Basker, as they went back through the twilight. "If he does, just you keep your head and you'll get on all right."

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"The big thing to remember," said Bill Almy, "is to take all the time you want. Don't let anyone hurry you in getting the ball away, Rowland. And if the other side interferes with you, yell right out! Make a big fuss about it. If you do the officials will watch the other side so close they won't dare to try it on again. In fact, it isn't a bad idea to claim interference, anyway, if you get half a chance."

"We won't have much trouble with Day and Robins's," said Basker. "It will be a good game to get some experience in, Rowland. Are you going to get back in time for Kenwood, Bill?"

"Not likely," replied the centre sadly. "This thing doesn't do much. Doc says a double fracture is always slower work than a single one. He's as pleased as pickles about it, the silly chump. Smiles all over his face whenever he looks at it. I wish he had it!"

"I don't see then but that Rowland has a pretty good chance to get in against Kenwood."

"Chance? It's a dead sure thing. I'm not knocking Terry Conlon, but he won't last the game. You know that yourself. Terry plays like a house on fire at first and then begins to let up. Oh, Rowland will get in all right. I hope he does, too. He's worked like a Trojan."

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"I haven't minded it much," said Ira. "All that's worrying me is the fear that Mr. Driscoll will change his mind about me again and try to make an end of me!"

"Look out that Beadle doesn't make an end of you!" laughed Basker.

"Who's Beadle?" Ira asked.

"The Kenwood centre. He's a peach of a player, isn't he, Bill?"

"Beadle," replied Almy slowly, "is about as good a centre rush as you'll find on a prep school team today. That's saying something, too. He's as pretty a player to watch as I ever saw. I'm sorry I'm not to try him again. I've been thinking I'd give him a better fight this time. Last year he put it all over me, and I don't mind owning up to it. The man's as quick as greased lightning."

"He's as strong as an elephant, too," added Basker. "And he plays hard. You'll subscribe to that, eh, Bill?"

Almy smiled. "Well, next to a steam roller, Beadle's the toughest thing to stop I know of. He isn't a dirty player, but he certainly can mess you up to the King's taste. I'll never forget my handsome phiz after he got through with it last Fall!"

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"Is that the fellow I'll have to play against?" asked Ira.

"Yes, if you get in," assented Almy. "Like the sound of it?"

"Not a bit," replied Ira. "I'm hoping that Conlon will last all through the game!"

When he got back to the room he found the encyclopedia piled up beside the door, twelve big, heavy volumes. It was a little after five and he was fairly certain that "Old Earnest" was still in his room downstairs. He left the door wide open and, during the next three-quarters of an hour, listened intently for sounds from below and several times crept to the banisters and peered over. It was not until nearly six, however, that Hicks' door crashed shut—"Old Earnest" had an emphatic manner with doors—and Ira caught sight of him starting down the first flight. Giving him time to get clear of the house, Ira gathered up four of the books and made his first trip. Hicks' room was in darkness, but the bracket in the hall faintly illumined a patch near the door and Ira set the volumes against the baseboard and returned for more. To his relief he completed the transfer before Humphrey appeared, for Humphrey would be sure to ask questions and Ira didn't know that he could explain the affair to his roommate's satisfaction. Humphrey clattered in shortly after he had returned from the final trip and they went over to supper together.

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Afterwards Humphrey announced in tones that held a queer mixture of pride and apology that he was going over to see a fellow in Goss. "You know him, I guess," he added carelessly. "Sternner. He's a second year fellow. President of the class, I think. He spoke at the meeting that night."

"No, I don't know him except by sight," answered Ira. "Where did you meet him!"

"Oh, he was with Brad this afternoon. He comes from Tonawanda. That's near my home, you know."

"As Mart says, no one can blame him," laughed Ira. "I'd come away, too, if I lived in a place

with such a name."

"Tonawanda? What's the matter with the name?" demanded Humphrey. "It isn't half as bad as some of the names in your part of the country. What's that one you sprung the other night? Chemquat—"

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"Chemquasabamticook? Oh, that's just a river. Our towns have pretty names, like Skowhegan and Norridgewock and Pattagumpus," replied Ira gravely. "Well, see you later."

He found Mart Johnston in possession when he reached the room. Mart explained that Brad had tried to get him to go to a meeting of the Debating Society and that he had had to run off after dinner to escape that horrible fate. "They all talk," he said, "and no one says anything. And they get most frightfully excited and tear their hair and froth at the mouth and beat on the table, and all they're fussed up about is whether Daniel Webster was a greater man than John L. Sullivan or whether honesty is the best policy! They're a queer bunch, those debaters, I should think! But if I'm in the way here I can go somewhere else. I can't go home until after eight, because Brad will get me if I do, but I can walk the streets or go to sleep in a doorway."

"You're not in my way," laughed Ira, "and Humphrey is calling on Mr. Sterner of Tonawanda."

"Who's he?"

"Sterner of the second," explained Ira. "He comes from Tonawanda, New York, and that makes a bond of sympathy between him and Nead. Nead hails from Buffalo. From what he said I gathered that the two places were near each other."

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"No one can blame you. Well, how's the battle going? Are you a scientific centre rush yet? I heard Fred say some nice things about you the other day. I guess he and Driscoll are real proud of you."

"I'm afraid they won't be when they see me play. Basker says they'll put me in tomorrow. Bet you anything I'll pass the ball over Wirt's head or do something else perfectly awful!"

"Pull yourself together, old man. You can't do any worse than some of the others Driscoll has had at centre. Someone's at the door, I think. Oh, *do* you suppose it's Brad? I won't go without a struggle!"

It wasn't Brad, however, but Hicks, Hicks looking oddly bewildered and embarrassed as he entered in response to Ira's call. His embarrassment wasn't reduced any when he found Mart there, and he started to retire, but thought better of it and slammed the door mightily behind him as one burning his bridges. Ira, surmising his errand, tried to head him off.

"You know Johnston, don't you?" he asked.

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"How are you, Hicks?" inquired Mart. "How's the old boy?"

"How do you do?" murmured Hicks. "I—I wanted to ask—"

"Have a chair," interrupted Ira. "Did you—did you find out about the—er—the Hamiltonian Theory?"

"Hamiltonian-System," Hicks corrected. "Not all I want. There's a book in the catalogue that I couldn't find. They're very careless at the library about misplacing volumes, and—" Hicks paused and frowned. "Oh, yes," he resumed. "I want to ask you if—if you know anything about that Encyclopedia Universal. I came in awhile ago and—"

"I've heard it was a very good encyclopedia," said Ira hurriedly, winking desperately at Hicks and all to no purpose. "Don't you think so, Mart?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Go ahead and rave! Don't mind my presence on the scene. Gibber away, you two!"

"But, what I mean," resumed Hicks, after a puzzled look at Mart, "is how did it get there? I thought maybe—perhaps—You see, I hadn't mentioned it to anyone else—"

"Also, you wanted to know when they were and, if so, to what extent," rattled Mart glibly. "And, while we are inquiring into the matter, let us also consider the other side of it. For instance, fellows: If it is as we say it is, then why not let them do it? Or, failing that, and all other things being equal—"

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"Oh, dry up!" laughed Ira. "Don't mind him, Hicks. He's crazy. Tell you what, I'll drop down to your room later and we'll—we'll talk it over." Ira winked meaningly. Hicks stared and shook his head.

"What I'm getting at," he said carefully, "is this. When I got in from supper I found my encyclopedia piled up on the floor of my room. I didn't ask Converse to send it, and I thought that possibly you—ah—knew something about it."

Ira sank into a chair and tried to look innocent. There was evidently no use in attempting to head "Old Earnest" off.

"Oh, I see," he said affably. "You—you've got it back, eh?"

"Yes. At least—Yes, I've got it back. But what I wanted to know was—"

"Ah, now we're coming to it!" murmured Mart. "Go on! You interest me strangely, Hicks!"

"Well, did you—I mean—" Hicks's embarrassment was becoming painful and Ira took pity on him. He nodded.

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"Yes, I did, Hicks," he said apologetically. "I hope you don't mind. You see, you needed the books and—and I happened to have the money, and Converse sold them dirt cheap—"

"Someone," muttered Mart, "has done something. But what? Books—money—dirt cheap! The plot thickens. Have patience, Martin, have patience! All will be revealed to you in good time."

"Oh!" Hicks swallowed once as though it hurt him and got up from his chair. "Well—" He observed Ira in a puzzled way. "I—I'm greatly obliged to you—er—What is your name, please?"

"Rowland," answered Ira gravely. "I hope you won't think it was cheeky of me, Hicks."

"Old Earnest" shook his head slowly. "No, no, I—I don't. I'm so—so glad to have them, you see, Rowland! It was—very good of you. Of course I'll pay you for them. But I—you'll have to give me time. I'm much obliged. Good evening."

"Old Earnest" fairly bolted to the door and an instant later it crashed shut with a shock that made the walls shake. Ira stole a glance at Mart. That youth, his legs stretched far across the old brown carpet, his head back, was whistling softly and tunelessly. Silence reigned for a long minute. Then:

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Ira.

"I beg your pardon?" Mart turned and regarded him in polite surprise. "You spoke, I believe."

"You heard what I said," laughed Ira. "Why shouldn't I buy his old books for him? He's dead-broke and—"

"Ira, my lad," said Mart sternly, "what have you been and gone and done?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, what dreadful crime have you committed? When I do anything like that, anything—er—kind-hearted and noble—which is very, very seldom—it's because I've been naughty. That's how I square myself with what would be my conscience if I had one. Isn't that the way with you?"

"I got his books because I had the money and he didn't and he needed them. You heard him say he'd pay me back. It's merely a business arrangement."

"Oh, certainly, certainly! My fault!"

"Well, then, dry up," grumbled Ira.

"But I haven't said anything, have I?"

"You've looked things, though."

"Have I? Well, I'll stop looking things, Ira. I suppose you don't want me to say that you're a—rather decent sort, eh?"

"I do not," answered Ira emphatically.

"Then I won't. I do wish, though, that you'd let me ask you one tiny little question. It's this. Pardon me, I prithee, if it sounds impertinent. Are you—that is, have you—oh, gosh! I'll try again. Are you a wealthy citizen, Ira?"

"Why, no, I guess not. I have enough money, of course."

"I see. Very nice. 'Enough money, of course.' Well, I only asked because I assumed—we all did, in fact,—that you were sort of hard-up."

"Hard-up? Why?" asked Ira, puzzled.

"Well, you see, you—you didn't spend much money on—things—"

"Meaning my clothes?" asked the other, smiling.

Mart nodded apologetically. "Clothes for one thing. And then I—we got the idea that as your father was a lumberman you wouldn't be very well-off."

"I see. Well, dad isn't exactly a lumberman in the way you mean. He's president of the Franklin Lumber Company and owns most of the stock. I dare say you could call him rather well-off. And of course he gives me all I need—and a bit more, I guess. As for spending, why, I don't know, Mart. You see, I've lived in a small place all my life, and there's never been very much to spend money on. And, besides, folks up our way are sort of saving. You get the habit, I guess. I always buy whatever I want that seems worth while, but I like to see that I'm getting the value of my money when I do buy. I didn't know I was giving you the idea that I was poverty-stricken. I certainly didn't mean to, Mart."

"Say no more. My fault! We sort of jumped to delusions, so to say. Personally, I'm glad that you aren't in the pauper class. It makes it easier for me to get around to the real, bona fide reason of my visit. You thought I dropped in for a social call or to escape Brad and his Debating Society, but I didn't, Ira. My real reason—but I hardly like to broach it even now."

"Go ahead," Ira laughed. "If it's a loan you can have it, you know."

"Well, it is," acknowledged the visitor, palpably embarrassed. "I—the fact is—Oh, hang it, could you lend me fifty dollars?"

Ira nodded promptly. "I *could*," he replied.

"Well—er—will you?"

Ira shook his head. "No, I won't."

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"Oh! Why? I'll pay it back."

"I know it, but you couldn't pay it back for a month of Sundays, Mart, and while you owed it you'd be no use to me as a friend. That's so, isn't it?"

"How do you mean, no use?"

"I mean that you'd have it on your mind and you'd be wondering whether I was getting impatient and you'd get so you'd dislike me because you owed me money. How would twenty dollars do?"

Mart laughed. "It wouldn't do, old Mr. Solomon. Nor ten. Nor five. But I will borrow a half if you've got it."

"What's the idea?" asked Ira. "Were you fooling?"

"Sure! I just wanted to see what sort of a philanthropist you were. Where's my fifty cents?"

"In my pocket," answered Ira grimly. "And that's where it's going to stay!"

CHAPTER XX

BEFORE THE GAME

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Events rushed headlong past. Ira played a round twenty minutes at centre in the Day and Robins' game and proved himself steady and dependable. He made mistakes, certainly, more than he liked to remember afterwards, but he never messed a pass and he held his position impregnable against the attack of a not very strong enemy. His sins were those of omission and were due to inexperience. On the whole, he put up a satisfactory game, and Coach Driscoll and the rest were secretly very pleased even if they didn't say so. The contest was not interesting from the point of view of the spectators except in that it showed the home team to have developed well during the last week. There were ragged moments and some loose handling of the ball by the backs, but the team showed fifty per cent more team play than it had shown before. The new plays, not all of which were used, went smoothly and gained ground. There was a noticeable improvement in kicking, also. Wirt and Captain Lyons made some punts that brought applause and Walter Cole missed but one goal in six tries. Two were drop-kicks from the field and the rest followed touchdowns. Parkinson had no trouble running up twenty-three points in the first half and ten in the second, while her opponent failed to score until the last quarter when a field-goal saved her from whitewash.

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Practice was hard on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of the next week, but Monday was an easy day and Friday held only a blackboard instruction in the gymnasium for the first team. The school was quite football-crazy by this time and meetings were held almost nightly. The old songs were sung and new ones tried and the cheer leaders went into training. Twice a week the Musical Clubs supplied music, and always earnest, enthusiastic youths waved their arms and predicted victory for Parkinson to a wild and approving chorus of cheers.

Ira no longer sought the field for strenuous half-hours of coaching. He practised with the first team substitutes and got as much and no more work than they did. Sometimes, when he allowed himself to visualise the mighty Beadle, he had qualms of stage fright and heartily wished himself back in private life. It wasn't that he was afraid of anything Beadle might do to him in the way of punishment, for he didn't mind taking blows or giving them, but he was certain that Beadle would, in the language of the gridiron, "put it all over him." And Ira didn't like to come out second-best, even if it was only in playing centre rush in a football game!

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Ernest Hicks came again shortly after that second call and spent the better part of an hour bolt upright in one of the more uncomfortable chairs and talked far over Ira's head, eventually arising and taking his departure as abruptly and noisily as usual. Ira returned the visit and in the course of the next month a rather odd friendship sprang up between the two. "Old Earnest," while grateful to Ira for the restoration of his encyclopedia, sympathised with his benefactor because of the latter's regrettable ignorance on so many important subjects, and Ira was very sorry for Hicks because that youth had stowed his brain so full of impractical knowledge! But they got on very well together, and Ira had to acknowledge that "Old Earnest's" erudite conversation was an excellent antidote for an hour of Mart Johnston's persiflage.

Ira ordered himself a suit about this time from the tailor recommended by Gene, and Humphrey, not to be outshone, followed his example. Humphrey had a little money in the keeping of his "financial agent" and it worried him until it was spent. Ira's suit fitted him perfectly and was becoming, but Gene, cordially commending it, was forced to the mental reservation that Ira had somehow looked more like Ira in his old duds!

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The St. Luke's Academy game aroused the school to new heights of football ardour, for it proved to be a see-saw, nerve-racking affair from kick-off to last whistle. St. Luke's was theoretically an easy aggregation to subdue and had been given her location in the season's schedule for that reason, but something had happened since last year at St. Luke's, and the big, rangy team that trotted onto Parkinson Field that Saturday afternoon was quite a different proposition to that of last Fall. Coach, captain and players scented trouble at first sight of the purple-legged team and even the spectators had an inkling that the home team's "easy game"

was to prove less simple than had been expected.

Parkinson received a bad fright in the first minute of play, when Cole dropped St. Luke's kick-off and recovered it on his six-yard. Two attempts at the purple line netted but four yards and, amidst a tense and uneasy silence, Wirt dropped well back of his goal line to punt. Even after that Parkinson was still in danger, for Wirt's kick, purposely sent high to avoid blocking, was caught in a current of air and came down but thirty-odd yards from goal. St. Luke's sprang a lateral pass from a wide formation and got seven yards, but when she attempted to repeat the play on the other side of the line Brad managed to pierce the running interference and bring down the man with the ball for a three-yard loss. In the end St. Luke's tried a goal from the thirty-four yards and kicked short.

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There was no scoring until the second quarter was almost over. Then Parkinson electrified the watchers by pulling off a forward-pass, Wirt to Price, that covered nearly thirty-five yards. From St. Luke's twenty-six to her twelve, Parkinson advanced by line plunging, Wirt and Wells alternating. Then St. Luke's braced and two tries availed little. Wirt went back to kicking position and Dannis broke through centre for five. On the fourth down, with four to go, Wirt again dropped back, but again the play was a fake, for, after an interminable moment of suspense during which the Parkinson backfield became seemingly inextricably mixed-up, Cole was discovered sneaking around the enemy's left flank. When he was down the tape had to be used. Parkinson had got her distance, though, by half the length of the ball, and from the two-yard line Cole went over on the second attempt. Lyons kicked an easy goal.

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St. Luke's evened the score soon after the beginning of the second half. Her big backs were fast and heavy, and got away quickly from a three-abreast formation close up to the line. Parkinson failed to stop them after a lucky fumble had given the ball to the enemy near the centre of the field. St. Luke's had to fight hard to win, but win she did, finally pushing her left half across the Brown's goal line near a corner of the gridiron. A good punt-out put her in position to kick goal and a moment later the score stood at 7-7. In that advance both Conlon and Donovan were severely battered, and the latter was taken out then and Conlon a few minutes later. Conlon's withdrawal called on Ira, and Ira held the centre of the line fairly intact for a good twenty minutes. It was a far stiffer trial than he had had, and just at first the desperate plunges of the hard-fighting enemy quite took him off his feet, physically and mentally. But when he once discovered that no quarter was given or taken today he promptly revised his ideas and held his own on most occasions.

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Parkinson dropped a field-goal over from the twenty-six-yard line just before the third quarter ended and St. Luke's came back with a second touchdown soon after the beginning of the fourth. As she failed to kick goal, the score stood 13 to 10 when the last period was half gone. Parkinson was showing her quality and no one was surprised, although many were vastly relieved, when, after a punting battle, Dannis got away and eluded the enemy as far as its seventeen-yards. Two tries at the tackles resulted in short gains and then Wirt went back to kick. Ira followed advice and took so much time that the impatient St. Luke's players began to rage. But when the pass shot away it was straight and true and Wirt would have had plenty of time to get the ball out had he tried. But he didn't try. He trotted out to the left, and, just as the enemy leaped at him, threw diagonally to Ray White, and Ray went over the line without challenge. Lyons made the Parkinson total 17 by kicking a clever goal, and the remaining three or four minutes failed to change it.

The school was highly elated over that contest, and the elation was expressed in a monster meeting that night in the Auditorium at which the team and first substitutes sat sheepishly on the stage and heard themselves cheered and praised. Ira was glad he had managed to beat Brackett to the last chair in the back row, for the whole proceeding seemed much too emotional. Ira always rather resented having his emotions disturbed, and tonight the singing and the cheering had their effect.

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There was only light practice Monday, but on Tuesday they went back to the grind. There had been several mix-ups in signals on Saturday and Coach Driscoll was after them today hot and heavy. More new plays were experimented with. Eventually all but two were discarded and Parkinson went into the Kenwood game with fewer plays in her repertoire than any brown team in years. Evening sessions began in the gymnasium at which the plays were diagrammed on the blackboard and afterwards walked through on the floor. Each man had to know what to do in every play, and the coach was not satisfied until the lot were gone through with in perfect precision and smoothness. And that didn't happen until Thursday evening. In the scrimmages, and there were hard ones on Wednesday and Thursday, Ira found himself starting at centre each time, for Conlon had been fairly badly used up in the St. Luke's game and too much work might have put him stale. He got in for a few minutes, however, each afternoon, and Ira couldn't see that he was any the worse for wear.

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During the final fortnight of the season the players were supposed to be in bed before ten o'clock and unnecessary noise in the dormitories was frowned on. Ira obeyed the rule, but as his neighbour across the corridor had evidently not heard the request for silence, he didn't always get to sleep promptly. The stout youth knew more different ways to make a racket than a cage full of monkeys, Ira decided!

On Friday there was a half-hour of signal work and some practice later for the kickers. Then the regulars trotted off and the third-string men and the second team pushed each other around for fifteen minutes for the benefit of the school which had marched to the field with banners and songs and cheers. That contest ended the second team's activities for the year. The regulars were dressed and waiting for them on the gymnasium steps when they came back and there was a fine

and heartening exchange of cheers. Then the marchers arrived and cheered first and second, coach, trainer, rubbers, manager and school, and went off again, singing, to parade twice around the yard and once through the town. The final mass meeting came off that evening, but neither Ira nor any other member of the team was there. They walked or trotted through the plays in the gymnasium, listened to a few words of final advice from Mr. Driscoll and then went home to bed and, in most cases, sleep. Anyone who has lived through a night before the Big Game knows that one or two, at the least, didn't find slumber very speedily.

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Saturday was cold, raw and cheerless at dawn, but in the middle of a long forenoon the sun peeped out for a few minutes. The wind peeped out too, however, and, unlike the sun, it stayed out. The football men had been excused from recitations and at ten o'clock they were taken in four big automobiles on a long ride that ate up most of the time remaining until the early lunch hour. When they returned they found town and campus in the hands of the enemy, for blue pennants were to be seen on every side. Kenwood ate her dinner at The Inn, just outside of town on the Sturgis road, and came rolling up to the field at a little before two. At two-thirty to the second, Captain Lyons having won the toss and chosen the up-wind goal, Kenwood kicked off.

CHAPTER XXI

PARKINSON SCORES

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The sun broke forth at the very instant that the Kenwood kicker's toe sent the pigskin hurtling from the tee, and a flood of wintry sunshine illumined the scene. But a chilling wind still blew from the northeast, snapping the big brown banner above the grandstand and eddying amidst the serried ranks of the onlookers. Brown pennants flapped and blue pennants, fewer in number, waved back defiantly. On the Parkinson side of the field the substitutes sat huddled in their sweaters and blankets on the bench or lay sprawled on the windrow of marsh hay that had covered the gridiron overnight and was now piled in the lee of the barrier. Ira, cross-legged, his back to the boards, meditatively chewed at a grass blade as Wells doubled himself over the ball, dug his cleats and went swinging off to the left behind his converging teammates. Five yards, seven, and then he was down, the arms of a Kenwood end wrapped about his thighs. Dannis' voice piped shrilly across the wind-swept field: "Line up, Parkinson! Signals!"

A moment of suspense and then the brown-shirted backs lunged at the Kenwood centre, faltered, stopped and came tumbling back.

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"Nothing doing there," muttered Brad, at Ira's left.

Then came a try at left tackle and a short gain, with Cole carrying the ball. A third attempt was hurled back by the right of the Blue's line, and Wirt dropped back. The ball went corkscrewing down the field, borne on a blast of the whistling wind, and the players sped under it. Here and there a man went down, rolled over, found his feet again and sped on. The Kenwood quarter signalled for a fair-catch and heeled the ball on his ten-yard line.

"Good work," commented Brad. "They're taking no chances with the ball floating like that. Ever try to catch in a high wind, Rowland?"

Ira shook his head.

"It's hard. You can't tell where the silly thing will come down until just before it gets to you. Now we'll see what they've got in the way of an attack. Hello!"

Kenwood was shifting her whole left side except the end. Parkinson shuffled over to meet the attack, the ball was snapped and the quarter was running back with it, while, far off at the left, a blue-stockinged end was racing down the field with upraised arm.

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"Not a soul with him!" groaned Brad. The ball went streaking across, well above the heads of the players. Cole, discerning the danger too late, was running hard and Dannis was making toward the side line. But the pass was safe and the Kenwood end plucked the ball from air, tucked it in the crook of his arm and started for the distant goal. Cole's effort was late and only Dannis stood in the path of the runner. But Dannis got him and they went rolling together over and over into the hay, while the Kenwood substitutes scattered right and left.

"Twenty yards easy," said Brad drily. "If Price gets fooled like that again it's good night to us! It was a peach of a throw, wasn't it?"

"I guess we weren't looking for it," said Ira. "I thought they'd rush."

"So did I. They'll bear watching. No one saw that. They'll try our line now, though. There they go! You would, would you? Well, you can stay where you are, Kenwood! How much did they get? Not more than a yard, eh?"

"About two feet, I think," answered Ira. "Brackett was right there, that time."

Kenwood tried the centre and pushed through for two and a wide end run around the Parkinson left gave her three more. Then the Blue was forced to punt and the pigskin settled into Dannis' arms and he dodged one end and scampered over two white lines before he was pulled down.

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Parkinson plugged at the centre, hurling Wirt and Cole into the blue wall, but Kenwood stood fast and Wirt again booted the ball far down the field. With that wind behind him it was no feat to

kick fifty yards once he got the ball high enough and this time the opposing left half-back caught well over in a corner. It was a fair-catch again, which was fortunate, since both Parkinson ends were by him when the ball came down. Kenwood tried another long forward and again eluded the enemy, but the throw was short this time and the ball went back. A plunge at Conlon got through for six and a skin-tackle play on the right added two more. But, with two to go on the fourth down, Kenwood again punted, trying to keep the ball low and out of the wind with the result that it rolled out of bounds near the Parkinson forty-yard line. Parkinson was not yet satisfied that she couldn't dent the opposing line, and Cole and Wells were hurled against it, with the result that after three attempts the ball was not far from where it had started.

"Gee, they've got some line there," marvelled Brad. "I suppose 'The' wanted to know what he's up again, but it looks to me as if he was silly not to kick while he's got this wind behind him. All right, Lester! Make it a good one! Get down there, Ray!" [292]

Once more the pigskin sped toward the further goal and once more the Brown and the Blue scampered after it. This time the ball went askew and landed outside near Kenwood's thirty. The Blue made the first down of the game then. Parkinson failed to diagnose a cross-buck play that slashed her line at left guard, and a big blue-legged back came fighting through and wasn't stopped until he had put eight yards behind him. Two plunges gave Kenwood the rest of her distance and the blue pennants waved and triumphant cheers crashed out. Kenwood found encouragement and smashed savagely at the Parkinson line. Twice she made three yards. Then Fred Lyons dived through and brought down the runner behind the line, and Kenwood punted to the enemy's eighteen. And so it went for the rest of that quarter, Kenwood plunging and punting only when she was forced to, Parkinson plunging and punting regularly on third down. The wind tipped the scales in the home team's favour, and when but a scant three minutes remained it was Parkinson's ball on her own forty-eight yards. The stand was cheering hopefully now. Coach Driscoll, hands in pockets, uncoated, walked slowly back and forth, his gaze always on the play, his expression always undisturbed. [293]

"If we can get to their thirty-five, Walt can put it over the bar," said Brad tensely. "Wouldn't you think 'The' would try that split-line play, Rowland? Look where Kenwood's playing her ends! Man alive, we could get around that left easy! I believe he's going to. No, it's another line play. Oh, tush!"

"Looks like a forward," observed Ira. "Unless we're really going to kick on first down!"

"It's an end-around, that's what it is. I hope it's Price. It is! Here he comes! Oh, rotten pass! Got it, though! In, you idiot! In! Got him! No, he's past! Go it, Chester! Go it, you—Wow! Five—ten—twelve yards, old man! What do you know about that, fellows?"

Expressions of delight from the substitutes, however, were drowned in the roar that swept over their heads from the stand behind them. The cheer leaders were on their feet again, brown megaphones waving. Brad leaned closer and shouted amidst the din: "It's square on their forty, Rowland! And it's first down! We've got them going!" [294]

"There isn't much time," said Ira doubtfully.

"Time enough! Two more rushes and then a try-at-goal and first blood for old Parkinson!"

Wirt back again and the ball to Cole for a plunge at left guard. Only a scant yard and a half gained. Wirt still back and the ball to Wells, and the backfield trailing to the right like a wall, with the runner scurrying along behind it. A break in the opposing line, a quick turn by Wells. Through! But only through, for a Kenwood man is on him and half a dozen bodies pile together and the whistle blows.

"Four more!" cried Brad. "Now then, Walter! Put it over, old man. You can do it with this wind back of you!"

But it was still Wirt back, and Brad groaned and shook his head sadly as Cole tucked the ball to his stomach and went head-on into a resolute defence for a scant half-yard gain.

"Oh, shucks! Fourth down!" wailed Brad. "Why the dickens didn't they try for a goal? What's this? Another end-around? No, it's Wells outside tackle. Watch it! By Jove, he's done it! How much did we need? Four? Then we've got it! Got to measure it, eh? Who's that down? One of our fellows? No, he's a Blue-leg." [295]

"Kenwood left tackle," said Ritter from further along. "How much time is there, Brad?"

"I don't know. About a minute, I think. We've got it! First down! We'll do it yet!"

The linemen were trotting off, trailing the chain, and the referee had waved his arm toward the Kenwood goal. The Parkinson cheer leaders were dancing along the side line and a mighty volume of triumph rolled across the field.

Parkinson went back at the centre and was stopped short, Wells squirmed outside tackle for two yards, Cole smashed at the right guard and went spinning through for another two. Now the pigskin lay almost on the twenty-five-yard line. The timekeeper was edging nearer and nearer. Ira viewed him anxiously and chewed harder on that straw. A sudden lull in the wind allowed Dannis' voice to reach them:

"Come on now, Parkinson! Let's have it! Signals! Lyons back!"

"It's a place kick!" exclaimed Brad. "Go to it, Fred! Hold that line, Parkinson!"

Dannis was on one knee and patting the turf. Fred was walking back slowly. Then he stopped, [296]

studied the distance and shortened it a stride. Dannis crept further back and leaned an elbow on the ground. From the blue team came hoarse commands, implorations:

“Get through, Kenwood! Block this kick! Block this kick!”

A moment of silence, a brown streak from between Conlon’s legs, the ball settles in Dannis’ hands. Very carefully he turns it, points it. Fred Lyons steps forward one step and his right foot swings in a long arc. The lines are battling fiercely. Kenwood comes plunging, leaping through, arms upstretched. But the ball is sailing well above the eager fingers. Now the wind has it and it veers to the right, still rising, turning lazily over in its flight, sailing nearer and nearer the further upright—

An instant of silence and suspense and then a wild burst of acclaim from the Brown stand, for the Parkinson players are running back, thumping each other on the shoulders, capering, tossing their head-harnesses aloft!

“Goal!” shouted Brad exultantly. “Three for us! Cheer, Rowland, you wooden Indian!”

Ira smiled. “It’s bully, isn’t it? I thought at first he’d missed it, though.”

“So did I. I guess it was pretty close. Well, that’ll do for a start. Three points may look pretty big when this game’s over!”

CHAPTER XXII

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COACH DRISCOLL APOLOGISES

Half a minute later the horn blew and the quarter ended.

Parkinson went back to line attacks, now that she was facing the wind, and soon yielded the ball. Kenwood, profiting by her adversary’s example, started a kicking game. History repeated herself and every exchange of punts gave the Blue a good five yards of territory and before the period was many minutes old Parkinson was digging her cleats into her thirty-yard line. Dannis let the centre alone now and sent his backs outside of tackles and made gains of a sort. Only once did she try a forward-pass, and then it was a short one over the middle of the line that gained her eight yards. Slowly but irrevocably she was being forced back. When, from her twenty-five, Wirt’s punt was caught in a flurry of wind and blown almost back to him and captured by the enemy, it was evident that Fortune meant to even her favours.

The Kenwood supporters cheered incessantly while the Blue team tore at the Brown line and, failing to gain the distance, again punted. This time it was Parkinson’s time to taste of luck, for Dannis, cuddling the ball to him squarely on his goal line, leaped away, eluding both Kenwood ends, and tore it past friend and enemy to his own forty-two yards amidst a perfect thunder of cheers. But three tries only netted six yards and Wirt had to punt and the ball was Kenwood’s again on her fifteen yards. A penalty set her back five and then came another long forward-pass and the pigskin was back in midfield. Price, right end, was hurt and Ritter took his place.

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Kenwood smashed the line once, skirted the left end once and tried a quarter-back run, all for a gain of five yards. Back went her punter and the Parkinson backfield scattered. But the ball didn’t sail into the air this time. Instead, it was borne straight through centre by the husky fullback for a good seven yards, and when the dust of battle had settled Conlon and Brackett were on their faces.

“They got Terry,” said Brad. “I saw it. It was their right guard. Guess Brackett’s only winded, though.”

And to prove it, Brackett was already climbing to his feet. But Conlon was taking full time and Billy Goode was kneeling over him solicitously. Coach Driscoll was looking intently across the field, and Billy had scarcely raised a beckoning hand before he had swung smartly on his heel and his eyes were searching the line of substitutes.

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“Rowland! On the run!” he called sharply.

Ira, startledly disentangling himself from his blanket, stumbled to his feet, dimly aware of Brad’s cheerful and envious “Good luck!”, and hurried across. He expected the coach to give him instructions, but Mr. Driscoll only nodded sidewise toward the line-up.

“Go in at centre,” he said. “Here, leave your sweater behind!”

Ira stopped and struggled out of that garment, tossed it behind him and trotted on. They were carrying Conlon off, his head sagging, and as Ira paused to catch the head-harness tossed by Billy Goode he had a glimpse of the boy’s pale face, dirt-streaked and drawn with pain, and something that was as near like fear as Ira had ever felt came to him!

Then Dannis was thumping his arm and the others were grinning tiredly at him and he was pulling his harness on. In front of him, inches wider of shoulder and inches taller, loomed the formidable Beadle. He was a fine-looking youth, in spite of a swollen mouth and a greenish lump under one eye, and there was nothing savage in the steady look he gave Ira. It was an appraising look, and as Ira met it something very much like a smile flickered for an instant in the big centre’s eyes. Then the signals came and Ira stepped back out of the line and the game went on.

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For the first few minutes Ira had only a dim conception of what he was doing and of what was going on about him. He worked in a sort of haze, doing what he had been taught to do, blocking, breaking through, tripping, falling, racing here and there after the ball, passing now and then, always with his breath coming hard and every energy alert. Kenwood came through time after time, but the gains were short. Beadle was a terror at his job and Ira's efforts to stop him were seldom more than half successful. Beadle was quicker than anyone Ira had ever played against, and he knew more tricks, and he was terribly hard to reach. Ira worked like a Trojan during that remaining six minutes, and sometimes he got the better of his man, but those times were few in number. Toward the end of the half Parkinson palpably played for time, and it was only that that saved her, for when the welcome whistle finally blew the enemy was raging about her fifteen yards. Had Kenwood been satisfied with a goal from the field she might easily have made it, for two chances were hers, but Kenwood wanted a touchdown and kept after it, and only the timer's watch defeated her. As it was, Parkinson trotted back to the gymnasium still leading by three points, but very doubtful of the outcome.

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Ira was wondering how it would be possible for him to last another half-hour, for it seemed to him that he had already done a day's work. He had a bleeding nose—he couldn't remember where or how he had got it—and one of his wrists had been badly wrenched, but compared with some of the others he was in fine condition! The locker-room was a scene of wild confusion, with rubbers hard at word, a vile odour of liniment in the air, dozens of tired voices scolding, the sound of rushing water over all. Mended and massaged, Ira sank into a corner and tiredly looked on. Fred Lyons, pale-faced, agitated, was pushing Billy Goode aside in his effort to reach Coach Driscoll.

"Oh, let me alone, Billy! I'm all right, I tell you! Coach! Coach! What are we going to do if they try that forward-passing again! We haven't a man who can stop it! It's rotten!"

"It's up to the ends," answered Mr. Driscoll. "What's wrong with them? Where were you, White? And you, Price? Haven't you been taught——"

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"It wasn't my end, sir!" denied Ray warmly.

"It's always your end! Any end's your end in a forward-pass! You don't keep your eyes open! Bradford! You go in at left end next half and see if you can cover your man. Where's Wells? Look here, what sort of football have you been taught? Can't you do anything but throw your head back and paw the air? You weren't much better, Cole. Someone's got to get through that line if we expect to win this game. Slow starting and slow running! It's been awful! Dannis, you've got to speed them up next half. They'll fall asleep in their tracks! Lyons, for the love of Mike, let Billy get that bandage on you! What is it, Lowell? Oh, I don't know. Yes, let them have it. Well, Rowland!" The coach paused in front of Ira and looked down at him with a sneer. "You're a fine piece of work, aren't you? Is that the best you can do?"

Ira, startled and surprised, looked back dumbly. Surely this wasn't the Mr. Driscoll he knew, this snarling, contemptuous person with the flashing eyes!

"Can't you fight a little bit?" went on the coach. "Clean yellow, are you? All you did was stand up there and take your punishment. Let me tell you something, Rowland. They're coming after you this next half. They're going to flay you if you don't show signs of life. They want a touchdown and they mean to have it and they'll be hitting the centre from now on. What do you intend to do about it, eh? Speak up!"

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"Why—why—" faltered Ira, "I—I'm going to do the best I can!"

"Best you can be blown! Don't you know you're up against the best centre there is today on a school team? 'Do the best you can!' Great Scott, man, you've got to do *better* than you can! Better than you ever dreamed of doing! You've got to *fight*! This isn't any Sunday-school picnic. This is football. We're out to win. I was afraid all along you had a yellow streak, and now I know it. But you'll stay in there until you have to be carried off, like Conlon. Want to know what your trouble is?"

Ira was still too amazed to answer.

"You're a coward! That's your trouble! You're afraid! You don't dare fight back! You're a plain squealer! I've got your measure, son!"

[Ira felt the blood pouring into his cheeks as he jumped to his feet](#) and faced the coach with clenched hands.

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"You take that back!" he said in a low voice that trembled in spite of him.

"Take it back!" sneered the coach. "Yes, I'll take it back when you show I'm wrong. You can't bluff me, Rowland. I see right through you."

"You take it back now, or—" Ira stopped and his arms fell at his sides. "You're coach now," he said hardly above a whisper, "but afterwards—if you aren't what you say I am—you'll—you'll answer for what—what——"

But the tears, hot, angry tears, were no longer to be denied, and he ended in a sob and turned away blindly and stumbled his way to the door. Outside, in the cold sunlight, he blinked the tears back and tried to get control of himself. Coward, was he? Then what was the coach? He had taken advantage of his authority! He knew well enough he wouldn't be called to account now. But afterwards! Just wait until the game was over, until they had quit training! Ira's hands clenched until they hurt. They'd see who was the coward. Driscoll wouldn't be coach then, he'd be just—just a thing to strike! He—

And then the door banged open and the players came trooping out, Fred Lyons in the lead, and Ira fell in with them as they passed and went back to the field, his thoughts in a strange confusion and a red-hot anger at his heart.

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It was Parkinson's kick-off and Fred, no longer white and tremulous, but quiet and cheerful and composed, sent the ball skimming the heads of the charging enemy. Then the battle began again, desperately. Kenwood settled down to batter her way through the opposing line. Forward-passes were not for them any longer. They wanted the six points a touchdown would give them and they meant to have them, and their way of getting them was to wear down the enemy and make weight and endurance tell. Minutes passed and the slow, steady grind went on. Twice Kenwood made her distance through the opposing line, yet, once past midfield, her plunges failed. Then came a punt, and it was Parkinson's turn. There was little to choose between those rival teams today. Offence and defence were evenly matched, and only when one side was favoured by the wind did that team's kicking excel. Between the two thirty-yard lines the battle raged until the third period was nearly gone. Then fortune favoured the visitors and a runner got away past Fred Lyons and reeled off twenty-odd yards before Dannis brought him down. The enemy was on the Brown's twenty-two-yards now and it was first down. Plunge, plunge, plunge! Two yards—three yards—one yard! Four to go still and only one down left! A fake attack at centre and a back stealing off to the left, Wells breaking through and bringing him crashing to earth, cheers and frenzied shrieks of joy and relief from the Brown stand! Back to midfield then under the ball, and the same thing to do all over again.

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No scoring in that first fifteen minutes. Subs going in now for both teams. Basker for Dannis, Pearson for Wells, Neely for Brackett on the Brown. Parkinson works the ends for short gains and then Wirt tears through the redoubtable Beadle and goes on and on, dodging, turning, twisting, throwing off tackle after tackle!

The ball is on the enemy's thirty-four-yards. Pearson, fresh and eager, makes four through tackle on the left, Cole adds two more, Wirt is stopped. Off goes the ball on a short kick and the Kenwood quarter is thrown on his five-yard line. Now the Blue desperately tries a forward-pass again, faking a kick, but Bradford has his man covered and the ball rolls into the hay. Two attempts at the line and Kenwood punts far down the field. Basker fumbles, recovers and is thrown on his twenty-eight. Pearson slips around the end for a yard, Cole gets three through Beadle, Cole takes the ball for two more, Wirt punts. And so it goes, and the minutes slip by. Kenwood sees defeat staring at her now. Eight minutes left and the ball again in midfield. Kenwood tries desperate tactics. She pulls her line apart and opens her bag of tricks. Sometimes she fools the enemy and gains, but for the most part she is forced to fall back on a punt on third down or fourth. Five minutes left and Parkinson well satisfied now to play on the defensive and hold what she has. And then, a sudden change in the fortunes of the game!

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It was Basker's fault, for the punt was unmistakably Pearson's. With both backs trying for it, the pigskin escaped and trickled past, and a flying Kenwood end was on it. Fortunately, Basker got him in the act of finding his feet again and pulled him back to earth, but the pigskin was Kenwood's on Parkinson's twenty-seven-yards and there was time enough to turn a victory to a defeat!

Then it was that Kenwood made her final, fiercest effort. Straight at the centre she sent her backs. Slowly but surely the Brown gave way. Play after play crashed at Lyons and Ira and Donovan, sometimes gaining a yard, sometimes two, infrequently more. Beadle worked like a wild man, but the holes weren't always there now. Time and again he brought up against his opponent as against a stone wall. Something—Beadle could never guess what—had wrought a change in that smiling-faced adversary since the first inning. The smile was still there, but it was a different smile. This man Rowland was playing him out, and he knew it well now. He couldn't fool him any longer, couldn't turn him in or pull him past as he had before. Every inch had to be fought for desperately.

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Back to her seventeen went Parkinson, fighting hard but giving a little each time. Kenwood might tie the game now if she chose to try a field-goal, but Kenwood wanted a victory. Still she aimed her plays at the centre, from guard to guard, though twice she attempted the ends and was stopped. Two yards was her best gain, once past the fifteen, and after that the distances grew shorter each time. With five to go on fourth down and the ball just short of the ten-yard line, she sent her quarter sneaking out toward the left end and, somehow, he squirmed and wriggled through for the distance. Parkinson's supporters were imploring wildly as the panting teams lined up on the seven-yards. It was now or never for the Blue, while, if she got over that line, Parkinson's lot would be defeat, for the minutes were nearly gone.

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Kenwood sent her full-back straight at centre. The Brown line bent, but held. A scant yard was gained. Then an attack on Lyons made two. Third down now and four to go! Kenwood shifted, thought better of it, changed her signals and shifted back. Quarter and captain walked apart and whispered. Then signals again, and once more the plunge came at Ira. There was a moment of heaving, panting confusion, the charge faltered and stopped. Another yard was gone!

Kenwood lined up quickly, put her backs in a tandem behind her left guard and the signals piped once more. But the tandem split and the ball went again to the big full-back and again he charged, head down, straight into the centre. Cries, grunts, the rasping of canvas! A surge forward checked in the instant. A second surge as the Kenwood linesmen turned in behind the attack. A yard gained! A sudden pause then and, somewhere, a faint voice grunting "*Down!*"

The whistle shrilled and the referee dived into the mass of squirming players. One by one they were thrust aside or pulled breathless to their feet until only two figures remained there on the

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trampled turf. One was the fullback with the ball clutched desperately under him, but a full yard from the line, and the other was the Kenwood centre. Above the latter stood a boy in a brown uniform who looked down at his vanquished foe with a queer, crooked smile on his lips.

They lifted Beadle to his uncertain feet presently and carried him away, and the game went on. But the time was practically up, for after Wirt had punted from behind his goal and Kenwood had made a fair-catch on the enemy's forty-five-yard line the final whistle blew and the Parkinson hordes swept down from the stand and flooded over the field with waving pennants.

Ira, head hanging, feet dragging, climbed the gymnasium steps. He had fought off those who would have placed him aloft and borne him around the field—they had captured fully half the team—and made his escape. With him was a happy, dirty-visaged Brad and an equally disreputable Pearson, for substitutes will flock together even in the hour of triumph, and behind and in front were straggling groups of other heroes. Brad found Ira strangely taciturn on the way to the gymnasium, and marvelled. Himself, he could have danced, as tired as he was! They burst riotously into the building, shouting mightily, and tore off soaking, dirt-grimed togs. [311]

Ira, struggling grimly with his shirt, heard his name called above the din and saw Coach Driscoll standing in front of him. The shirt parted with a rip and Ira stepped forward, free.

"Are we out of training yet, sir?" he asked.

The coach nodded. He was smiling gravely. Ira wondered at that smile even as he poised himself to strike.

"Wait a minute, Rowland," said Mr. Driscoll quietly. "There's time enough."

Ira paused irresolutely. "What is it?" he demanded frowningly.

"First, it's an apology," answered the coach. "Don't you understand yet, Rowland?"

"Understand? Yes, I understand that you—you called me a coward a while ago, Mr. Driscoll. We're not in training now and you're going to answer for it!"

"My dear fellow," laughed the coach, "I'm quite ready to answer for it. But listen to me first, will you? I suppose I played rather a mean trick on you, but I think the end justifies it. You weren't doing yourself justice. You weren't half playing the game you could play—and did play afterwards. And I knew there was only one way to wake you up, and that that was to make you angry. I'm sorry, Rowland, if I hurt you, even for a half-hour, but—well, I wanted to win! We all did! Even you did, though you didn't know it! Rowland, if I hadn't insulted you you'd never have played Beadle to a standstill, my boy! We won and you did a big share of the work. And you did it because you were mad clean through. Now didn't you?" [312]

Ira's look of amazement brought chuckles of amusement from the circle of listeners.

"You mean that—that you said that just to—to make me play better?" gasped Ira.

The coach nodded. "Just for that," he said. "And now I apologise. You're no coward, Rowland, and I never believed you to be. Want to shake hands and forget it?"

A smile came slowly to Ira's face and he shook his head hopelessly. "Football," he murmured, "is a funny game!" But he stretched his hand out and clasped the coach's firmly.

Transcriber's Note:

Except for the frontispiece, illustrations have been moved to follow the text that they illustrate, so the page number of the illustration may not match the page number in the Illustrations.

Punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

The author's em-dash style has been retained.

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