

# CROFTON CHUMS



RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

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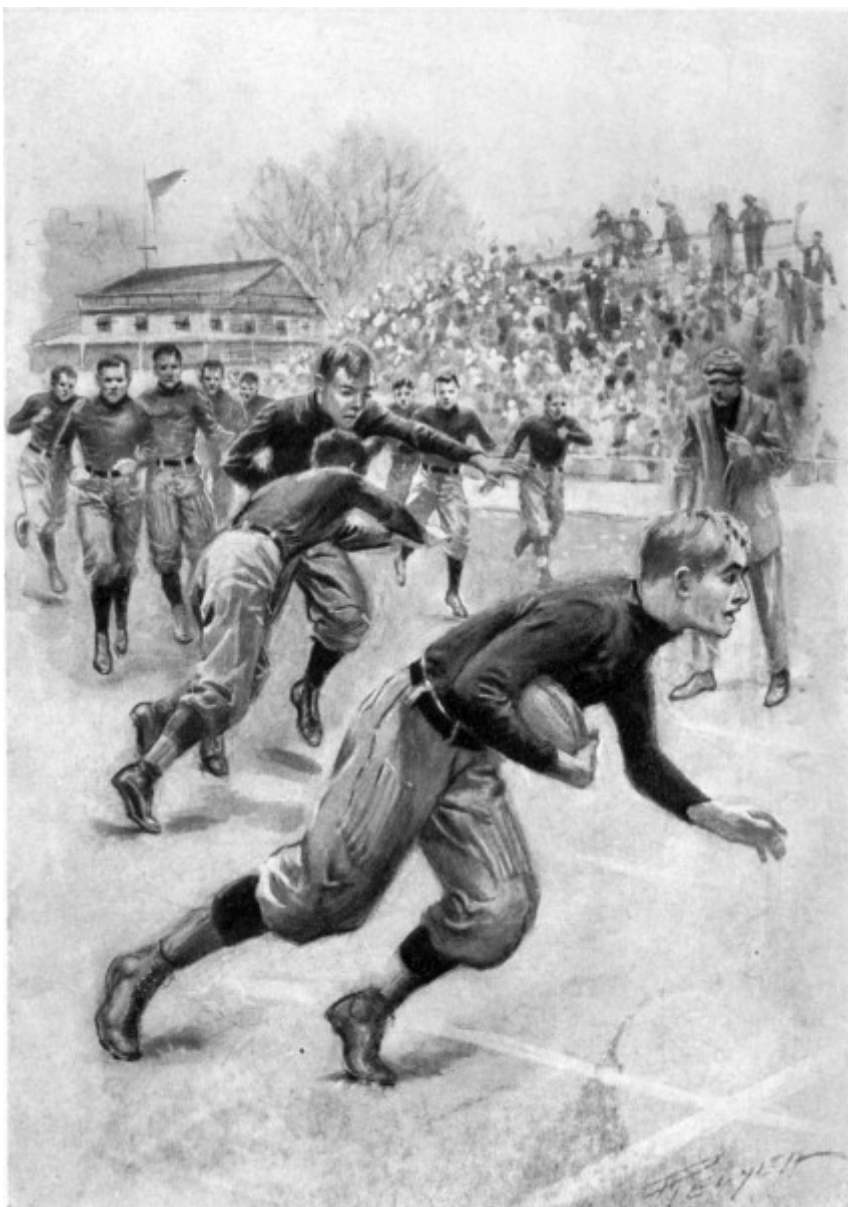
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# Crofton Chums

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[Jim was off with a clear field ahead.](#)

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# Crofton Chums

By

Ralph Henry Barbour

Author of "The Crimson Sweater," "Captain Chub,"  
"Team-Mates," etc.

With Illustrations

By C. M. Relyea



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1912

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To  
G. R. O.  
Who Helped

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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	<u>BACK TO SCHOOL</u>	3
II.	<u>SUNNYWOOD COTTAGE</u>	16
III.	<u>GARY RECONSIDERS</u>	36
IV.	<u>MR. GORDON RECEIVES</u>	52
V.	<u>MR. HANKS RENTS A ROOM</u>	69
VI.	<u>PLATO SOCIETY</u>	89
VII.	<u>JIM MAKES A PROMISE</u>	103
VIII.	<u>POKE USES TACT</u>	114
IX.	<u>OUT FOR THE TEAM</u>	129
X.	<u>MR. HANKS ACCEPTS ADVICE</u>	148
XI.	<u>ON THE SECOND</u>	162
XII.	<u>GARY IS SURPRISED</u>	172
XIII.	<u>POKE ON CANOES</u>	183
XIV.	<u>UP THE RIVER</u>	193
XV.	<u>THE “MI-KA-NOO”</u>	205
XVI.	<u>MR. HANKS AS A NOVELIST</u>	216
XVII.	<u>THE GAME WITH ST. LUKE’S</u>	227
XVIII.	<u>GARY CHALLENGES</u>	235
XIX.	<u>POKE ADVERTISES</u>	245
XX.	<u>AN EARLY MORNING PRACTICE</u>	256
XXI.	<u>THE GREAT RACE</u>	267
XXII.	<u>THE SWORD FALLS!</u>	284
XXIII.	<u>FRIDAY AND ILL-LUCK</u>	302

XXIV.	<u>HAWTHORNE COMES TO CONQUER</u>	316
XXV.	<u>JIM PASSES AN EXAMINATION</u>	332

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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
<u>Jim was off with a clear field ahead</u>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<u>“Well, what do you think of that!” ejaculated Poke</u>	11
<u>“This is Mrs. Hazard’s, isn’t it?”</u>	27
<u>“What is it, Jim? Is anything wrong?” inquired Mrs. Hazard</u>	37
<u>“This certainly beats dining-hall,” declared Poke</u>	61
<u>“You a football man, Hazard?” Sargent asked</u>	75
<u>“I am looking for accommodations, a room and—er—yes, board with it”</u>	83
<u>“Look here,” he demanded, “what did you tell Duncan Sargent about me?”</u>	125
<u>“Ever see a football before?” he asked</u>	141
<u>They found Mr. Hanks at his desk</u>	153
<u>Gil and Poke assisted in the household duties</u>	181
<u>Hope, being a rather wise young lady, prepared a tray.</u>	295
<u>“We thought you might send him a telegram,” said Gary, boldly.</u>	309
<u>Jim takes his examination on the football field</u>	329

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# CROFTON CHUMS

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# CHAPTER I

## BACK TO SCHOOL

“**I**n the good old football time,  
In the good old football time!”

sang “Poke” Endicott, as he pulled a nice new pair of fawn-hued football pants from his trunk and reverently strove to smooth the creases from them. “Aren’t those some pants, Gil?” he demanded.

His room-mate turned from the window as the “mole-skins” were held up for inspection.

“Rather! You must have spent a year’s allowance on those, Poke.”

“Huh!” Poke folded them carefully and then tossed them in the general direction of the closet. “I’d hate to tell you, Gil, what they stood me. But they’re good for ten years; anyhow, that’s what the tailor man said. Those trousers, Gil, will descend from generation to generation, down through the ages, like—like—”

“A mortgage,” suggested Gil Benton, helpfully, as he turned again to the view of autumn landscape framed by the open casement. Just under the window, beyond the graveled path, the smooth turf descended gently to the rim of the little river which curved placidly along below the school buildings barely a stone’s throw away. (Joe Cosgrove, baseball captain, had once engaged, on a wager, to place a baseball across it

from the steps of Academy Hall, and had succeeded at the third attempt. As Academy stands farthest from the stream of any of the buildings, Joe's throw was something of a feat, and many a perfectly good baseball had been sacrificed since by ambitious youths set on duplicating his performance.) The Academy side of the river was clear of vegetation, but along the farther bank graceful weeping willows dipped their trailing branches in the water and threw cool green shadows across the surface. Beyond, the willows gave place to alders and swamp-oaks and basswood, and then, as the ground rose to the rolling hills, maples, already showing the first light frosts, clustered thick. Here and there the white trunks of paper-birches showed against the hillside.

Gil—his full name was Gilbert, but no one ever called him that—viewed the familiar scene with eager pleasure and satisfaction. To-morrow began his third year at Crofton Academy, and he had grown very fond of the school; how fond he had scarcely realized until this minute. To the left, a quarter of a mile away, the old covered bridge was in sight, its central pier emerging from a wilderness of bush on Bridge Island. To his right, a little distance down-stream, lay Biscuit Island, a tiny round mound of moss-covered rock with here and there a patch of grass, and, in the middle, a group of four white birches asway in the westerly breeze. Opposite the island was the brown-stained boat-house and the long float, the latter as yet empty of the canoes and skiffs and tubs that would later gather there. By bending forward a little, Gil could catch a glimpse of a corner of the athletic field and the roofed portico of Apthorpe Gymnasium, the last of the buildings that formed a crescent along the curve of the river.

He smiled companionably at the blue and green world, sighed once—why, he couldn't have told you—and breathed in a lungful of the warm, scented air. It was good to be back again; awfully good! He wondered—

Footsteps crunched the gravel beneath the window, and Gil leaned out. Then he turned and called to his chum:

“Say, Poke, come and see ‘Brownie.’ He’s got a suit of ‘ice-cream’ clothes on, and a Panama hat! Me, oh, my! Who’d ever think Brownie could be so frivolous?”

Poke stumbled over a pile of clothing and hurried across to the casement, leaning out beside Gil. Almost directly below was a tall man of thirty-odd years, attired modishly in light home-spun. When, in answer to Poke’s “Hello, Mr. Brown!” he looked up at the window, his face was seen to carry a rich coating of tan from which his very light blue eyes twinkled with startling effect. He waved his hand to them.

“Hello, Endicott! Hello, Benton! You’re back early, it seems.”

“Couldn’t stay away, sir,” replied Poke laughingly. “Missed Greek awfully, sir!”

“Not the first time you’ve missed it—awfully,” retorted the instructor with a broad smile. The boys chuckled. “Don’t forget the meeting to-morrow evening, fellows.”

“No, sir; we’ll be there,” said Gil.

“He’s a dandy chap,” he added heartily, as the instructor passed on toward his room in the next dormitory. Poke nodded.

“One of the best. That’s why Plato’s the best society in school. What time is it?”

“Nearly one,” replied Gil, with a yawn.

“Don’t suppose we can get anything to eat here, eh?”

“Not likely. We might try, but as we’re not supposed to come until after dinner, I guess it would look pretty cheeky.”

“Right-O! Besides, it will be more fun eating in the village. Aren’t you going to unpack?”

“Yes, but there’s no hurry. Let’s get dinner now, Poke. We’ll go to Reddy’s; he has the best eats.”

“Got you! But wait until I get some of this mess picked up. How’s that for a swell suit of glad rags, Gil?” Poke held up the jacket for inspection. It was perceptibly green in color and decidedly “loud” in style. Gil grunted.

“If you had a gray silk hat you could march in the minstrel parade with that, Poke. Bet you sent your measurements by mail with a ten-dollar bill.”

Poke looked highly offended, and draped the garment over the back of a chair. Then he drew away and admired it silently.

“That,” he announced finally, “was made by one of the best tailors in New York.”

Gil grunted again. “We wouldn’t wear a thing like that in Providence,” he said.

Poke laughed rudely as he hung the coat up. “Providence! I believe you, Gil! Providence never saw anything like that.”

“That’s no joke,” replied the other. “Get a move on, Poke, I’m hungry.”

“All right. Put that in the drawer for me, will you? No, the table drawer, you idiot! Where’s my hat? Come on now. I could eat an ox!”

They closed the door of Number 12 behind them, scuttled down a flight of well-worn stairs, and emerged on the granite steps of Weston Hall. They looked along the fronts of the buildings, but not a soul was in sight. Gil chuckled.

“Bet you we’re the first fellows back, Poke.”

“Sure. They won’t begin to get here until that two-twenty train.”

They turned to the right, passed between Weston and Rogers, traversed a few rods of turf, and took a path leading downwards through a grove of maples and beeches. The path turned and twisted to accommodate itself to the descent. Gil walked ahead, hat in hand, since it was close and warm here in the woods, and Poke lounged along behind, hands in pockets and his merry, good-humored face alight with anticipation of the good things awaiting him at Reddy’s lunch counter. Poke’s real name was Perry Oldham Kirkland Endicott, and the nickname had been the natural result of the first view of the initials on the end of his suitcase. In age he was sixteen, one year his companion’s junior. He was well set-up, with a good pair of shoulders and a depth of chest that told of athletic training. He had brown hair and brown eyes, a good-looking sunburned face, and a general air of care-free jollity. Like Gil Benton, Poke was a member of the Upper

Middle Class, and consequently had two more years to spend at Crofton.

Gilbert Benton, seventeen years old, was a good two inches taller than his chum, and somewhat slimmer. But the slimness showed wiry muscles and a healthy body. Gil's hair was darker than Poke's, and his eyes were gray. His face spoke of determination and fearlessness. Seeing the two boys, you would have said that Gil was the sort to lead bravely a forlorn hope, and Poke the sort to shrug his shoulders, laugh—and follow. Gil's home was in Providence, Rhode Island, and Poke's in New York City. The latter had taken an early train and Gil had joined him at Providence, and the two had reached the station at Crofton well before noon. To arrive at school early and get settled before their fellows arrived had struck them as something of a lark.

The woods ceased and the path led them out onto Academy Road, where Hill Street turned off and where the village residences began. Hereabouts most of the trim white-walled structures were used as boarding- and rooming-houses for the Crofton students who were unable to secure accommodations in the school dormitories. At the corner was Mrs. Hooper's; across the road from it, Jones's; farther up Academy Road toward the school, Mrs. Sanger's. To their left as they leaped the tumble-down stone wall was a comfortable-looking residence whose outbuildings nestled in the edge of the woods.





**“Well, what do you think of that!” ejaculated Poke.**

“Wonder who has the Timberlake place this year,” said Gil. “I see it’s rented.”

“Why did she give it up?” asked Poke idly.

“Went out West to live with her son, I believe. I don’t believe the old lady ever made much money here.”

“Well, what do you think of that!” ejaculated Poke, stopping in his tracks and staring at the house in question. Perched on a short ladder was a boy of about Poke’s age, nailing a sign over the front steps. A girl in a white dress and with a long braid of yellow hair aglint in the sunshine was steadying the ladder. As the boys stopped to look, the last screw went home and the sign stood forth for all to see:

### SUNNYWOOD COTTAGE

The boy descended from the ladder, and he and the girl stepped a little distance down the short walk toward the gate to admire the result of their labors. Gil and Poke went on, the latter chuckling.

“Sunnywood Cottage,” he murmured. “Guess there wasn’t anything very sunny about the place when Mrs. Timberlake had it. I wonder who the girl is?”

“Miss Sunnywood,” replied Gil instantly.

“Thanks,” said Poke, turning to steal another look at the young lady. “You’re a veritable mine of information, Gil. The house is looking rather nice, isn’t it? Must have painted it, I guess.”

“Yes, and her hair is very pretty,” laughed Gil.

“Oh, you run away,” Poke retorted. “Wonder who the chap is?”

“You seem mighty interested in the family. Like to call there on the way back?”

“That’s not a bad idea! We might make believe we wanted to rent a room.”

“We might,” Gil laughed. He, too, turned for a glance at the cottage. “Guess a fellow could be pretty comfy at Sunnywood. Funny, isn’t it, how some houses look homey and comfy and others sort of give you the creeps. Look at Jones’s; wouldn’t live there for a hundred dollars a month!”

“I wonder if a fellow has more fun living in the village,” mused Poke. “Of course it’s nice being in hall when you know there are loads of chaps envying you your room, but, after all, we don’t have much chance for larks, what with study hour, and being in at ten, and all that. I believe I’d like to try a house next year, Gil.”

“Sunnywood?” asked Gil slyly.

Poke grinned and nodded. “I wouldn’t mind. That corner room in front on this side ought to be pretty nice. You’d get lots of sun and light—and that’s more than we get in Number 12.”

“Well, never mind about sun and light now. Let’s hit it up, Poke. What I need is food and drink. Thank goodness we’re nearly there! It’s pretty hot for September, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know how hot it is for September,” replied Poke with a grin, as they turned into Main Street, “but it’s uncomfortably hot for Poke!”

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## CHAPTER II

### SUNNYWOOD COTTAGE

“It’s a perfectly jimmy sign!” declared the girl delightedly.

The boy turned with an amused smile. “What’s a ‘jimmy’ sign, Hope? One made by Jim?”

“N-no, not exactly. Jimmy means awfully nice—something very—very pleasing—quite *darling*! See?”

“Of course,” answered her brother. “It’s as plain as the nose on your face.”

“My nose isn’t plain,” was the retort. “It’s a real Hazard nose, just like yours and Lady’s.”

“Sort of a jimmy nose,” laughed the boy. “Sis, if you keep on coining words, you’ll have to publish a vocabulary or no one will be able to understand you. What was it you called the back room upstairs yesterday?”

“Snudgy,” replied Hope Hazard gravely. “And that’s just what it is; small and hot and—and *snudgy*! It’s the snudgiest room I ever saw, Jim.”

“Well, don’t let Jane hear you call it snudgy. She might leave. But, say, that’s a pretty good-looking sign, isn’t it? I don’t believe any one could tell it was home-made, eh?”

“N-no, not unless they looked real close. I guess that Y is a little bit wipsy, though, Jim.”

Jim Hazard frowned intently for a moment at the letter in question. “Well, maybe it is kind of out of plumb with the others,” he acknowledged. “Just the same, I think I’m a pretty good sign painter, sis. Now what’s to do?”

“Curtains in the front room upstairs; the rented one,” replied Hope promptly.

“Oh, hang the curtains!” grumbled Jim.

“That’s what I meant,” laughed Hope. “Never mind, they’re the last ones. And we really must get them up because our star boarder may come any moment.”

“All right,” he answered resignedly, “but I’ve got to cool off first.” He seated himself on the top step and Hope perched herself beside him. Jim fanned himself with the screw-driver, and they both laughed. Then the boy’s smile died away, and his forehead puckered itself into lines of worry.

“Hope, we’ve got to do better than this or Sunnywood will be vacant again. Four rooms to rent and only one taken! Didn’t you think from what Mr. Gordon said that we’d get all the fellows we wanted?”

“Yes, but maybe they don’t look for rooms until they get here,” she answered cheerfully. “And you know they don’t begin to come until this afternoon.”

“I don’t believe that,” he answered. “Fellows wouldn’t come and not know where they were going to live. I don’t think Mr. Gordon has treated us fairly, Hope. That lady over there—”

“Mrs. Sanger.”

“Took the sign out of her window this morning. I guess that means that her rooms are all taken. I’ll bet Mr. Gordon has been sending the fellows to the other houses and leaving us out of it.”

“Oh, he wouldn’t do that,” Hope protested, “after all the nice things he said to mama.”

“You can’t tell. Besides, we don’t know just what nice things he did say. You know very well that if a person doesn’t actually call Lady names she thinks they’ve been as nice as pie to her. Wish I had her gift of thinking the very best of everything and everybody. Well, if something doesn’t happen pretty soon, I’m going to see Mr. Gordon and tell him what I think about it. One thing we do know is that he wrote Lady that if she took the house she wouldn’t have any trouble in renting the rooms.”

“Well, let’s hope for the best, Jim,” said his sister, laying a small brown hand on his shoulder and giving him a reassuring pinch.

“That’s you all over,” he muttered. “Guess they knew what they were about when they named you Hope.”

“Well, they didn’t name you Despair,” she laughed, “so don’t try and play they did. It’s most time Lady was back, isn’t it?”

Jim nodded and looked down the street toward the village a half-mile away. “That’s her now, I guess; away down by the big elm; see?”

“Yes, it is. Let’s go and meet her, Jim. She’s probably got a lot of things to carry.”

“All right!” Jim laid down the screw-driver and pushed the ladder aside. “You’d better put a hat on, though.”

“Nonsense! The sun won’t hurt me. Come on.”

They went out of the gate together, and walked briskly down the sidewalk. Jim was half a head taller than his sister, rather thin, a bit raw-boned, in fact, but strong looking, and good looking, too, in spite of a smudge of dirt across his forehead and a generally begrimed appearance due to the fact that he had been sign-painting, carpentering, and house-cleaning all the forenoon. Besides this, he wore the very oldest clothes he owned, and that he managed to look prepossessing in spite of these handicaps speaks rather well for him. He had brown hair and brown eyes, but the hair was light, extremely light in places, as though it had been faded by sun and weather, and the eyes were very dark. Hope had told him once that he had perfectly lovely eyes, they looked so much like sweet chocolate! For the rest, Jim was tanned and hardy-looking, with more often than not a little puckery frown on his forehead, for at sixteen years of age he had already been head of the family for three years.

Hope Hazard isn’t quite so easily described, and I’d flunk the task if I might. She was fourteen, slender, golden-haired, gray-eyed, light-hearted. As Jim had said, she had been well named, for hopefulness was the key-note of her nature, and Jim, who was somewhat prone to borrow trouble if he had none of his own, called her frivolous in moments of exasperation. But Hope came honestly by her sunny optimism, for her mother had always been the most hopeful, cheerful soul in the world, and even Mr. Hazard’s death and

the immediate collapse of the family fortunes had failed to change her.

Mother and daughter looked much alike. Mrs. Hazard was quite tall, still young looking, and still pretty. She had gray eyes, like Hope's, and if they were a trifle more faded, they still twinkled brightly at the slightest provocation. Jim was more like his father, a little more serious, with something of New England granite showing in his face, a heritage from a race of coast-dwelling Hazards. The Hazard nose, which Hope fondly believed she had inherited, and which was a straight and stern appendage, well shaped but uncompromising, was his, while Mrs. Hazard's nose was an undignified, even flippant affair that looked for all the world as though, had it had proper encouragement at an early stage, it would have become tip-tilted. Truth compels the admission that in Hope's case the Hazard nose was more a matter of anticipation than realization, in spite of the fact that she religiously pulled it and pinched it in the attempt to make it conform to Hazard requirements. Perhaps it is a mean thing to say, but Hope's nose was more remarkable for the cluster of three big freckles on the end of it than for beauty of contour.

Mrs. Hazard yielded her packages to the children and gave an account of her shopping expedition. "It's lots of fun buying things in Crofton, my dears; quite exciting. You never know when you ask for a thing what you are going to get. I tried to buy some scrim to make curtains for Jane's room, and what do you suppose I got? Why, some muslin for a next summer dress for Hope! It was really very sweet and pretty."



“And I suppose,” said Jim, with a smile, “that when Hope isn’t wearing it, Jane can hang it up at her window.”

“I think you’ll have to do the shopping, Jim,” continued Mrs. Hazard. “They don’t take me seriously, I’m afraid. If I want a wash-board, they smile at me humoringly and sell me a nutmeg grater! And two or three things I meant to get, I forgot all about!”

“Did you get the blankets, Lady?” asked Jim anxiously.

“Oh, yes; and the toweling, and the mat for the front door. But I forgot bluing and soap and meat for supper.”

“Well, if we don’t rent some rooms we won’t be able to afford supper,” replied Jim grimly. “I don’t think Mr. Gordon has been treating us decently, Lady.”

“Oh, I’m sure he has done all he could, dear. I can’t doubt that after the nice way he talked.”

“Talk’s cheap,” growled Jim. “Why doesn’t he send some boys here to rent our rooms?”

“He will, I’m sure. You wait and see.”

“That woman over there has taken her sign down already.”

“But she’s been here for years, Jim dear, while we are only starting. It’s going to take time, of course. Meanwhile we have that Latham boy—”

“And he’s a cripple,” interrupted Jim, “and I dare say no one else would take him!”

“I don’t think that at all,” protested his mother as they entered the gate, “for Mr. Gordon said that he was sending him to me because he wanted a place where the poor boy

could be well looked after. Oh, how nice your sign looks! I suppose it is perfectly all right to have a sign, Jim, but I see none of the other houses have any.”

“That’s the point,” replied Jim. “This is going to be different. Fellows who come here are going to be at home; this isn’t going to be just a plain boarding-house, Lady. Isn’t it most dinner time? I’m pretty hungry.”

“You shall have it right away. I’ll tell Jane I’m back.” She hurried through to the kitchen, and Jim, with a sigh, picked up his step-ladder and, followed by Hope, trudged upstairs to hang the curtains in the corner room.

“I wonder what sort of a cripple he is,” mused Hope, as she paired the strips of flounced muslin. “I do hope he will be nice.”

“I wish Mr. Gordon had sent his cripple somewhere else,” muttered her brother as he worked the brass pole through the heading. “Anybody can impose on Lady.”

“Jim, you’re perfectly awful to-day! You’re just one long wail of despair. I guess you want your dinner. Boys are always grumpy when they’re hungry. Here’s a hole in this curtain. I’ll draw it together after dinner.”

“It’s good enough for him,” growled Jim, who was working himself rapidly into a fit of ill-temper. “I dare say we’ll have to lug him up and down stairs, too.”

“Oh, I don’t believe he’s that kind of a cripple,” responded Hope. “And he has a perfectly jimmy name, hasn’t he? Jeffrey Latham; it’s quite a—a romantic sort of name, Jim.”

“He’s probably a pasty-faced little milksop. There, that’s the last, thank goodness! My, it’s no wonder I’m hungry!” he added, as he looked at his nickel watch. “It’s half-past two and after!”

“It can’t be!”

“It is, though. Hello, what’s that?” He pushed the new curtains aside at a front window and looked out. “It’s a carriage—with a trunk—and bags! I’ll bet it’s the cripple, Hope! Run and tell Lady!”

His sister hurried downstairs, and Jim, lugging his step-ladder with him, followed more slowly, grumbling as he went. “It’s a wonder he couldn’t stay away until the room was ready for him.” He put the ladder out of the way and went out onto the porch in time to see the driver of the carriage open the door and the rubber-tipped ends of a pair of crutches appear. Still resentful, Jim went down the path and reached the gate just as the occupant of the vehicle swung himself nimbly to the sidewalk.

“This is Mrs. Hazard’s, isn’t it?” he asked of Jim.

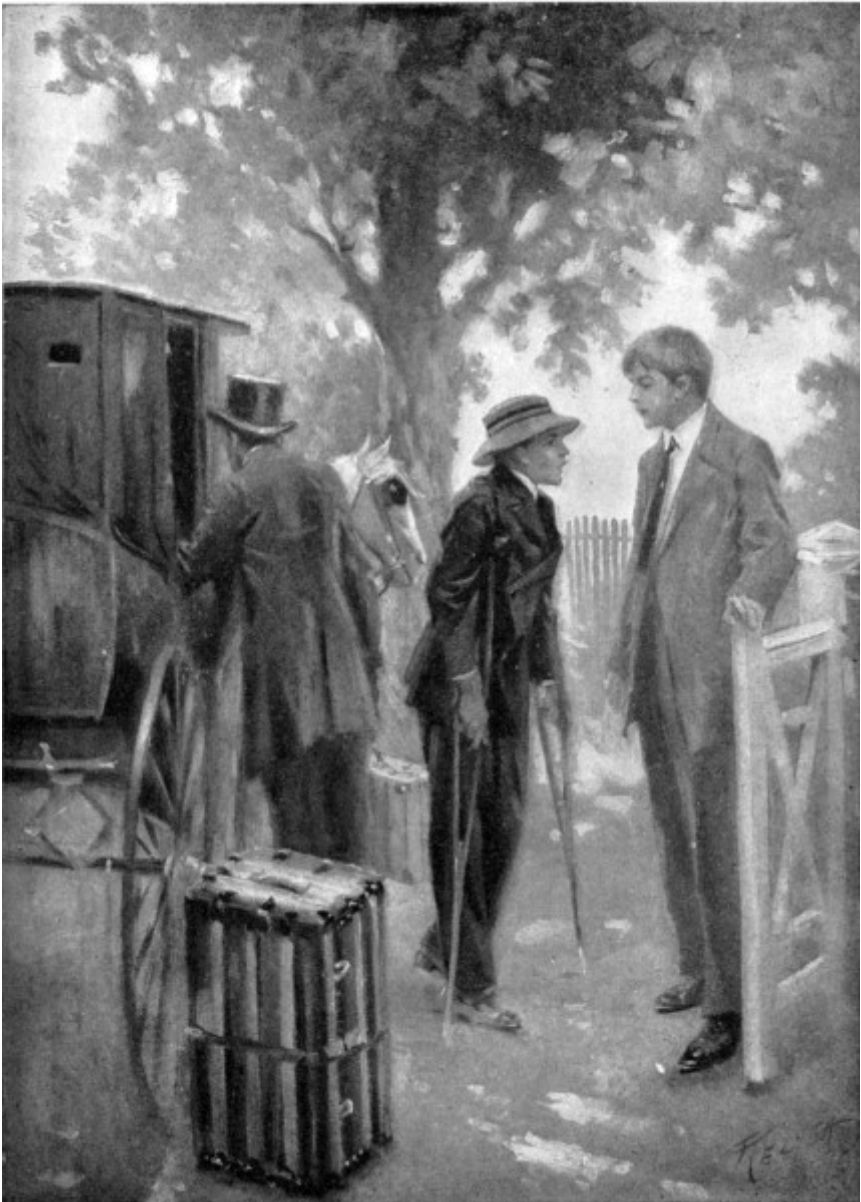
“Yes. I suppose you’re Latham.”

Jim’s tone was not very gracious and the newcomer looked a little surprised. He was a slight, nice looking boy of fifteen, with big wistful brown eyes set in a somewhat pale but cheerful face. He was dressed extremely well, even expensively, and was quite immaculate from the crown of his Panama hat to the tips of his smart tan shoes. As he turned to speak to the driver he looked like any healthy, normal boy, for he appeared well built, straight of back and limb, and it was only when he crossed the sidewalk to the gate that any

imperfection showed. Then Jim saw that one foot, the left one, swung clear of the ground by several inches.

“If you’ll tell the man where my room is he will take my baggage up,” said Jeffrey.

Mrs. Hazard met him on the porch, while Hope, frankly curious, hovered in the background.



[“This is Mrs. Hazard’s, isn’t it?”](#)

“I’m so glad to see you,” said Jim’s mother as she shook hands with Jeffrey. “I’ll show you your room, and then you must come down and have some dinner with us. This is my

daughter Hope, and my son you've already met. And I am Mrs. Hazard. I almost forgot to introduce myself, didn't I?"

Jeffrey bowed to Hope. "Thank you, ma'am," he answered, "I'd like to go to my room, but I've had my dinner. I stopped at the lunch room."

"Lunch room! Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Hazard, "that's no dinner for a grown boy! Of course you'll have something with us; although we're hardly settled yet, and our meals are still rather skimpy."

Jeffrey murmured thanks as he followed her upstairs, abandoning one of his crutches and helping himself along by the banister. The driver followed with his trunk, and Jim and Hope were left alone in the hall.

"Isn't it a perfect shame?" cried Hope indignantly, when the star boarder was out of hearing. "He's such a nice boy!"

"Isn't what a shame?" growled Jim.

"Why, his being like that! Having to go about on crutches! We must be awfully kind to him, Jim."

"Huh!" Jim picked up the boy's bags and started upstairs. "Guess I'd be willing to use crutches if I could wear clothes like his and buy bags like these!"

"Oh, Jim!" protested Hope. "That's an awful thing to say! You shouldn't talk like that even—even in fun."

Jim grunted and went on. "Bet you," he said to himself, "he will kick about his room. The carpet's worn out and there ought to be new paper on the walls." But if Jeffrey Latham observed these things, no one would have suspected it.

“What a bully room!” he was saying as Jim entered. “Isn’t it nice and sunny? May I keep my trunk in here, Mrs. Hazard?”

“Why, certainly. Between the window and the bureau would be a good place, wouldn’t it? I’m so glad you like the room. It’s the pleasantest in the house.”

Jeffrey took out a pigskin purse and opened it, exhibiting what looked to Jim like a good deal of money. “How much do I owe you?” he asked the driver.

“One dollar, sir. Fifty cents for you, sir, and the trunk and bags extry.”

“Nonsense!” said Jim sharply. “He’s trying to do you, Latham. Seventy-five’s all it ought to be.”

“With a heavy trunk and two bags like them!” demanded the driver incredulously. Jeffrey laughed.

“I dare say the trunk was heavy,” he said as he paid the amount asked. “Thank you very much.”

The driver, mollified, touched his hat and took his departure. Jim looked his disgust at such a reckless waste of money.

“The bathroom is just down the hall on the left,” explained Mrs. Hazard. “Dinner is ready, but you needn’t hurry. Your name is Jeffrey, isn’t it? You see, I must know what to call you.”

“Yes’m, it’s Jeffrey, but I’m generally called Jeff. I’ll just wash a bit and come right down, although I’m really not hungry.”

Perhaps Hope was right in her theory that what Jim needed was food, for after he had had his soup he forgot his peevishness. Mrs. Hazard did most of the talking, although Hope showed unmistakable symptoms of being quite willing to help out. Jeffrey answered questions unreservedly. They learned that his home was in Poughkeepsie, New York; that he was entered in the Lower Middle Class; that he had never been away from his folks before, although he had evidently traveled about a good deal; and that while others might pity him for his infirmity, he wasted no pity on himself, but was quite cheerful and contented.

“Yes’m, I like reading pretty well,” he said in answer to one of Mrs. Hazard’s questions, “but I like to be out of doors better. There isn’t much I can do myself, but I like to see other fellows have fun. I’m crazy about football and baseball and things like that. At home I’m always running around to the games.”

“It must be very hard,” murmured Mrs. Hazard sympathetically, “not to be able to—to take part in them. But I do think you get about wonderfully on your crutches.”

“I ought to,” laughed Jeffrey. “I’ve been practising all my life. I’ve had this bum leg ever since I was born. Oh, you get used to it; used to not being able to do things like other fellows, I mean. Besides, I’ve seen chaps worse off than me. I *can* row a little.”

“Wish I could,” said Jim, making his second remark of the meal.

“I guess you could if you tried,” answered Jeffrey. “It isn’t hard. I suppose there are boats here?”



“Lots,” said Jim. “They have crews, too, you know.”

Jeffrey nodded. “Yes, that’s partly why I came here. I’ve always been fond of boat racing. At Poughkeepsie, you know, we have a lot of it every year. Are you—do you go to Crofton?”

“Yes,” answered Jim, passing his plate for a second helping, “I begin to-morrow. We’re in the same class, too.”

“Really? And are there other fellows here?”

“In the house? No, not yet. We’ve got three other rooms, but yours is the only one taken.”

“We hope to rent the others,” explained Mrs. Hazard. “This is our first year here. We have always lived in Essexport; that’s on the coast, you know; but when Jim decided that he’d rather go to Crofton than anywhere else, we decided that we couldn’t do without him. So we rented our house at home and took this. My husband died three years ago and since then Jim has looked after us. Hope and I are awful babies, aren’t we, Hope?”

“Speak for yourself, Lady! Jim and I— Listen! There’s somebody going upstairs!”

“I’ll see who it is.” Jim laid aside his napkin, pushed back his chair and hurried out. In the hall he was just in time to see the end of a bag disappear about the turn of the landing. He ran up the stairs, wondering. At the open door of Jeffrey’s room stood, bag in hand, a big thick-set boy of apparently seventeen years of age. He had a good deal of color in his cheeks, very dark eyes and a mass of unruly black hair under the funny little crimson cap perched on the back of his head.

He turned at the sound of Jim's approach and scowled at him across the banisters.

"Hello," he growled.

"Hello," replied Jim, taking at the instant a strong dislike to him. "Do you want a room?"

"No, I'm looking for four-leaved clovers," he replied with a grin. "Who are you?"

"My name is Hazard," answered Jim, beginning to lose his temper, "and I happen to live here, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I don't mind," laughed the other unpleasantly. "What I want to know is why isn't my room ready?"

"Your room?"

"Sure! Those your things in there? If they are, dump 'em out, Bunker—or whatever your name is."

"If you want a room I'll show you one," said Jim, "but that room's taken."

"Taken? You bet it's taken! I took it last year, and if you don't dump that trunk and those bags out I will."

"That room is rented to a fellow named Latham," answered Jim warmly. "Who the dickens are you, anyway?"

"Who am I? I'm Brandon Gary, that's who I am. And I engaged this room from Mother Timberlake last June. And what's more, I mean to have it!"

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## CHAPTER III

### GARY RECONSIDERS

The sound of the talking had brought the others from the table to the hall below, and now Mrs. Hazard came up the stairs to inquire anxiously: “What is it, Jim? Is anything wrong?”

“This fellow says he engaged this room last spring and means to have it,” replied Jim.

“Engaged this room? But—but how could you?” Mrs. Hazard observed Brandon Gary bewilderedly. “We only took the house last month!”

The claimant had snatched off his crimson cap at Mrs. Hazard’s appearance on the scene and when he replied his tone was much more respectful. “I engaged it from the lady who had it last year, ma’am, and it’s always been a rule here that when a house changes hands the—the new landlady takes it—er—subject to—to—”



**“What is it, Jim? Is anything wrong?” inquired Mrs. Hazard.**

“I understand,” said Mrs. Hazard helpfully, smiling her sweetest, “but I knew nothing about any reservations. You see, Mrs. Timberlake left early in the summer and I took the house from an agent. And he said nothing at all about any of

the rooms being taken. I'm awfully sorry. But there are three other very nice rooms for rent—" She paused and looked at Jim with a look of comical despair. "Unless they are engaged too!"

"Don't believe so," said Gary. He had set his bag down, thrust his hands into his pockets and dropped some of his aggressiveness, although it was plain to be seen that he meant to have his rights. "You see, ma'am, the fellows never liked Mother Timberlake much. I didn't either, but I'd always had my heart set on this room, and so, when Kidder graduated last June, I made a streak over here and nabbed it. I had a chance at living in hall, too, this year. I'm sorry you didn't know about it, but I guess you can't expect me to give it up. This chap"—nodding at Jim—"says you've rented the room to some one else. Well, all he's got to do is take one of the other rooms. That's easy."

Gary picked up his bag, walked through the door and took formal possession. Jim and Mrs. Hazard looked at each other at a loss. Jim was angry clear through, and yet the newcomer seemed to have the law on his side. "I suppose," faltered Mrs. Hazard, "we might let Mr. Gordon decide." Jim frowned. Gary had set his bag on the table, opened it and was now unpacking. "I'd like to chuck him out the window!" muttered Jim.

"Perhaps Jeffrey would just as soon have one of the other rooms," suggested his mother weakly. "What do you think?"

"I guess he'd take one and be decent about it," answered Jim, eyeing the intruder with strong distaste, "only I don't think it's fair to ask him to. I don't care what the—the

custom is here; no one told us about this room being engaged, and I don't believe that fellow has any right to it."

At the back of the house a bell pealed and Mrs. Hazard went and leaned over the banisters. Jim followed slowly.

"Have you any rooms left?" asked a voice at the doorway.

"Yes," replied Hope. "If you'll wait a moment I will call my brother. Will you come inside?"

"Will you see them?" asked Mrs. Hazard. Jim nodded and went down. Hope rejoined Jeffrey in the dining-room. Near the front door stood two boys talking together softly. They had no bags with them, nor was there any conveyance to be seen outside.

"You wanted to look at a room?" asked Jim gloomily.

"Please," replied the taller of the two.

"This way, then. There's a back room on this floor to rent and one or two upstairs." Jim threw open the door of the chamber opposite the dining-room and they looked in. It was not a very attractive apartment, however, and they didn't enter.

"I think something upstairs would be nicer," said one. He turned, crossed the hall and looked into the dining-room. "Oh, I beg your pardon," he said, "that's not a bedroom, is it?" But in spite of his apology he seemed in no hurry to withdraw.

"That's the dining-room," said Jim shortly.

"I see." The boy gave a final look at the room—and its occupants—and followed toward the stairway. "Is the corner

room on that side rented?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Jim grimly. "Very much rented!" Then he stopped on the landing and faced the two boys. "Say, you fellows aren't new here, are you?"

"No," replied the elder, "why?"

"I want to know something. We rented a room to a fellow about a week ago and he came to-day. That's he in the dining-room. Now another chap comes along and says he engaged the same room from the lady who had the house last year. It's the corner room you asked about. This new chap says we've got to stand by what Mrs. Timberlake did. I don't think that's sense. We never saw her and didn't know anything about it. At that rate she may have rented all the rooms, for all we know!"

The two boys looked at each other doubtfully.

"Well, the chap's right in a way, I guess. It is customary. But if he's a new boy how does he know so much about it?" This from the taller of the two.

"He's not new," said Jim. "I guess he's been here two years or so from the looks of him. He said his name was—Gerry, or something like that."

"Gerry? You don't mean Gary, do you?"

"Yes, that's it."

The two boys exchanged glances and began to chuckle.

"'Bull' Gary! Sounds like him, doesn't it? Is he here now?"

"Yes, in the room," answered Jim.

“I think, then, you had better let us talk with him. Hold on, though. Did you rent the house from Mrs. Timberlake?”

“No. She left early in the summer. We rented from an agent, Mr. Simpson.”

“Ah, that simplifies the case, eh, Poke?”

“Like anything,” was the cheerful response. “Lead us to him.”

“Do you fellows know him?” asked Jim doubtfully.

“Rather! We’re very dear friends of his. You leave it all to us.”

They went on up, bowed to Mrs. Hazard, who still waited in the hall, and made for the corner room. Jim dropped back.

“Well, well, if it isn’t Bull!”

Gary turned with a doubtful grin.

“Hello, Poke! Hello, Gil! Where’d you fellows come from? Aren’t living here, are you?”

“No, we’re still at the old place,” answered Gil. “Whose room is this, Bull?”

“Mine, of course. Not bad, is it?”

“No, it’s fine and dandy, but I understood that some one else had taken this. Didn’t that chap downstairs tell us that, Poke?”

“Sure he did. I guess Bull’s spoofing.”

“I dare say he did tell you that,” said Gary. “But I engaged this room last June from Mrs. Timberlake.”



“Oh, I see!” Gil nodded his head. “Well, that explains it. Too bad, too, for it’s a mighty pleasant room. Still, there’s one across the hall that looks pretty decent and I dare say you’ll be just as happy there, Bull.”

“Me? I’m staying here,” said Gary uneasily.

But Gil shook his head gently and firmly. So did Poke.

“No, you can’t do that, you see,” said Gil. “This room belongs to the other chap. You see, Bull, Mrs. Timberlake gave up the house. That canceled everything. Then this Mrs. —Mrs. Whatsername took it from Simpson. Get me, Bull? Your case isn’t good, old scout.”

“That makes no difference!” blustered Gary. “I engaged this room—”

“Tut, tut! Don’t be dense, Bull. Have we got to explain it all over again to you? Honest, Gil, he’s the prize dunce, isn’t he?”

“Oh, he understands all right. He’s just trying to tease us. Let’s have a look at the room opposite, Bull.”

“I don’t want to see the room opposite,” Gary protested with vehemence.

“Then why not have a look at the back rooms? Of course, they aren’t as sunny as this, but I’ve no doubt they’re quite comfortable.”

“I’ll stay just where I am,” growled Gary. But there was a tone of uncertainty in his voice. Gil smiled indulgently. Poke flicked an imaginary speck of dust from his sleeve.

“Strange how dense some folks are, Gil,” said the latter. Gary flushed, and tried bluster.

“You fellows think you can come here and bullyrag me into doing anything you like. Well, you’re mightily mistaken. I know my rights and I intend to stand up for them.”

“Noble youth! But you haven’t any rights in this case, Bull. You’re just making a silly ass of yourself and being disagreeable. Don’t let’s have any bother about it, Bull.” This from Gil.

“I rented this room—”

“S-sh! Remember, please, that there’s a gentleman present,” remonstrated Poke. “Be sensible, Bull. Honest, you’ve got your signals mixed.”

Gary looked from one to the other for a moment, swallowed hard once and yielded. “All right, but I don’t have to give this room up unless I want to.”

“You’re doing it, Bull,” responded Poke sweetly, “because you are the soul of generosity. Ah, we know you, you rascal!”

“We will examine the other apartments,” said Gil.

“Not for me,” growled Gary. “If I can’t have this room I don’t want to stay in this hole. I’ll go back to Sanger’s.” He began to pile his things back in his bag. Gil and Poke eyed each other dubiously.

“I—I don’t believe I’d do that,” said Gil finally. “This is a perfectly good house, Bull, and the landlady hasn’t let many of her rooms—”

“I don’t care if she hasn’t! I hope she won’t! You can make me give up this room, but you can’t make me stay here!”

Gil and Poke recognized the truth of that. Gary slammed his bag shut, seized his cap and strode wrathfully downstairs and out the door with neither a glance nor word for Mrs. Hazard or Jim.

“I’m afraid we’ve lost you a—a tenant,” said Gil to Mrs. Hazard. “We didn’t mean for him to leave the house.”

“That doesn’t matter. It was very kind of you to straighten it out about the room. We’re so much obliged to you.”

“I’m glad he’s gone,” declared Jim. “I don’t like him.”

“Jim dear,” remonstrated his mother, “you mustn’t say that. He may be a very nice boy for all we know. Has my son shown you the rooms we have to let?” she added, turning to Gil.

“Er—yes, thanks; that is, he was showing them when—”

“This room over here is quite pleasant,” she said, leading the way to the door across the hall. “It has only one bed in it, but we can set up another one if necessary. Were you both thinking of coming?”

Poke looked a trifle uneasy, but Gil came to the rescue.

“We’ve been rooming in hall, ma’am, and were just sort of looking around to see what there was. We’re not decided yet.” He looked at the room. “I suppose this gets the afternoon sun until quite late.”

“Yes, indeed,” replied Mrs. Hazard. “It’s quite a warm room in winter, I’m told.”

Poke looked in over Gil’s shoulder. It really was a very jolly-looking room. It was big and square, with two broad windows on the front and a bay on the side. The furnishings were neither new nor elaborate, but there was a roomy bureau, a big library table that had seen better days, two good easy chairs, two straight-backed ones and a washstand. And of course there was a bed, a simple white-enameled iron bed that looked both clean and comfortable. On the walls were hung several pictures, the windows had neat dimity curtains and the floor was covered with a cheerful red and gray carpet which, if it showed wear in some places, was still quite presentable. There was a fireplace and mantel, too, and the fireplace looked as though it could be used.

“It’s a very nice room,” said Poke warmly.

“Dandy,” said Gil. “I suppose we—I suppose whoever had it could have a fire there.”

“Oh, I should think so,” answered Mrs. Hazard. “But I hope that the furnace will keep the house warm enough without having to use the grates.”

“How much would this room be?” asked Gil.

“Well, I suppose—” Mrs. Hazard turned to Jim for assistance—“I suppose for two it would be ten dollars a week.”

“Eleven,” said Jim firmly. “But we don’t charge for board, of course, when you are away. Then you just pay three dollars for the room.”

“That seems reasonable,” declared Poke.

“Quite,” agreed Gil.

“I dare say if we wanted a fire any time we could have it by paying something extra?” Poke asked.

“Just pay for what you burn,” said Jim.

“I see.” Gil turned to Poke. “What do you think?”

“Why, we—we might think it over a little,” gasped Poke.

“Better let us know pretty soon,” said Jim in businesslike tones. “We couldn’t hold it for you, of course.”

“N-no,” replied Gil, “I suppose not.”

There was a silence. Gil and Poke stared fascinatedly at each other. Finally:

“I guess,” blurted Gil, “we’ll say we’ll take it!”

“But, Gil!” cried Poke. “Don’t you think— Hadn’t we better talk it over a bit first?”

“Well, maybe we had. We—we’ll let you know in—in an hour.”

“Much obliged,” murmured Poke as they made their escape downstairs.

Once out of sight of the house Gil pulled up and leaned against the fence. “That—that was awful!” he gasped. “In another minute we’d have rented the room!”

“Sure thing,” agreed Poke solemnly. “How the dickens did we get started?”

“How did we get started?” exclaimed the other indignantly. “Why, you insisted on going in there to look at rooms, you idiot!”

“Well, you asked how much it was, didn’t you? It was all safe enough until then.”

“Now, hang it, Poke, I feel as though we’d ought to take it; as though it was our duty! After all, you know, we drove Bull away.”

“How can we take it, you simpleton? Haven’t we got a room already? Honest, Gil, you oughtn’t to be trusted out alone! If it hadn’t been for me we’d been saddled with two rooms now!”

“Well, why didn’t you help me? You could see that I was—was hypnotized!”

“I guess I was too,” laughed Poke. “I never knew before how easy it is to buy something you don’t want! Not that I wouldn’t like to have that room, though. It’s a peach, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s about twice the size of Number 12. I wonder what it would be like to have all the light and sunshine you wanted.”

“I’m crazy about the windows,” said Poke. “We could have a seat built in that bay, Gil.”

“Sure. And with our pictures and stuff to fix up with the room would look dandy.”

“Great!” sighed Poke.

There was a silence. At last:

“I don’t suppose J. G. would let us give up our room now,” observed Gil thoughtfully.

“We might find out,” answered Poke. They turned by common impulse and stared at each other. Then Poke broke into a laugh.

“Let’s do it!” he shouted.

Gil grinned. “All right,” he answered.

They shook hands on it.

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# CHAPTER IV

## MR. GORDON RECEIVES

At a quarter before five that afternoon the expressman landed the last of Gil's and Poke's belongings in the corner room at Sunnywood Cottage. On his final trip upstairs the expressman carried a waste-basket filled with books and a crimson sofa pillow embroidered with a gray C. Gil paid him, closed the door behind him and then with a shout of triumph seized the cushion and hurled it across the room at Poke. As Poke was at that instant bent over a suit case, extracting a miscellaneous assortment of books, balls, pens, shoes and so forth from it, and as the cushion struck him square between his shoulders, the result was interesting and spectacular. Poke's head went into the suit case and his feet flew out behind him. Gil, chortling gleefully, watched Poke recover his equilibrium. Then, by deftly dropping to the floor at the psychological moment, he escaped the rubber-soled shoe that sang across the room and banged against the door. He picked up the missile and tossed it back. Poke caught with one hand, swooped down and tagged the suit case. Gil waved his hand.

“Out at the plate!” he yelled.

Then they looked at each other and grinned.

“Get busy,” said Poke finally. “It's most five o'clock. Say, you hate to unpack, don't you?”



“Observe the trouble I saved myself at hall,” said Gil, pointing to his trunk. “If I’d unpacked there, as you did, I’d have had it all to do over again. See?”

“Well, as we aren’t likely to move again to-day you’d better get busy. Say, it was a great scheme of ours to get here early and be all settled ahead of the others, wasn’t it?”

“Marvelous,” agreed Gil ironically. “See us now!”

Poke looked over the room and grinned. “Looks as though it had been struck by a cyclone, doesn’t it? Say, this is a dandy big closet.”

“Well, don’t hog it all. Seen my trunk key anywhere?”

“Yes, I saw it on the window sill at hall.”

“Oh, feathers! Well, I’m not going back for it to-night. Let’s try yours, Poke.”

“Won’t fit. You tried it last year. Get a hammer.”

“Haven’t any.”

“Put your fool head out in the hall and yell for one.”

“All right. Say, Poke, weren’t you surprised when J. G. let us off on our room?”

“Rather! But I dare say there are plenty of fellows who’ll be glad of it.”

“Well, they can have it! I like this ten times better. Of course we’re paying a little more—”

“About fifty cents a week more,” said Poke scornfully, “and what’s that? I’ll bet Mrs. Hazard will give us better

things to eat than we got at school. And anyway it will be more—more homelike.”

“Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home,” sang Gil as he opened the door. Then, “Say, Poke, who shall I yell for?”

“Yell for a hammer, of course.”

“Hammer! Hammer!” cried Gil softly. “It doesn’t come, Poke! What’s the chap’s name?”

“Hazard.”

“First name, I mean.”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, maybe he wouldn’t like to have me get familiar on so short an acquaintance,” reflected Gil. “I guess I’ll go down and find some one.”

“Don’t get lost,” advised Poke.

Gil didn’t have to search far, for Jim was in the lower hall. Gil explained his quandary.

“I guess I can get it open for you without prying the hasp off,” said Jim. “Wait a minute and I’ll get some keys.”

Five minutes later Jim lifted the lid in triumph. “There you are,” he said. “Say, you fellows have got a raft of truck, haven’t you? Going to put all those pictures up?”

“I guess so,” answered Gil, “if there’s room for them.”

“Better let me help you, then,” said Jim. “Tell me where you want them to go. I’ll get the step-ladder.”

“He’s a good-hearted kid,” observed Poke as Jim hurried off.

“Your friend came back again,” announced Jim as he returned with the ladder, “just after you telephoned. Said he’d decided to take this room. I told him we’d just rented it and he was as mad as a hornet. You would have thought that we’d cheated him out of it.”

“Oh, that’s like Bull Gary,” said Gil. “He has an overdeveloped sense of importance.”

“He’s got an ingrowing ego,” said Poke.

“I don’t know what that is,” laughed Jim, “but it sounds bad.”

“It’s awful,” Poke assured him solemnly. “Let’s put that one over the bed, Hazard. Want help?”

“No, you fellows go on and get your things unpacked. We have supper in about an hour.”

“That sounds reasonable,” said Gil.

“I’d like to know how you managed that fellow the way you did,” said Jim presently.

“Who? Gary?” asked Gil. “Well, not to make a mystery of it, Hazard, we all belong to the same society, Plato, and in Plato every fellow is supposed to act decently. Bull wasn’t acting decently and he knew it.”

“Oh, do you have societies here?” asked Jim.

“Four,” was the reply. “There’s Plato, which is the best, and to which Endicott and I belong—”

“Also Bull Gary,” said Poke dryly. “But Bull was an accident.”

“And Pindar, Homer and Hesiod,” continued Gil.

“Are they secret societies? How does a fellow get into them?”

“Yes, they’re secret. And a fellow doesn’t get into them; he’s taken in. Each society has from thirty to forty members. New members are taken in each year during Winter Term.”

“I see,” said Jim, moving the ladder to a new location. “I thought maybe you could be proposed and get in that way.”

“Why?” asked Poke. “Are you at school?”

“I’m starting to-morrow,” replied Jim. “I’m in the Lower Middle Class. I suppose you fellows are beyond that, aren’t you?”

“One year,” replied Gil. “I didn’t know you were one of us, Hazard. What do you think of our seat of learning?”

“I like it,” answered Jim warmly. “I’ve always wanted to come here.”

“Know many fellows?” asked Poke.

Jim shook his head. “Not a one.”

“Wrong, Mr. Hazard,” said Gil; “you know two. Mr. Perry Oldham Kirkland Endicott and Mr. Gilbert Benton, two of the Academy’s most prominent and representative members. Bow, Poke.”

“Happy to meet your iniquity,” murmured Poke politely.

“Well, I know you fellows a little,” laughed Jim, “and I know the chap across the hall in the same way. But that’s all.”

“That doesn’t matter. You’ll soon know plenty of fellows. Who is the chap you spoke of?”

“His name is Latham, Jeffrey Latham, and he comes from Poughkeepsie. He’s a sort of a cripple. One leg’s shorter than the other. He says he was born that way. He seems a nice sort of fellow, and I was mighty glad that Gary didn’t get his room from him.”

“Cripple, eh? That’s hard lines. What class is he in?”

“Lower Middle, same as me.”

“Then we’re all Middlers here. Is the young lady your sister, Hazard?”

“Yes. Hope’s going to High School when it starts. It’s her first year.”

“Is your father here?” asked Poke.

“No, he’s dead,” answered Jim. “Died about three years ago. That’s why we’re here doing this. Everything went smash when dad died.”

“Too bad,” said Poke sympathetically. “Never mind the rest of those pictures. You’ve done enough already. Besides, I’m going to knock off work and get ready for supper.”

“There aren’t many more to go up,” said Jim. “I’ll stick ’em under this bed.”

“Don’t forget that we must telegraph this evening, Poke,” said Gil. “We can telephone to the office from here.”

“That’s so,” answered Poke, adding in explanation to Jim, while a broad smile enveloped his countenance. “You see, Hazard, we’ve got to get permission from home to change our lodgings.”

“But you’ve already done it!” exclaimed Jim. “Suppose—suppose your folks won’t let you?”

Visions of having the room back on his hands, empty again, gave him an anxious moment. But Gil smiled reassuringly.

“Oh, that’ll be all right,” he declared. “I shall wire, ‘Poke moving to village. Am going with him. Wire permission.’”

“And I,” said Poke, “shall say, ‘Gil moving to village. Am going with him. Wire permission.’” He winked at Jim. “Easy, what?”

“Well, I hope it works,” laughed Jim. “Supper will be ready in about ten minutes. Guess I’ll go and wash up.”

“Much obliged for helping us,” said Gil. “See you later.”

Sunnywood Cottage may be said to have formally opened its season that evening at supper. At one end of the table sat Mrs. Hazard, at the other Jim. Hope sat at her mother’s right with Jeffrey Latham beside her, and across from them were Gil and Poke. Jeffrey was a bit shy at first, but by the time supper was half over Gil and Poke had made friends with him and the meal was a very jolly one.

“This certainly beats dining-hall,” declared Poke, accepting a second dish of Mrs. Hazard’s preserves.

“Well, rather!” Gil agreed. “We never had preserves like this, did we, Poke?”

“Nor cake like this, either,” added Poke, looking politely expectant at Hope, in front of whom the cake dish was reposing.



[“This certainly beats dining-hall,” declared Poke.](#)

“Do have another piece,” said Mrs. Hazard, smiling with pleasure. “I shall tell Jane that you like it.”

Poke accepted his third slice demurely.

“Is Jane the cook, ma’am? She’s a dandy, all right!”

“Jane made the cake,” answered Mrs. Hazard, “but I can’t trust her yet with all the cooking. I think she is going to do very nicely after she has had a little more experience.”

“Yes’m, experience is what counts,” said Poke gravely.

“Well, you’re getting plenty of experience with that cake,” said Gil dryly. “I guess, Mrs. Hazard, I ought to warn you now that Poke is an awful eater.”

“Huh! I don’t begin to eat as much as you do. Have some more cake, Latham? You don’t eat much, do you?”

“Oh, yes, I do, but Mrs. Hazard made me take dinner after I came. And I didn’t want to seem impolite and so I ate a whole lot.”

“Come to think of it,” said Gil, “it’s a good idea to leave a little room for J. G.’s ice cream and wafers.”

“By Jove,” exclaimed Poke, “I forgot about that!”

“To-night, do you mean?” asked Jim. “Do you get things to eat at the reception?”

“Sure thing! Ice cream and those sugar wafers that taste like blotting paper. It’s a good plan to go early, though; last year the eats gave out about nine o’clock.”

“Are you expected to go to it?” asked Jim.

“Yes,” replied Gil. “Of course you don’t have to, but it’s a pretty good idea to do it, Hazard. You get a chance to meet fellows, you see. Faculty too. ‘Boots’—that’s Thurston, you know; physics;—will tell you about his trip to Europe, and ‘Kitty’ Clarke—he’s chemistry—will talk fishing until your head spins. Besides, you’ll meet Mrs. Gordon, and she’s a dandy, isn’t she, Poke?”

“Yes. We’ll all start about eight. You’re going, Latham?”



“Yes, but I’ll start a little ahead. I can’t get along quite as fast as you fellows.”

“Oh, we’re in no great rush. We’ll all go together. We’d better go by the road, though; I guess you’d find it pretty hard through the woods. Let’s telephone those messages to the telegraph office now, Gil, before we forget it.”

Half an hour later they were off, Gil and Poke ahead and Jim and Jeffrey behind, all suiting their pace to Jeffrey’s. He managed to swing himself along about as fast as an ordinary walk, and that was fast enough for any of them this evening, for all had supped well and it was still pretty warm, although the sun had been down for a good half-hour and there was a little breeze from the west. It was not quite dark as they followed the winding road, but when, presently, the school buildings came into sight beyond the trees lights were a gleam in most of the rooms.

“Seems funny not to be living up there,” reflected Poke. “I wonder who’ll get our room.”

“Homesick already?” laughed Gil. “Much I care who gets it. I believe we’re going to have a dandy time at—what’s its name?”

“Sunnywood Cottage,” replied Poke as they turned onto the drive that led past the rear of Academy Hall to the Principal’s residence. “Say, I like Mrs. Hazard, don’t you?”

“You bet! She’s a lady.”

“Yes, she’s—she’s sort of like a fellow’s own mother, isn’t she? And she certainly has great preserves!”

The house was brilliantly lighted and already fellows were arriving. Gil and Poke waited at the steps for the others to come up. Then, settling their collars and furtively slicking down their hair, they followed the stream, deposited their caps in the hall and entered the big library, already half full of guests. Mr. Gordon, the Principal, or J. G. as the boys called him, was receiving with Mrs. Gordon, and toward them the Sunnywood contingent made their way, Gil and Poke, however, stopping at least a dozen times to greet friends. On several occasions Jim and Jeffrey were introduced, but only one name stuck in Jim's memory afterwards, that of a big, good-looking, broad-shouldered fellow of nineteen, who squeezed Jim's hand like a vise and of whom Gil whispered a moment later as they passed on: "That's Duncan Sargent, football captain; one of the best!" Then Jim was shaking hands with Mr. Gordon and Mrs. Gordon and the Principal was saying:

"This is James Hazard, my dear. His mother has taken the Timberlake house, you know."

The Principal was a sturdily built man of fifty-odd, clean-shaven, with a nice face and a voice that made you like him instantly. In appearance he was more the business man than the scholar. Jim had met Mr. Gordon several times already, but Mrs. Gordon he had never seen. She asked kindly about Jim's mother and how the house was prospering. Then another boy claimed her attention and Jim stepped back out of the way just as Jeffrey, who had found difficulty in getting through the throng, reached Mr. Gordon.

"How do you do?" greeted the Principal, shaking hands in his hearty way. "And what is your name? We haven't met

before, have we? You must set me right if I am wrong. I confess that I sometimes forget a face.”

“My name is Latham, sir, Jeffrey Latham. I came to-day.”

“To be sure! And so you’re Latham, eh? I believe—yes, I think I might have known it, my boy, for there is certainly a strong resemblance to your father. And how is the Senator? Well, I trust?”

“Yes, sir, thank you.”

“I’m pleased to hear it. A fine man, Latham. I have had the pleasure of meeting him once or twice in a casual way. I hope you’ll find your stay with us happy and profitable, Latham. You must come and take tea with Mrs. Gordon and me some evening.”

As Jeffrey shook hands with Mrs. Gordon and turned away Poke Endicott, who had been next him in line, dragged him aside.

“What did J. G. mean about the Senator, Latham? Is he your father?”

“Yes,” replied Jeffrey.

Poke whistled softly.

“Don’t that beat all!” he ejaculated. “Why, man alive, Senator Latham and my dad are regular old cronies. Haven’t you ever heard him speak of Major Endicott?”

“Lots of times!” cried Jeffrey. “Is that your father?”

“That’s the dad! Why, say, Latham, you and I are pretty nearly relatives, aren’t we?” He grinned and stretched out his hand. “Senator, I’m pleased to meet you!” he cried.



# CHAPTER V

## MR. HANKS RENTS A ROOM

With the ringing of chapel bell in the old stone turret of Academy Hall the next morning Crofton began its forty-third year. Seven-fifteen seemed to come extremely early, for none of the boys in Sunnywood Cottage had gone to bed until very late the night before. There had been lots to talk about after the reception and they had loitered on the way home and afterwards had congregated in Jeffrey's room for a final gossip. Jim, for one, pulled himself out of bed with a sigh; it seemed to him that he could have slept until noon to-day. Gil and Poke were already downstairs when he arrived, and Jeffrey followed a minute later. They chose the wood path, Jeffrey protesting his ability to manage it. And manage it he did very well, swinging himself along the winding path, over protruding roots with a remarkable dexterity.

Chapel was held in the Meeting Room on the first floor of Academy Hall. It was a large, square room, taking up the entire east end of the building. There was a long platform at one side and facing it were rows of yellow settees. The walls held many portraits of former Principals, faculty members and noted graduates and the big windows were set in deep embrasures adorned with plaster casts of Greek and Roman immortals; the students called this array "The White Company."

The shrill-toned bell gave its expiring clang as Jim followed the other three into the room. Most of the fellows were already in their seats and his first impression was of a sea of faces confronting him. They passed row after row of settees before Gil, who was leading, turned in. Behind them a boy closed the big door and Mr. Gordon arose and stepped to the reading desk on the platform. Whispers ceased as the big Bible was opened.

“My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments.

“For length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add to thee.

“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man.”

The Principal’s deep, pleasant voice went on to the end of the chapter. Then there was the rustling of many pages as the hymn-books were opened and the scraping of feet as the boys arose. They sang without accompaniment of any sort, and to Jim, accustomed to the wheezy droning of the worn-out organ in the little church at home, the effect was very beautiful. Then came a prayer, a simple, earnest appeal to the Almighty for help and guidance throughout the year just beginning.

“And, O Lord, bless the faculty and the students of this school: give them strength and patience to do their work, understanding and clean hearts to follow Thy laws.”

Then came the Lord's Prayer, repeated in unison; a moment of silence; and then the scraping of feet, the creaking of settees and the moving of bodies, signifying the end of the service; signifying too, perhaps, a longing for breakfast. But Mr. Gordon was not yet through with them. He said a few words appropriate to the opening of the school and then announced the presence on the faculty of a new member. A tall, thin gentleman of middle age arose and stepped to the front of the platform. He wore spectacles and held his head forward in a near-sighted way.

"Mr. Hanks, young gentlemen," announced Mr. Gordon. Mr. Hanks bowed to the right, to the left, to the center, hesitated nervously and returned precipitately to his chair. The students clapped their hands, grinning the while at the new instructor's evident delight in reaching his seat again.

"Hanks, did he say?" whispered Poke to Jim. "It isn't hard to guess what his name will be?"

Jim looked a question and Poke laughed softly.

"Nancy," he whispered. "Nancy Hanks; see?"

Mr. Gordon dismissed them and there was a fairly dignified rush for the door, Jim becoming separated from his companions in the exodus. He discovered them again outside, however. Jeffrey, the subject of much polite curiosity, was leaning on his crutches at the foot of the steps, while, close by, Gil and Poke made part of a group of six or seven fellows who were talking and laughing as fast as they knew how. Jim joined Jeffrey, but a moment later Gil saw them and called them over.

“Want you to meet some friends of mine, fellows,” he said. “Sargent you met last night, I think. This is Cosgrove. Joe, shake hands with Hazard and Latham. You too, Atherton. Likewise Sommers and Heath. Hazard’s a Lower Middler. How about you, Latham; what’s your class?”

“The same,” replied Jeffrey.

“You fellows want to come over and see our new room,” said Poke. “It’s a dandy. We’ve got hardwood ceilings, hot and cold elevator service, continuous janitor, telephone in every room—”

“Dry up, Poke,” laughed Joe Cosgrove. “Where is it? What did you leave Weston for?”

“Didn’t like the society there,” replied Poke gravely. “We’re at Mrs. Hazard’s; this chap’s mother, you know. She’s taken the Timberlake cottage. We’ve got a fine old room, honest. Come over soon, will you?”

Jim became aware that Duncan Sargent was looking at him in a peculiarly speculative way as though trying to guess his weight. He was enlightened the next moment when Sargent asked:

“You a football man, Hazard?”

Jim shook his head. “Not much of one, I’m afraid. I’ve tried the game but I never made a success at it.”

“Well, but you’re coming out, aren’t you?”

“Coming out?” repeated Jim at a loss.

“Yes, to try for the team. This afternoon at four. We want all the new material we can get this year and you look as



though you might make good.”

“Why, thanks,” said Jim. “I—I’d like to, but I won’t have time. You see, we’ve taken that house and there’s a good deal to do.”

“Oh.” Sargent looked disappointed. “I wish you would, though. See if you can’t give us an hour or so in the afternoon, Hazard. I’m going to look for you, anyhow.”



**“You a football man, Hazard?” Sargent asked.**

Jim murmured vaguely and politely, very much flattered by the football captain’s interest in him, and the group broke up. The quartette hurried back to Sunnywood Cottage as fast as Jeffrey could go, all very anxious for breakfast. At nine

the school bell rang again and Jim and Jeffrey—with many another new boy—attended their first class. But there wasn't much real work done that opening day, and at three o'clock they were free. Jim returned to the cottage alone. Most of the other fellows were making for the athletic field to either don canvas and get into the first day's practice or to loll about the grand-stand or on the warm turf and watch and comment. But Jim had plenty of work awaiting him at the cottage, for in spite of the fact that they had been at Crofton for almost a fortnight there still remained numerous odds and ends to attend to. Hope, busily hemming dish-towels on the porch, was eager to hear about his experiences, but she found her brother a good deal of a disappointment.

“Why, nothing much happened,” replied Jim, dumping his books in a chair. “There was history and French. I have the new man, Mr. Hanks, in history. He's awfully funny; guess he was rattled a bit. Poke calls him ‘Nancy’; not bad, is it?”

“I haven't seen him, Jim.”

“You don't have to see him to appreciate that; Nancy Hanks; don't you see?”

“Oh!” murmured Hope blankly. “But—but why does he call him Nancy?”

“Don't you know who Nancy Hanks was? My, you don't know much United States history, do you?”

“I suppose not,” replied Hope humbly.

“Was she a—a nurse or something in the Revolutionary War, Jim?”

“Of course she wasn’t,” answered Jim disgustedly. “You’d better read your history, sis. Where’s Lady?”

“In there.” Hope nodded toward the door. “She wants you to go down town for something.”

“All right; I’ve got to go anyway; got to get some books and stationery. What are you doing?”

Hope held up the piece of blue-checked linen. “Dish-cloths.”

“Oh. I suppose we haven’t rented any more rooms?”

Hope shook her head. “No, there hasn’t been a soul here—except the ice-man and a man who wanted to sell us a set of ‘The World’s Best Literature.’”

“Well, I don’t see how we’re going to get along with just those two rooms rented,” said Jim gloomily. “Endicott said I might advertise in the school paper, but Benton said it would be wasting money because the fellows don’t change rooms after school begins.”

“Lady and I were talking about it this afternoon,” said Hope, biting a thread off with her teeth and then glancing apologetically at her brother.

“What have I told you—” began Jim sternly. But Hope hurried on. “Lady said she thought we could manage to make expenses even if we don’t let any more rooms. She says living isn’t very expensive here in Crofton. And then, Jim, there’s the rent money from the house at home.”

“Thirty-three dollars a month! Wait until we have to buy coal to heat this place! It’s going to take a lot of fuel, the rooms are so big and there are so many windows.”

“Well, we may rent another one yet,” replied Hope cheerfully. “You never can tell, Jim, and, anyway, it doesn’t do a bit of good to worry.”

“Some one’s got to do a little worrying,” answered Jim shortly. “You and Lady don’t seem to care whether we make this thing go or not!”

“You’re perfectly horrid! We do care, Jim, but nobody ever did any good to anybody by worrying. Besides, I don’t see that there is anything we can do but just—just wait.”

“Yes, wait,” said Jim disgustedly. “Sit here and wait for some one to come along and insist on being taken in. A lot of rooms we will rent that way!”

“Well, those boys upstairs did that, didn’t they? They came along and rented the room, Jim; nobody worried them into it, did they?”

“Well, you sit here and wait,” growled her brother. “I’m going down town.” He picked up his books and turned toward the door. “I’ll see what Lady wants.” He was back in a few moments, stuffing a slip of paper, Mrs. Hazard’s list, into his pocket. “Want to go along, Hope?”

But Hope shook her head. “I must finish these, Jim. I’ve got five more to do.”

“Oh, all right.” He pulled his hat down over his eyes and started off. Hope looked after him, sighed and shook her head.

“Jim’s getting growlier and growlier every day,” she murmured. “I suppose I ought to worry too; maybe he’d like it better if I did. The trouble is I don’t seem to be able to.

Every time I get started to be unhappy I think of something nice and forget! I'm afraid"—she fixed her gaze thoughtfully on the little round bed of scarlet sage, which was all the garden the cottage could boast—"I'm afraid I'm dreadfully fripish. Maybe I have a—a shallow nature." Then she smiled, and, "Oh, dear," she sighed ruefully, "I can't worry even about that!

"Just the same," she continued in thought as she sent her needle in and out, "I really don't see the use of worrying all the time. It seems to me that if things go wrong you just ought to keep cheerful, and the wronger they go the cheerfuller you ought to keep. You never know when something nice is going to happen in this wonderful world. Why, I might be sitting here just like this and somebody might come along and say, 'Young lady, have you any rooms to rent?' And I'd say—"

"I—I beg your pardon."

Hope looked up with a start. At the end of the short walk, holding the gate half open, stood a tall gentleman in rather ill-fitting pepper-and-salt clothes. On his head, set at a rakish angle, was a straw hat with a narrow up-rolled brim. It was very yellow as to straw and very rusty as to ribbon. And it didn't suit his lean, thoughtful face the least bit. He wore spectacles and from behind the lenses a pair of faded blue eyes peered near-sightedly. He carried a small book in his right hand, one finger inserted between the pages to hold his place. Hope wondered if he could be another book agent and dropped her work and went to the steps.

"I regret disturbing you, young lady," said the gentleman, "but will you kindly tell me whether this is—er—" He

stopped perplexedly. Then, “Dear, dear,” he said half to himself, “what was the name now?”

“This is Mrs. Hazard’s house,” said Hope helpfully.

“Ah, that was it; Mrs. Hazard!” he said with vast relief. He entered and closed the gate carefully behind him, changing the book from right hand to left as he did so but taking care to keep his place. “I—I am looking for accommodations; lodgings; a room and—er—yes, board with it. You give board here?”

“Yes, indeed,” answered Hope. “If you will take a seat I will tell my mother you are here.”



[“I am looking for accommodations, a room and—er—yes, board with it.”](#)

“Thank you.” He took a chair. “My name is Hanks. I am just beginning my duties as instructor at the school. The Principal, Mister—Mister—well, the name doesn’t matter—



sent me here. I had a room—” He broke off abruptly and exclaimed anxiously; “Your rooms have plenty of light?”

“Yes, sir, they’re quite light and sunny.” Hope had reached the door but politeness kept her there until the visitor had finished talking.

“That is excellent. I had a room in one of the halls; I think it was Roberts—or Rutgers; now was it that? Well, that’s of no consequence. I was explaining that the room was extremely dark, even in midday very little light penetrating the—er—the windows. As my eyes are unfortunately quite weak I was obliged to inform Mister—Mister—”

“Gordon,” prompted Hope gently.

“Thank you. Yes, Mr. Gordon. I was obliged to inform him that the room would not be satisfactory. I then learned that there was no other room to be had at the school. Quite extraordinary, I would say.”

He paused and seemed to be pondering the fact. Hope waited. After a moment he looked up in his funny startled way.

“I—I beg your pardon!” he said confusedly. “I—I fear I am detaining you.”

“Oh, no, sir. I’ll tell my mother that you are here.”

“If you will be so kind.” He bowed gravely.

But Mrs. Hazard was already on the way, having heard the voices on the porch. As she came out Mr. Hanks arose from his chair and bowed. Then, as an afterthought, he removed his faded straw hat.

“Mama,” said Hope, “this is Mr. Nancy Hanks—I mean—” She faltered in confusion. Mr. Hanks came to the rescue.

“I fear you did not get the name quite correctly,” he said politely. “Artemus Hanks is the name.”

“He—he is looking for a room,” said Hope hurriedly, painfully aware that she was blushing frantically.

“I shall be very glad to show you what we have,” said Mrs. Hazard with a smile. “Will you come in?”

“Er—thank you.” Mr. Hanks placed his book, open and face down, on the chair, put his hat carefully on top of it and followed. “I am not very particular, Mrs.—er—Mrs. Hazel; plenty of light is almost my sole requirement. Unfortunately, my eyesight—”

They passed out of hearing, leaving Hope divided between confusion and laughter. How had she ever been so stupid as to call him Nancy? The gate slammed and Jim came up the walk, laden with bundles and looking very warm.

“Oh, Jim,” she cried softly. “He came and I called him Mr. Nancy Hanks! Wasn’t that simply awful?”

“Who came? Mr. Hanks? Came here? What for?”

“For a room. Just after you went. I was sitting here—”

“Did he take it?” asked Jim eagerly.

“I don’t know. He’s still up there. Isn’t he the funniest, foolishest old dear of a man, Jim? He couldn’t remember Lady’s name, nor Mr. Gordon’s—”

“S-sh, they’re coming down,” warned Jim. The instructor, followed by Mrs. Hazard, came out of the door.

“I hope you will find it quite light enough, Professor.”

“Not Professor, ma’am, merely instructor. I have no doubt the room will be—er—quite satisfactory. I shall have my things removed directly.” He caught sight of Jim and bowed. “How do you do,” he murmured. “Thank you, ma’am.” He bowed to Mrs. Hazard, managing to include Hope in the salutation, and started down the steps. Hope, stifling a giggle, seized his hat and book and ran after him.

“Eh?” he asked bewilderedly. “Oh, thank you, thank you. My hat—and book; to be sure. I believe I would have forgotten them. Thank you, thank you.”

He set his hat on his head, where it immediately shifted to the same rakish angle as before, closed the gate carefully behind him, opened his book and paced slowly off toward school, reading as he went. Hope subsided in a chair and gave way to laughter. Jim grinned in sympathy and Mrs. Hazard said “S-sh!” warningly, but had to smile too. Then:

“Well, Jim, another room rented,” she said cheerfully.

“Fine, Lady! What’s he going to pay?”

“Why—why”—a queer expression came over Mrs. Hazard’s face—“why, do you know, Jim, I don’t think he—I—we spoke of the price at all!”

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## CHAPTER VI

### PLATO SOCIETY

“Of course I’m glad you’ve rented your room,” said Poke with hesitancy, “but—but it isn’t going to be much fun having a faculty in the house.”

“We had two in hall,” said Gil.

“Yes, but what’s two when there are forty fellows to look after? That’s different. Here there are only four of us, and, besides, he’s right next door. Not, of course,” he continued, assuming an air of conscious virtue, “that I would think of doing anything—er—out of the way, but I—one resents the—the espionage.”

“Come again,” requested Gil.

“I’m sorry,” said Jim. “I didn’t think about that.”

They were talking it over on the porch before supper. Mr. Hanks was already installed in the room behind Jeffrey’s, his luggage consisting of four huge boxes of books, one small trunk and a battered valise, having arrived simultaneously with Gil and Poke.

“Piffle!” said Gil. “It doesn’t matter. I dare say Nancy isn’t the sort to bother us much. He’s a queer old duffer.”

“Old?” questioned Jim thoughtfully. “I don’t believe he’s so terribly old, fellows.”

“He looks as though he might be anything from twenty-five to forty,” said Gil. “I dare say he’s really about thirty, eh?”

“I dare say,” responded Poke. “Well, it doesn’t matter as long as he behaves himself and leaves us alone to our innocent amusements. I’d hate to have to report him to J. G., though. Here comes Latham. He manages to get along pretty well on those sticks of his, doesn’t he?”

“It’s too bad he’s that way,” said Gil. “He seems a good sort. Wonder why he doesn’t wear a thick-soled shoe on that foot. Seems to me that would be better than using crutches.”

“It’s something about the muscles of that leg,” explained Jim. “Some of them don’t work right; I think he said they were the—the extensive muscles,” ended Jim doubtfully.

“Extensor,” corrected Gil. “He’s mighty cheerful considering everything, I think. Hello, Latham! Where have you been?”

“Seeing the world,” replied Jeffrey. “Stumping all over the place. I watched football practice awhile and went down along the river afterwards. It’s awfully pretty, isn’t it?” He seated himself in a chair, leaning his crutches against his knees. “I saw you two fellows playing,” he added.

“You saw us working like dogs,” replied Poke grimly. “Football for the first month is a whole lot like hard work, Latham. By the way, Hazard, what happened to you? Aren’t you going to try for the team? Dun asked where you were today.”

“I wouldn’t have time,” answered Jim. “Besides, I can’t play; I’ve tried it.”

“Can’t play? How do you know you can’t play? You let Johnny get at you for a couple of weeks. Then if he says you can’t play I’ll believe it. Johnny can make a football player out of a lump of wood!”

“He did something more wonderful than that,” said Gil. “He made one out of you, Poke.”

“Your wit is very cheap, Mr. Benton.”

“Who is Johnny?” asked Jim.

“Johnny? Johnny is Mr. John Connell, the best little trainer in the country. He’s a wonder! Why, half the big schools have been after him for years, and last spring he had an offer from Dartmouth! You go and let Johnny look you over. If he says there’s no hope for you, all right.”

“I’d like to play well enough,” said Jim, “but there’s too much to do about the house.”

“Why? What sort of things?”

“Oh, chopping kindling, bringing up coal, running to the village, cutting grass—”

“Get your coal up in the morning, cut your kindling at night, telephone to the village and forget the grass,” said Poke glibly. “It won’t do to waste yourself on—on domestic duties, Hazard; you look to me just like a chap who has the making of a good back in him. Say, now, you come out tomorrow afternoon with us and we’ll hand you over to Johnny and see what happens. Will you?”

But Jim shook his head, with a smile. “I know what might happen,” he said. “There might be no coal to cook supper with.”

“Get a fireless cooker,” suggested Jeffrey with a laugh.

“Joking aside, Hazard,” said Gil soberly, “they really need you on the field this fall. We’re short of good men. See if you can’t fix your chores so as to have the afternoons for football.”

“Oh, I think they can do without me,” laughed Jim. “If they ever saw me play they wouldn’t want me a minute. No, I guess I’ll get my exercise right around here.”

“Let me go as his substitute,” said Jeffrey with a smile.

“At that you’d get around a heap quicker than some of the fellows who try for the team,” replied Poke. “Well, let’s wash up, Gil. It’s meeting night, you remember.”

“What’s meeting night?” asked Jim.

“Plato Society meets this evening. I’d ask you along, but it’s business meeting to-night. Glad to have you some other time, though; you, too, Latham, if you’d like.”

At supper the household had increased to seven, for Mr. Hanks occupied the seat of honor at Mrs. Hazard’s right. He was introduced to the boys and shook hands with each, smiling in his absentminded way. At first his presence at table rather dampened the spirits of the others, excepting Mrs. Hazard who did her best to make conversation with the newcomer. Her efforts, however, were not very successful. Mr. Hanks replied politely but embarrassedly, showing that he was far more ill at ease than the boys. On the whole, supper was a quiet meal, and almost as soon as it was over Gil and Poke left the house for the meeting.

At Crofton the faculty keeps a gentle but firm hold on the societies by assigning to each a Counsellor, one of the younger faculty members. He is responsible to the Principal for the conduct of his society, although his office is merely an advisory one. Plato's Counsellor was Mr. Brown, better known as "Brownie," instructor in Greek and one of the more popular of the faculty members. Plato, like the other three societies, had a home of its own, a small cottage near the campus on Academy Road in charge of an elderly man and his wife who received the rear part of the house rent-free in return for their services as housekeeper and gardener. There was a little yard in front, what Poke called an "open-faced porch"—there being no railing on it—and four downstairs rooms, of which two were used by the society. On the second floor were four bedrooms, occupied principally by visiting friends. The room on the right on the first floor was the Meeting Room, and it was quite ample in size to accommodate the thirty boys who had congregated there this evening.

It was already well filled when Gil and Poke arrived, although the meeting had not yet been called to order. Mr. Brown was the center of a group of fellows which the two new arrivals joined. The instructor had a handshake and a word of welcome for each. Then other friends demanded recognition, and for the next five minutes the hum of talk and laughter filled the square, old-fashioned room. The two windows on the front of the house were wide open, for the flaring gas-jets in the big chandelier were making the room uncomfortably warm. The side windows were kept closed and curtained, for it was not beyond the possibilities that prankish or curious members of a rival society might



eavesdrop; such a thing had occurred before now, and the heavy shrubbery outside offered excellent concealment for the enemy. The room was papered with plain gray cartridge paper above the white-painted paneling, and a half-dozen good engravings decorated the walls. There was an oak desk between the front windows with a few straight-backed chairs about it, while some forty folding chairs filled the body of the room. There was no carpet on the floor and the broad mantel was bare of adornment. The apartment, save at commencement time, was used only for business purposes. At commencement the chairs were moved against the wall and visiting relatives and friends took possession and the floor was waxed for dancing.

Presently the president of the Society, Ben Atherton, who was also captain of the crew, rapped on the desk with a little silver-mounted gavel and the fellows took their places. What passed at the meeting we, as outsiders, have no right to know. I do not believe, however, that it was a very important affair, for it lasted less than half an hour. Then the boys trooped into the room across the hall or emerged onto the porch. Banjos, mandolins and guitars were taken from their cases. "Punk" Gibbs seated himself at the piano—a long-suffering instrument constantly in need of tuning—and wandered through some chords while the other musicians, seated around or leaning about it, tuned up.

The Social Room, as they called it, was well and comfortably furnished. There were many brown oak chairs and settles upholstered in dull red leather, some fairly good rugs on the polished floor, a broad couch, filled with cushions—and, just now, with boys as well—in front of the fireplace, a good-sized bookcase moderately well filled and

many pictures on the walls. The word picture here means all sorts of things in frames, for there were originals of cover-designs for the school weekly, *The Crow*, posters of all sorts, drawings and other trophies and mementos, all crowded together in interesting confusion. Visitors to Plato Society found the walls of the Social Room highly amusing.

The room was soon noisy with talk and laughter, the jangle of the piano and the *strum-strum* of strings. Gil and Poke had found places at one of the windows, which opened clear to the floor, where, seated on cushions, they were in position to see and hear what went on both inside and out. Mr. Brown was on the porch telling an interested group about his summer walking trip through Switzerland. On the big couch in front of the empty fireplace a very hilarious group were recounting their own vacation experiences and, incidentally, “rubbing it into” one youth on whom they apparently had a very good joke. He was grinning in an embarrassed way and half-heartedly retaliating on his chief tormentor with a cushion. Then Gibbs started up “Old Plato” and the banjos and guitars and mandolins, six or seven in all, joined in as best they could. Fingers were stiff, however, from lack of practice, and the music was pretty wobbly at first. But by the time Gibbs had reached the refrain the orchestra was doing fairly well, and when the pianist started over again, first one voice and then another began the words, and presently the whole assemblage was singing the Society Song. It wasn’t an especially edifying production, but it went with a swing and Platonians had sung it for years.

Old Plato was a good old soul,  
Old Plato, Old Plato!

He loved his pipe and he loved his bowl,  
Old Plato! Old Plato!  
But more than all he loved a scrap;  
He'd argufy at the drop of the cap;  
Oh, he was a fine old sporting chap,  
Old Plato! Old Plato!

Hurrah, hurrah for Plato,  
Hurrah for our Patron Saint!  
He was a hot potato  
In the good old days that ain't!  
A very lucky man was he,  
A lucky man as you'll agree,  
For "Greek ain't never Greek to me,"  
Said Plato, Old Plato!

Old Plato dealt in philosoph-ee;  
Old Plato! Old Plato!  
And he founded this great Societ-ee;  
Old Plato! Old Plato!  
He wrote the Protagoras, too,—  
Which wasn't a thoughtful thing to do—  
And made much trouble for me and you;  
Old Plato! Old Plato!

Old Plato lived in Ancient Greece;  
Old Plato! Old Plato!  
And when he died he died in peace;  
Old Plato! Old Plato!  
They buried him under a cypress tree,  
And said, as they danced with joy and glee;  
"No more of your fool philosoph-ee,

Old Plato! Old Plato!”

Hurrah, hurrah for Plato,  
Hurrah for our Patron Saint!  
He was a hot potato  
In the good old days that ain’t!  
A very lucky man was he,  
A lucky man as you’ll agree,  
For “Greek ain’t never Greek to me,”  
Said Plato, Old Plato!

Afterwards they sang “Crow, Crow for Crofton!” and then “Follow the River”:

Follow the river up from the sea,  
Through sun and shadowy tracery,  
Over the shallows and past the green pools;  
You’ll come at last to the School of Schools.

Then came the old college songs, “Mother Yale,” “Fair Harvard,” “Old Nassau,” and the football songs, “Boola,” “Veritas,” and many more. And then it was bedtime—Mr. Brown was the first to discover the fact—and instruments were put away, the lights extinguished and by twos and threes and larger groups the Platonians dispersed. The Counsellor lived in Browne Hall—most appropriately—and as Browne was the last dormitory on the campus the instructor was accompanied homeward by some dozen or more students. Gil and Poke were amongst the number, for it was quite as near for them to walk to the school and then go home through the woods as to follow the winding road. Besides, there was a full moon to-night to light their way.

They talked about the new students and speculated as to whom they would draw into Plato when the elections came. This was a subject of unflinching interest, although it was too early in the school year for the interest to wax intense. The societies took their members from the three upper classes in January and each sought to select fellows who had in some way distinguished themselves.

“There’s one thing,” said Mr. Brown, as they passed into the black shadows of Academy Hall, “that we ought to keep in sight, fellows, and that is that the men we want for Plato are the men who have not only *done* things but who *think* things. Don’t let’s just make the Society a group of athletes and First Honors men and commencement officers. Let’s try and pick the fellows who are honorable and earnest and fine and manly. Remember that Plato isn’t over with when you leave Crofton; the Society goes right on, bringing other fellows together just as it has brought us together. Let’s see that when we leave it we leave it in shape to do the work it was designed to do, let’s see that we leave a fine, big lot of chaps to carry on the work in our stead. It’s character we want, fellows, and not merely athletic honors, nor social honors, nor even merely scholastic honors. Let’s judge our members to be as *men* first; then consider the honors they’ve won. Remember the motto, fellows: ‘For the Good of the School, and so for the Good of Myself.’ Good night, everybody.”

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# CHAPTER VII

## JIM MAKES A PROMISE

“We’ve got the same lessons, Hazard,” said Jeffrey, after the others had taken their departure, “so why don’t you bring your books into my room and study?”

“I’d like to,” answered Jim, “and I will as soon as I finish my chores.”

Half an hour later the two were seated on opposite sides of the table in Jeff’s room, their books spread out before them in a very businesslike way. But there wasn’t much studying done that evening, although each acknowledged the necessity of it. There were too many things to talk about. Naturally the foremost topic was the school. Jeffrey had to tell Jim what he thought about it, and Jim had to give his opinion of the fellows they had met; and after that they discussed the instructors and the course of study and many associated subjects. And before the evening was over it was no longer Hazard and Latham, but Jim and Jeff.

And in another day or two proper names had quite disappeared from Sunnywood. Every one called every one else by his first name; except that Poke had dubbed Jeff “The Senator” and called him that about half the time. For awhile Jim’s mother was “Mrs. Hazard,” but eventually she became “Lady” to every one except Mr. Hanks. Mr. Hanks—or “Nancy,” as the boys dubbed him—called Mrs. Hazard pretty nearly everything except Mrs. Hazard. Sometimes it was Hazel, sometimes Hastings, sometimes Hathaway; and once,

to the amusement and bewilderment of the entire table, he called her "Mrs. Venture." Hope was "Miss Hope" to the boys for awhile, but as friendship ripened the Miss was dropped. The boys all liked Hope. They couldn't have done anything else, I fancy, for Hope was always happy and merry, eager for fun and firmly convinced that Sunnywood Cottage held the four finest boys in Crofton Academy.

But I am getting ahead of my story.

Gil and Poke had in due time received the required parental sanction to their change of quarters and had settled down very comfortably in what Poke called the Royal Suite. With three of their rooms rented for the school year Jim and his mother were much encouraged, for even if the fourth room didn't rent they could, they were certain, more than pay expenses. Mr. Hanks, in spite of Poke's forebodings, troubled no one. If he found the house rather noisy at times, he made no complaint. Except at meal times they saw very little of him. He was usually very silent at the table, accepting what was placed before him or handed to him and eating it in his funny absentminded way. At school, however, Mr. Hanks was having his troubles. In the first place, he was a new man, and there is an unwritten law at Crofton to the effect that new instructors must be decently hazed. Hazing in Mr. Hanks' case consisted of taking advantage of his inexperience and diffidence until at the end of his first week at school his Latin and history classes had lost all semblance of order and discipline. The instructor's worst trial was Latin 2. In this class was Brandon Gary, and Gary knew more ways to make the teacher's life a burden to him than there were pages in the *Æneid*.

“Bull makes me very tired,” said Gil one day. “It’s all right to have a little fun; and every faculty ought to stand a little joshing; but Bull is keeping it up too long. First thing we know Nancy will get discouraged and quit. If he only knew enough to sit on a few of those Smart Alecks he wouldn’t have any more trouble.”

“I think it’s just as mean as can be,” declared Hope. “Mr. Hanks is a perfect dear.”

“Oh, he’s all right,” agreed Poke. “Nancy isn’t a half bad sort. Only thing is he hasn’t enough grit.”

“And,” continued Hope, puzzledly, “I don’t see why you want to call him Nancy. He doesn’t look a bit like a horse.”

“A what?” demanded Jeff in surprise.

“A horse. I asked Lady the other day who Nancy Hanks was and she said he—I mean she—was a famous racehorse. And I don’t see—”

But the boys were laughing so loudly that the rest of Hope’s remark was drowned. She viewed them bewilderedly.

“Wasn’t she a horse?” she asked doubtfully.

“Well,” answered Jeff, who had recovered first, “I believe there used to be a horse named that. But the original Nancy Hanks was Abraham Lincoln’s mother. Have you never heard of her?”

Hope shook her head. “I don’t believe so. What—what did she do?”

Jeff looked at Gil and Gil looked at Jim and Jim shook his head. It was Poke who came to the rescue.



“Mrs. Hanks,” he observed thoughtfully, “was a very estimable lady. Besides being the mother of the Martyr President she—er—she invented the idea of winding yarn in hanks. Hence the name.”

The others viewed him suspiciously, but were afraid to question his statement for fear of confessing their ignorance. Jeff said “Hm” noncommittingly and Jim became very busy over the lock he was trying to repair. Hope accepted the information at face value and thanked Poke very nicely. Poke, I think, was on the verge of a confession when Mr. Hanks himself came into sight beyond the fence. He had an armful of books as usual and his head seemed to have acquired to-day an added droop. As he turned in through the gate his face looked pretty tired and discouraged. Jim and Poke arose from their places on the steps to let him by and it was only then that he saw the group. He lifted his funny old straw hat rather sketchily and murmured, “Good evening.” The others responded politely, but Hope, with a sudden rush of sympathy for the instructor, said: “Won’t you sit down here and rest, Mr. Hanks? You look very tired, and supper won’t be ready for a long time.”

Mr. Hanks looked surprised and embarrassed, hesitated, dropped a book—which Gil rescued—and finally stammered: “Er—thanks, but I have much work to do. It—it has been a very nice day, hasn’t it?”

They all agreed enthusiastically that it had, after which Mr. Hanks hemmed and coughed once or twice, bowed jerkily and went on in. They could hear him walking weariedly up the stairs to his room.

“He looks perfectly floppy!” exclaimed Hope, indignantly. “It is too mean for anything to treat him so!”

“What’s floppy?” asked Gil, a little ashamed of his own small share in the instructor’s unhappiness and willing to switch the conversation.

“Why—why, *floppy*, of course; tired and—and miserable and unhappy!”

“Ready to flop,” added Poke knowingly. “It is an excellent word, even if Mr. Webster doesn’t countenance it. What’s the matter, Jim?”

“I lost a screw somewhere. I guess it went down a crack when I got up.”

“That lock will be a wonder when you get through with it,” laughed Poke. “You’ve used up three screw-drivers and a perfectly good penknife on it so far.”

“The trouble,” responded Jim gravely, holding the offending article under his nose and squinting knowingly into its intricacies, “is with the tumblers.”

“Nonsense!” said Poke. “The trouble’s in the carburetor. It needs adjusting. How’s school going, Hope?”

“Fine!—I just love the teacher in our room.”

“Hm; wait until you’ve been there another week. Teachers all look good at first. They’re very—very deceptive.” Poke shook his head sadly. “I’ve had a great deal of experience with teachers.”

“I guess they’ve had a good deal of experience with you,” laughed Hope. Poke grinned.

“Well, I don’t deny that I have aided in the education of a few. Including our estimable Nancy,” he added rashly.

Hope sobered. “I shan’t like you, Poke,” she said gravely, “if you’re mean to Mr. Hanks.”

“Who? Me? Honest, now, I haven’t done a thing, have I, Gil?”

“Not much,” answered Gil. “No more than I have. We’ve all had a go at him. I think, though, it’s about time we let up. I guess we’ll have to squelch Bull Gary, Poke.”

Poke nodded. “I guess so. Bull lacks a—a sense of sufficiency.”

“What’s that?” inquired Jeff.

“That is a polite way of saying that he doesn’t know when he’s had enough. By the way, Jim, did we tell you that Gary has taken a room at Jones’s? He says it’s fine, but that’s poppycock. Jones’s is the worst hole in the village. I guess he’s still peeved with you for not renting a room to him.”

“I don’t see how I could,” said Jim, laying aside the lock with a sigh of relief. “I wasn’t going to put Jeff out; or you fellows either. Besides, I don’t like him.”

“Well, Bull isn’t terribly popular,” said Gil, “but he’s really not so awfully bad. All he needs is some one to beat a little sense into him. He’s a lot better than when he first came. I dare say that some day Gary will be a useful member of society.”

“In the sweet by and by,” said Poke skeptically. “And, say, Gil, what’s the matter with Bull’s playing this year? He’s way off his game. Johnny gave him a fierce ragging this

afternoon. Did you hear him? Told Bull that if he didn't do better than he'd been doing he'd be wearing a nice warm blanket on the side-line. I guess Bull has a swelled head after last year."

"Does he play well?" asked Jim.

"He *can* play well. He's one of the best guards we've had for years. And in the Hawthorne game last fall—which, as you probably know, Mr. Locksmith, is our big game—he put up a grand old exhibition. Didn't he, Gil?"

"You bet! And that's what I say. You can't altogether dislike a chap who can play football the way he can—when he wants to."

"Well, he will have to want to pretty soon, I guess," said Poke. "Johnny's getting out of patience. When are you coming down to the field with me, Jim, to have a try?"

"About Christmas time, I think."

"You don't say? Well, let me tell you something, son. I'm going to get Dun Sargent after you. I'm not going to see a good football player wasted in a locksmith."

"Good football player!" scoffed Jim. "I never played enough to be good—or even real bad, for that matter. I don't know enough about the rules to—to—"

"That's all right," said Gil. "They'll teach the rules to you. Just you come and have a try. You're missing a lot of fun."

"And a lot of hard work, too," sighed Poke.

"I wish you would play," said Hope. "Won't you, Jim?"

“How can I?” asked Jim a trifle irritably. “I’d like to—in a way—I guess, but who’d do the work here?”

“Listen,” said Poke impressively, “if you’ll try for the squad and if you make it we’ll all help with your silly chores. Won’t we, fellows?”

“Right-O!” agreed Gil.

“Surely,” said Jeff.

“Besides,” Poke continued, “what do you have to do, anyway? Lug up a little coal, split some kindling, sift some ashes—”

“Beat some carpets, run some errands, fix some locks, study some lessons,” added Jim with a laugh.

“Oh, well, that’s nothing,” said Poke airily. “I’m a wonderful carpet beater; better than one of those vacuum things, Jim. Now that’s a fair offer. What do you say?”

Jim laughed.

“Will you report to-morrow?” Poke persisted.

“No, but maybe I’ll go down and look on for awhile.”

“All right! That’s a promise. You go down with Gil and me after school to-morrow. Don’t forget. Jeff, you’re a witness; you too, Hope. After he’s looked on awhile he will want to play. Jim, you’re a gone coon!”

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## CHAPTER VIII

### POKE USES TACT

Jim kept his promise; in fact, he was given no choice in the matter, for Poke was waiting for him on the steps of Academy Hall when he emerged from his algebra recitation the next afternoon. Jeffrey had agreed to accompany them to the field, but as he didn't show up they started along without him. It was Jim's first visit to the field, although he had often viewed it from afar. Their way took them past the front of Memorial Hall, a small building of Grecian architecture presented to the school by graduates in honor of four Croftonians who had lost their lives in the war with Spain. Crofton was proud of those men and the bronze tablet beside the doorway was one of the first objects exhibited to visitors. The building held the dining-hall and kitchen, and if some humorists alluded to it as Prunorial Hall no disrespect was intended.

The river, a few rods away, was alive with craft this afternoon, for this early October day was warm and still, with just enough hint of autumn in the air to make the blood course quickly and put the joy of adventure in the heart. Half way between Memorial and the gymnasium the two boys turned at the sound of a hail from the river. In a canoe sat Jeffrey and Gil, the latter snuggled comfortably in the bow and the former dexterously dipping the paddle in the stern. Gil waved his hand nonchalantly.

“Where are you going?” cried Poke enviously. “Do you know what time it is?”

“I am the Queen of Sheba,” replied Gil, “and this is my royal barge. We are on the way to the gym.”

“Well, of all the lazy Its!” exclaimed Poke. “Say, Senator, take me back after practice?”

Gil howled derisively. “Get out! I’ve engaged Jeff for the rest of the day. Proceed, slave!”

Jeffrey, smiling broadly, dipped his paddle again and the canoe went on along the stream to the swimming float. The others walked down to meet them.

“We’ve had a dandy ride,” said Gil as he stretched the kinks out of his legs. “Jeff took me all the way up to Birch Island and back. He’s a fine little canoedler.” Jeff, once more with his crutches under his arms, fell in beside Jim.

“I think I’ll get a canoe of my own,” he said. “They say there’s a fellow up the river a couple of miles who makes dandy ones. And I’m sort of daffy about being on the water.”

“Is it hard to learn to paddle one of those things?” Jim asked. “I tried it once and the silly thing just went around in a circle and made me dizzy.”

“It’s the easiest thing there is,” laughed Jeffrey. “You come out with me some day and I’ll show you the trick in a minute.”

Gil and Poke disappeared in the gym to don their football clothes and the others sauntered slowly toward the field. Already the big expanse of yellowing turf was scattered with players. Beyond the gridiron with its new white lines a

baseball game had begun. Nearer at hand the tennis courts were all occupied. And on the grand-stand and along the sides of the field on the warm grass fellows less inclined to bodily exertion sat or sprawled in groups and waited to be entertained. Half a dozen pigskins were arching back and forth across the gridiron or bounding erratically into the spectators. Jim and Jeff found a place near the twenty-five-yard line and settled themselves, Jeff laying his crutches down with a sigh of relief.

“This is fine,” he murmured as he lay back with his hands beneath his head and blinked at the sunlight. “I read somewhere once, Jim, that every one has the—the characteristics of some animal. I guess I’m like a cat, I’m so fond of sunlight and warmth. I could almost purr this minute.”

“Go ahead,” Jim laughed. “I don’t mind as long as you don’t scratch. There comes What’s-his-name, the coach.”

“Connell,” murmured Jeffrey. “They say he’s a dandy.”

“He isn’t very big,” replied Jim doubtfully. “He doesn’t look much taller than I. Guess he’s the sort to make you stand around, though; don’t believe he’d take much nonsense. There’s Gil and Duncan Sargent. And there’s that chap Gary, the fellow who wanted your room. He’s pretty hefty, isn’t he?”

“Yes.” Jeffrey rolled over and observed the scene, supported on one elbow. “I heard a fellow say Gary had a grouch against Connell and isn’t half playing.”

“Johnny” shouted to the candidates and they came from all quarters of the field and flocked about him. There seemed to



be some fifty or sixty of them altogether.

“A lot of show I’d have,” said Jim, “in that bunch. Some of those chaps must be nineteen years old.”

“I dare say,” Jeffrey replied. “But that doesn’t necessarily mean much. You are going to try, aren’t you?”

Jim shrugged his shoulders. “I’d sort of like to,” he acknowledged, “but I’d just make a show of myself, I guess.”

The coach had finished his instructions and now the candidates were forming in groups about the field. For the beginners football was still drudgery; passing, falling on the ball, starting and tackling. But the veterans were learning signals and getting ready for the first game now only three days distant. The first and second squads were soon scampering up and down the field in short rushes under the directions of shrill-voiced quarter-backs. In Squad A a substitute had Duncan Sargent’s place at left guard and the captain, draped in a faded red blanket that trailed behind him and tried to trip him up in moments of excitement, followed the play. Now and then Jim could hear him calling a halt and laying down the law.

“Hold on! Let’s try that again. And don’t go to sleep, Smith, this time. They’d have got you about three yards behind your line then. Take your time from quarter. This is a delayed pass, but not a misplaced one. And now try again. Same signals, Arnold.”

On this first squad Gil was at left end, Poke at right half-back and Gary at right guard. To Jim’s surprise the fellows were not very heavy in weight, while as to age the squad would have averaged about seventeen. The quarter, Harry

Arnold, was a mere youngster, and with the exception of Captain Sargent himself there was no member over eighteen. LaGrange, a big good-natured youth who played center, was but sixteen, in spite of his size.

Jim and Jeffrey looked on with interest. Jeffrey, who had made other trips to the field, knew many of the more prominent players by name and pointed them out to his companion. At the end of half an hour the signal work ceased, the linemen were taken to the upper end of the field for special instruction and the backs and ends were put to work getting down under kicks. As it happened Poke took up his position at a little distance from Jim and Jeffrey, and, turning to run back for a long catch, caught sight of them.

“Hello!” he shouted. “Seen Sargent, Jim?”

Jim shook his head. Poke curled the ball against his arm and hurled it back across the field.

“Well, he’s looking for you. I told him you wanted to come out for the team. Told him you were a wonderful footballist, Jim, and he’s hot on your trail.”

“You told him that?” cried Jim in dismay. “Why, you— you—”

“Say it,” said Poke, keeping a watchful eye across the field at where a substitute center was poising the ball between his legs. Jim grinned ruefully and threw a pebble at him.

“But you didn’t tell him any such yarn as that, did you, Poke?” he asked.

“I told him you were thinking of coming out, Jim, and that you’d played the game some. Said you looked good to me.

When he asks you just keep your mouth shut tight and it will be all right.”

With that Poke sprinted for the arching pigskin, caught it deftly without slackening his speed and dodged the opposing end.

“Do you suppose he did tell Sargent all that?” Jim said.

“I dare say,” replied Jeffrey with a smile. “Poke is likely to say most anything he thinks of. I guess you’ll soon know, though, for there’s Sargent now.”

The captain, having discarded his blanket, was striding across the field toward Poke. They exchanged a few words and Poke nodded his head toward Jim and Jeffrey. In a moment Duncan Sargent had reached them.

“How are you, Hazard?” he began. “Endicott tells me you’ve decided to help us out, and I’m mighty glad to hear it. We really want fellows who know something about the game and are willing to buckle down to it. Wish you might have come out to-day. To-morrow sure, though, eh?”

Jim, who had climbed to his feet, looked somewhat embarrassed.

“Why—er—I only told Endicott that I might like to try—”

“Of course! That’s the spirit! You’ve played a good bit, haven’t you?”

“No, not much,” answered Jim modestly. “I really don’t \_\_\_”

“In the line, I suppose?”

“Well, yes, when I played, but I never—”

“Fine! We need linemen, Hazard. You report to me tomorrow and I’ll put you to work. There’s going to be a cut in a day or two and then we’ll have some of these dubs out of the way. Don’t forget! Three-thirty!”

And away hurried Sargent, leaving Jim flushed and uncomfortable and Jeffrey visibly amused.

“Now what shall I do?” asked Jim ruefully. “He evidently thinks I’m a regular Hogan of a lineman. I wonder what Poke *did* tell him! Why, hang it, Jeff, I don’t even know this year’s rules!”

“Oh, they aren’t much different from last year,” replied Jeffrey consolingly.

“Yes, they are; they’re different every season. Every time any one thinks of a new wrinkle he writes to the Rules Committee about it and they stick it in. Well, you won’t see me around here to-morrow! It’s me for the tall timber!”

“Oh, shucks, Jim, see it through. You can tell Sargent you aren’t a star—”

“Tell him! Why, didn’t I try to tell him?” exclaimed Jim irritably. “He wouldn’t let me get a word in edgewise.”

“He was afraid you would try to beg off,” laughed Jeffrey.

“He didn’t give me a chance,” replied Jim ruefully. “Guess I’ll just have to hike out to the woods or he will get me sure.”

“I don’t think I’d do that. See it through. You’ll like it after you get started. Why, the first game’s on Saturday. Maybe Sargent will put you in in his place, Jim!”

“Dry up. They’re going to scrimmage. Let’s get nearer the middle of the field.”

The scrimmage wasn’t very encouraging that day. There was a good deal more fumbling than there should have been and it was plain to be seen that neither first nor second team had thoroughly learned its signals. When it was over Jim and Jeff cut across the field and took the road back to Sunnywood.

“I wonder,” mused Jim as they passed the little white house where Plato Society held its meetings, “if being on the football team would help a fellow to make a society.”

“Well,” answered Jeffrey, “I suppose a fellow who is well known and has done something for the school like playing football or baseball or rowing in the boat naturally stands a better show than some chap who is unknown.”

He shot a glance at Jim’s thoughtful face and smiled to himself. A hundred yards further on Jim spoke again.

“I wonder,” he said, “if Gil or Poke has a book of rules.”

When Poke came back he sought Jim and found him in the cellar swinging the ax.

“Hello,” he said, “what are you doing?”

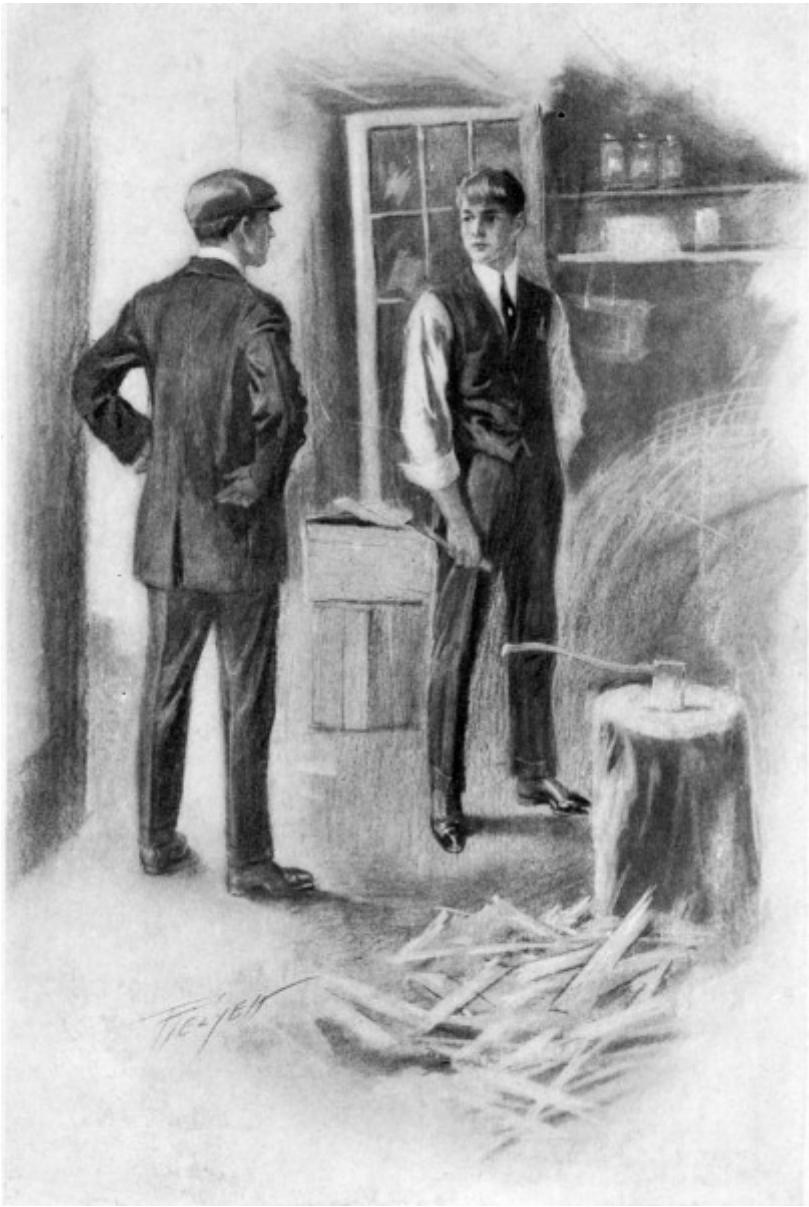
“Kindlings,” replied Jim as he dodged a piece of wood. Then he buried the ax in the block and faced Poke.

“Look here,” he demanded, “what did you tell Duncan Sargent about me?”

Poke laughed. “Why?” he asked.

“Because he evidently thinks I’m a football player and he wouldn’t give me a chance to say anything at all; just rattled on and on and fixed it all up that I’m to report for practice tomorrow.”

“Did he? Well, I told you you’d be a gone coon if you once got out on the field.”



**“Look here,” he demanded, “what did you tell Duncan Sargent about me?”**

“What did you tell him?” Jim insisted sternly.

“Oh, just that you’d played the game and that I had an idea you’d be a big addition to the team. It wasn’t what I really

said so much as the—the impression I managed to convey, Jim. One thing I rather dwelt on,” he continued with a chuckle, “was that you were terribly modest and that you were almost certain to refuse to come out for the team if he gave you a chance.”

“I see. Well”—Jim shrugged his shoulders—“he will be considerably surprised to-morrow.”

“Pshaw, that will be all right. You’ll pick it up quick enough, and before the season’s over you’ll be thanking me on your knees for my—er—diplomacy.”

“Your fibs, you mean! Look here, Poke, I don’t even know what the rules are this year.”

“No more does any one—except Johnny; and I sometimes think he’s just bluffing. You come up to the room after supper and Gil and I will tell you all you need to know. Between us I dare say we’ve got a fair inkling of the rules.”

“All right,” Jim agreed. “But I’m going to see Sargent to-morrow before practice and tell him the facts. I’m not going to start out under false colors.”

“Hm.” Poke considered that a moment. “Oh, all right. The main thing is to come out. Got any togs?”

“Yes, some old ones. I guess they’ll do. Guess they’ll have to. I can’t afford to buy new ones.”

“Good stuff! Get ’em out and we’ll look ’em over. Here, I’ll take that up for you. You bring the coal. You know we all agreed to help out with the chores if you went in for the team.”





# CHAPTER IX

## OUT FOR THE TEAM

Hope was delighted.

“I just know you’re going to be a real football hero, Jim,” she declared earnestly. “And I shall be too proud of you for words! And to-morrow I shall go and see you play.”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort,” responded Jim shortly. “If I’ve got to make a fool of myself I don’t intend to have the whole family watching me.”

Hope’s face fell. “But I may see you some day, mayn’t I? And I shall bring some of the girls from school with me. There’s one, Grace Andrews, whose brother plays on the High School team and she’s too sticky about it for anything. We play the High School Saturday, don’t we?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, I do hope they’ll let you play then, Jim! I’d love to have Grace Andrews see you.”

“Well, she won’t,” replied Jim grimly. “I’ll be on the awkward squad for weeks, I suppose, and it’s a fair bet I never leave it. Besides, it seems to me your sympathy ought to be with your own school, sis.”

Hope considered that a moment. Then, “Well,” she sighed, “it’s a very difficult position I’m in. Of course I’m very fond of High School, Jim, but—but I think I’d rather have Crofton

win; especially if you play. Wouldn't that be just perfectly jimmy?"

"Fine! And maybe Duncan Sargent will retire and make me captain in his place," added Jim ironically as he started upstairs to get ready for supper. "But, somehow, I don't look for him to do it!"

After supper study was delayed in Sunnywood while Gil and Poke went over the football rules with Jim and did their best to elucidate them. Jeffrey was on hand too, and if it had not been for him I think Jim would have known less after the lesson than before, for Gil and Poke proved quite at variance as to the interpretation of half the rules and Jim was getting more and more confused when Jeffrey came to the rescue. Gil and Poke were hotly contradicting each other as to what invalidated a forward pass.

"I'll leave it to Jeff if I'm not right," declared Poke.

"Whereupon Jeffrey very quietly and understandingly explained Rule XIX in all its phases, while the others listened in respectful and admiring silence.

"I say," exclaimed Poke when Jeffrey had finished, "you certainly know the rules, Senator. I'll bet you you wrote them yourself!"

Jeffrey smilingly denied this but acknowledged that he always studied them very carefully each year, adding, "You see, I like to watch football mighty well, even if I can't play it, and unless you know the rules of the game well enough to know just what's being done all the time, and why, you don't thoroughly enjoy it."

“Well,” said Gil, “I guess you know them better than most of the fellows who play. I believe I’ll get a rule book and study up a little myself.”

“You wouldn’t understand them,” said Poke. “It takes a chap with a whole lot of brains to make head or tails of that stuff. Why, bless you, fellows, I was looking through a book of rules before I left home. Give you my word I tried the hardest I knew how to make out what it was all about, and could I? I could—*not!* So I pitched the silly book in the waste-basket. And I wouldn’t be at all surprised to hear that the ashman found it and has gone crazy.”

“Well, that’s about all you need to know at first, Jim,” said Gil. “You’ll pick it up quick enough. The main thing is to know how to hold a ball so it won’t bite you, to kick a little, throw a little—”

“Won’t need to know that if he plays in the line,” said Poke. “If he can block and break through and help the runner \_\_\_”

“Well, I guess I’ve had enough for to-night,” said Jim. “I guess I’d better pay a little attention to my lessons. Looked at your Latin yet, Jeff?”

“Yes, I’ve been over it once; it looks pretty easy.”

“For you perhaps,” replied Jim. “It won’t be for me, though.”

“Speaking of Latin,” said Gil, “something’s due to happen to Nancy Hanks pretty soon if he doesn’t brace up. They say J. G. is getting very much peeved at him. There was a peach of a rough house in history this morning, wasn’t there, Poke?”

“Lovely! But I’m sorry for Nancy, just the same. Bull Gary makes me tired. He’s got half a dozen of the fellows trained now so that every time he starts something they all drop into line and poor Nancy’s life is a positive burden to him.”

“He shows it, too,” observed Jeffrey. “He’s getting to look as worried and nervous as—as a wet hen.”

“That’s so,” said Jim. “We’ve sort of let up on him in our classes. The fun wore off after awhile.”

“Because you haven’t any one in your bunch with the inventive genius of Mr. Gary,” said Poke. “Bull lies awake nights, I guess, thinking up new mischief. Somebody will just have to sit on him, Gil, and sit hard.”

“Yes, maybe. Still, perhaps, after all, Crofton isn’t just the place for Nancy. And if it isn’t he might as well make the discovery now as later. I guess he knows an awful lot, but I don’t believe he can teach it. And as for discipline, why, he doesn’t know the meaning of the word.”

“Oh, he knows what it means all right,” corrected Poke, “but he doesn’t know how to go to work to enforce it. I’ll bet you he never taught before in his life.”

“Then what’s he been doing all these years?” asked Jim.

“I think,” replied Jeffrey, “that he writes.”

“Writes? Writes what?” asked Poke.

“Books. The other day I passed his room when he happened to have left the door open—which doesn’t very often happen, as you know—and I saw a whole pile of paper

on his desk and he was writing away like sixty with those tortoise-shell spectacles of his on.”

“Pshaw! Correcting papers, likely,” said Poke.

“They weren’t papers; they were sheets all written on just alike. I could see that easily.”

“Wonder what sort of books he writes,” murmured Jim.

“Oh, about Latin and history, probably,” said Poke.  
“Maybe they’re text-books. He doesn’t look quite such a criminal as that, either.”

“Well, whatever he writes,” remarked Gil, “it’s a safe bet he won’t be doing it here much longer.”

“Couldn’t we do something?” asked Jeffrey. “You see, after all, even if he is a member of the faculty, he—he’s one of us, you know, a Sunnywooder.”

“That’s so,” agreed Poke, “and we ought to stick together. I guess we’ll just have to read the riot act to Bull, Gil.”

Gil half-heartedly replied that he guessed something like that would have to be done and the conclave broke up, Jeffrey and Jim retiring across the hall to the former’s room in which Jim had formed the custom of studying.

The next afternoon he accompanied Gil and Poke to the gymnasium, rented a locker and struggled into his football togs which had grown strangely tight in the last year. Then, in the wake of half a hundred other fellows, they trotted down to the field and Jim sought Duncan Sargent. He found him conferring with Johnny and waited a few steps away until they finished talking. As it happened captain and coach

were not telling secrets and so made no effort to talk quietly, and before Jim realized it he heard Sargent say:

“By the way, Johnny, I’ve got a new lineman coming out this afternoon; fellow named Hazard; big and rangy and looks good. Poke Endicott knows him and says he’s an all right player. I’ll hand him over to you and you give him a try with the second squad in scrimmage, will you? Let me know how he shapes up.”

“That’s good,” replied Johnny with enthusiasm. “We surely need better line material than we’ve got. There isn’t a promising substitute tackle in sight. Send him along to me and I’ll see what he can do.”

They strolled slowly away, still talking, leaving Jim a prey to varied emotions. He wanted to punch Poke for getting him into such a scrape. How could he go to Sargent now and say that it was all a mistake, that he really knew very little about the game and had only played as a sort of third or fourth substitute on his grammar school eleven? Why, it couldn’t be done! Rather than do that he would sneak back to the gymnasium, get his togs off and go home. He thought hard for a minute, while he followed the captain and trainer across the field. After all, he reflected presently, perhaps he could play fairly well if he had a chance. Why not accept the reputation that had been imposed upon him without his connivance and carry things off as best he could? After all, it wasn’t his fault, and if he disappointed them, why, he could get out. The situation required nerve and Jim had plenty of it when necessary. He smiled and made up his mind. They thought him an experienced player. Well, he would do his best to keep up the delusion. Let them find out for

themselves that he was little more than a tyro, a one-hundred-and-thirty-pound bluff in a suit that threatened to rip at the seams every time he stretched his muscles!

He quickened his gait and overtook Duncan Sargent.

“What shall I do, Captain?” he asked quietly.

“Eh? Hello, Hazard.” Sargent was so pleased that he shook hands and Jim’s conscience smote him for an instant. Sargent was such a dandy chap that it seemed a shame to impose on him. “Hi, Johnny! Here a minute, please.” And as the trainer came swinging up, Sargent continued: “This is Hazard. You know I spoke to you about him. Take him in hand, will you, Johnny?”

Johnny said he was glad to meet Mr. Hazard and shook hands with a grip that made Jim wince.

“Play in the line, don’t you?” he asked. “That’s good; we need linemen. This is your first practice?”

Jim agreed that it was.

“Then I guess we’ll go easy with you. Suppose you go over there and report to Gary; tell him I sent you. Pass the ball awhile and warm up.” He took out a little tattered memorandum book and entered Jim, name, age and address. “Come to me after practice, Hazard, and I’ll put you on the scales. About a hundred and thirty, aren’t you?”

“I haven’t weighed very recently,” replied Jim, “but I guess that’s pretty near it.”

“All right. By the way, ever play tackle?”



“Yes, for awhile; and guard. And I was at full-back once or twice.”

“You don’t look very quick on your feet,” commented Johnny, “but we’ll get you gingered up after awhile. Don’t be afraid of sweating a little; it will do you good.”

Jim obediently made his way down the field to the squad indicated, and Johnny and Sargent looked after him critically.

“He’s well set-up,” mused Johnny, “but somehow he doesn’t handle himself like a player. Looks slow to me, eh?”

“Y-yes,” agreed Sargent, “but I have Endicott’s word for it that he’s a good man, and you know Endicott’s a good judge, Johnny.”

Jim didn’t exactly relish putting himself under Brandon Gary’s charge, but there was evidently no help for it. Gary, looking very well in his football togs, was looking after, with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm, some twelve or fourteen members of the third squad who stood about in a circle and passed the ball to each other. Jim observed that they threw the ball by claspng it with the fingers at one end and sending it away with a round-arm sweep that caused the pigskin to revolve on its shorter axis; also that in catching it the fellows received it between elbow and thigh, pulling up the right leg slightly to cradle it. When they missed the catch they fell on the ball, snuggling it under them. He made his way to Gary just as that youth, with an impatient glance toward Sargent, was receiving the ball.

“The captain told me to report to you,” said Jim.

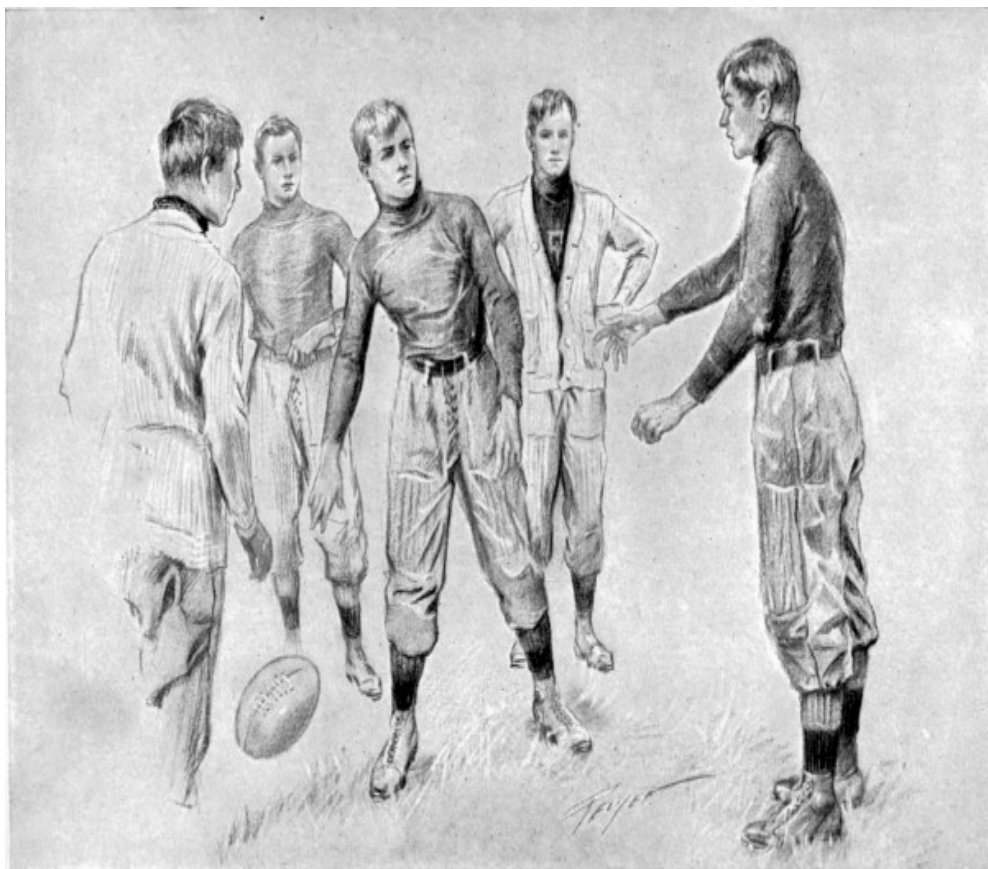
Gary turned and viewed him carelessly. “All right, find a place somewhere,” he answered. Then recognition dawned

and he accorded Jim a scowl. “Here, stand over there,” he said curtly. And then, before Jim was well in place, Gary launched the ball at him swiftly. As the pigskin had only some eight feet to travel before it reached Jim, the latter was quite unready for it, and although he made a desperate attempt to capture it the ball struck his chest and bounded crazily away across the grass. Jim trotted after it and was in the act of picking it up when Gary bellowed:

“Fall on it, you idiot! None of that here!”

Jim fell. Unfortunately, confusion made him miss the ball entirely and he had to scramble on elbows and knees for a full yard before he could seize the exasperating oval and snuggle it under him. From behind him came audible, if good-natured, laughter from the others. Gary alone seemed unamused.

“Ever see a football before?” he asked as Jim went back to his place. Jim made no reply and the pigskin went on around the circle, *thump thump*, with an occasional break in the monotony of the proceedings when some one missed and had to launch himself to the turf. As the ball went around, Jim looked over his companions. He saw none that he recognized. All were apparently of Jim’s age or younger, and it was plain to be seen that they constituted the awkward squad. Whenever the ball reached Gary he tried his best to make Jim fumble it again, now throwing it high and now low, but always as hard as he could. But Jim, watching the others closely, emulated their way of catching and only once dropped the ball. Then he fell on it from where he stood and captured it very nicely. But Gary declined to let the incident pass without a reprimand.



[“Ever see a football before?” he asked.](#)

“Keep your eyes open, you fellow! You’re not running a boarding-house now; this is football!”

The allusion to the boarding-house caused other members of the squad to observe Jim curiously, but Jim kept his temper and his tongue. A minute afterwards the coach called them and the squad broke up. Jim walked over to the bench and picked up a blanket, but before he had wrapped it around his shoulders Johnny was after them.

“Over to the dummy now! And hurry up!”

About thirty panting youths gathered at the side of the newly spaded pit and one by one launched themselves at the swinging canvas dummy. Johnny himself operated the pulley that sent the headless imitation of a man swinging across the soft loam.

“Pretty good, but tackle lower next time.”

“Perfectly rotten, Curtis. Try it again and get off your feet. That’s better but not good enough.”

“All right! Next man! Wrong side. Get in front of the runner always.”

“Too low, Page! Aim higher.”

“Pretty fair, Hazard, but put some jump into it. Remember you’re not patting him on the back; you’re trying to stop him—and stop him short. Try again now.”

Jim had never hurled himself at a tackling dummy before but he had tackled players in a game and he strove to create the illusion that the canvas-covered figure was real. The pulley creaked, the dummy slid across the pit, wobbling and turning, and Jim ran and dived with outstretched arms. *Thump! Rattle!* His nose was buried in the cold loam and his arms were tightly wrapped about the stuffed canvas legs. He scrambled to his feet and cast an inquiring look at the coach. Johnny nodded noncommittally and Jim took up his place at the end of the line again. And so it went on for twenty minutes longer. Jim’s next try brought slight commendation with the criticism and the third attempt went off handsomely.

“That’s the stuff, Hazard! Just as though you meant it. Some of you fellows go at that dummy as though you were

afraid you'd hurt it. That'll do for to-day. Back to the bench! On the trot!"

By now Jim was tuckered and aching, with one side of his face smeared with dirt and his right elbow sticking forth from the faded blue jersey he wore. But football was in his blood now and so he was highly disappointed when Johnny called to him and ordered him once around the field at a jog and back to the gym.

"But I'm not tired, sir," he ventured. Johnny scowled.

"I didn't ask you if you were tired," he said shortly. "Do as I tell you. Get on the scales after your shower and let me know your weight. Maybe you'd better come back here after you're dressed and watch scrimmage. I may want to use you to-morrow."

So Jim jogged around the field, his eyes on the others as he went, and wished heartily that he had come out for the team at the beginning of the term. Had he done that, he reflected, he might now be one of the fortunate number running through signals. Well, he reflected, he hadn't done so badly for the first time. He doubted if Johnny even suspected what a green candidate he was. And he meant to learn. They thought he could play good football and he meant to prove them right!

Half way down the backstretch of the running track he passed near Poke who was going through signals with the first squad. Poke waved to him and grinned.

"How'd you get on?" he called.

"Pretty fair," replied Jim. "And I hope you choke!"

But he really didn't. He had quite forgiven Poke by now, for without Poke's conspiracy he would probably not be where he was. Completing the circuit of the field, he trotted off to the gymnasium, had his shower, found that he tipped the scales at one hundred and thirty-one and a half, dressed and hurried back to the gridiron just in time to see Sargent kick off the ball for the scrimmage with the second team. Afterwards he waited for Gil and Poke and walked home with them through the early dusk, rather lame and tired but supremely happy.

At the supper table football was the one subject and Mrs. Hazard alone failed to show enthusiasm over Jim's conversion. She was very glad, she said, that they were going to let Jim play if he really wanted to, but she did wish that football wasn't quite so dangerous. Whereupon Poke deluged her with a mass of impromptu statistics proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that, with the possible exception of croquet, football was the safest amusement extant. Mrs. Hazard smiled and sighed, but remained unconvinced. Mr. Hanks did not appear at the beginning of the meal, nor had he come down when the cake and preserves began to circulate, and Hope was despatched to his room to summon him. She returned alone to report that the instructor wished no supper.

"No supper!" exclaimed Mrs. Hazard. "But he must have something, Hope. You shall take some toast and tea up to him. I'll set a tray when we've finished. I do wish he would eat more, Jim; I'm getting real worried about him."

After supper the boys returned to the porch, still talking football, while Mrs. Hazard fixed up a tray for Mr. Hanks

and Hope bore it upstairs. Poke was narrating humorously the tale of what he called Jim's deception against Duncan Sargent and Johnny when Hope appeared at the hall door, breathless and dismayed.

“Oh, boys!” she cried. “What do you think has happened?”

Four pairs of startled eyes questioned her.

“Mr. Hanks is going to leave!”

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# CHAPTER X

## MR. HANKS ACCEPTS ADVICE

There was a moment of silence, broken at length by Gil. “Going to leave!” he exclaimed. “You’re not fooling, Hope?”

“No. I took his tray up and he was writing at his desk. I told him he just must eat some supper and he said we were very kind and he would drink some tea. And then—then he was afraid he’d been a great deal of trouble to us and that he wouldn’t be that much longer as he was going to leave the school. And I said, ‘Oh, Mr. Hanks!’—just like that—and he said he was sorry to leave and—and he thanked me for bringing the tray and—and I ran out of the room because—because—” Hope’s eyes were “because” enough. The boys looked away while she dashed a wisp of a handkerchief across them. Poke whistled between his teeth, much out of tune. “I—I think it’s just—just too horrid for anything!” ended Hope tremulously.

Jim stirred his feet uneasily and Gil cleared his throat as if to speak and then evidently thought better of it. Hope subsided on the arm of a porch rocker. It was Jeffrey who spoke first.

“I’m awfully sorry,” he said. “I suppose we’re all to blame to some extent.”

“If he had any grit—” began Poke.



“I’d like to punch that fellow’s head,” Jim growled.

“What fellow? Bull Gary?” asked Gil.

Jim nodded.

“What are we going to do?” demanded Hope anxiously.

“I don’t see that there’s anything we can do,” answered Gil. “I’m sorry he’s going, for he really isn’t a bad sort. But he’d never get on here because the fellows have found out that they can do just as they please with him. If he’d put his foot down hard the first day and made Bull and a few of the others walk the plank he wouldn’t have had any trouble. As it is now I guess he’s wise to quit.”

“That’s all well enough for you,” demurred Jim, “but we can’t afford to lose a lodger. So, by hooky, something’s just got to be done!”

“If we went up and asked him to stay don’t you think perhaps he would?” asked Hope.

“Sure! He’d do anything to oblige us,” replied Poke ironically.

“You needn’t be sarcastic,” murmured Hope aggrievedly. “I don’t think you’ve been very nice about it anyway, Poke.”

There was a silence after this that lasted until Jeffrey, who had been staring thoughtfully into the dusk, said:

“Look here, if some one can induce Nancy to turn over a new leaf now and—er—buck up, you know, he won’t have much trouble, will he? It isn’t too late, is it?”

“I’m afraid so,” said Gil.

“I’m not,” said Poke. “But he wouldn’t do it; he doesn’t know how.”

“Do you think he’d mind if we suggested something of the sort to him?” pursued Jeffrey. The rest looked doubtful, but Hope broke out eagerly with:

“Of course he wouldn’t! He’s just as nice and—and good-natured as he can be. Let’s do it!”

But Poke hung back. “He’d probably tell us to mind our own miserable business,” he objected.

“There’d be no harm in trying it,” said Jim. “Let’s all go up and tell him we’ve heard that he’s going to leave and that we’re sorry and—and—”

“And then what?” asked Poke. “Tell him he doesn’t know his business and that he’s made a mess of things?”

“Why not?” asked Jeffrey quietly. “It’s so, isn’t it?”

“If you’ll do the talking,” suggested Jim, “it’ll be all right, Jeff. What do you say, Gil?”

“Oh, I’ll go.”

“Will you, Poke?”

“Not by a long shot!”

“Oh, Poke, I think you might!” wailed Hope. “It’s partly your fault, and you know it is, and I think you might do what you can to—to help.”

“Gee, you talk as though I was to blame for everything,” Poke growled. “Anybody would think—”

“Oh, cut out the grouch,” said Gil. “Nobody’s asking you to do anything except go up there and hear Jeff talk.”

“I think you’d better do the talking,” objected Jeffrey. “You’re the oldest, Gil.”

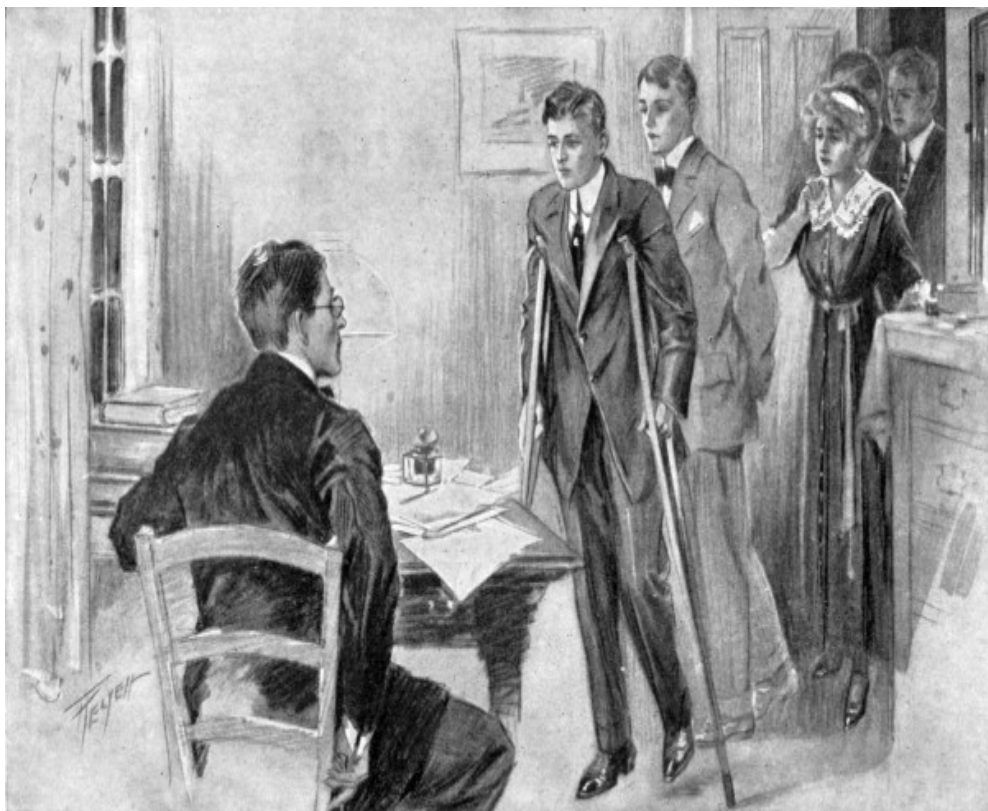
“You can do it better. If you need help the rest of us will come to your assistance. Ready now? Know what you’re going to say?”

“Not exactly,” laughed Jeffrey, “but I guess I can stumble through with it.”

“Good!” said Jim eagerly. “Let’s go before we lose courage.”

So, Gil and Jeffrey leading and Poke ambling along behind with his hands in his pockets and a general expression of disapprobation about him, the five mounted the stairs and knocked at the door of the instructor’s room. Bidden to enter, [they found Mr. Hanks at his desk](#), pen in hand and a pile of manuscript at his elbow. He had taken his tea, Hope observed, but nothing else on the tray had been touched. As the embassy filed into the room Mr. Hanks arose from his chair with a look of surprise and embarrassment.

“Good evening, sir,” began Jeffrey. “May we come in for a minute if you’re not too busy?”



[They found Mr. Hanks at his desk.](#)

“Er—certainly! How do you do? Won’t you—won’t you be seated?” Mr. Hanks glanced around nervously in search of accommodations. Gil and Poke simplified matters by seating themselves on the edge of the bed, leaving the chairs for the others. Mr. Hanks laid aside the tortoise-shell spectacles he was wearing, pushed his manuscript aside, drew it back again, smiled doubtfully and subsided in his chair.

“You—er—you wanted to see me?” he asked, clearing his throat nervously.

“Yes, sir,” replied Jeffrey. “Hope has just told us, sir, that you are thinking of leaving Crofton.”

“Yes.” Mr. Hanks glanced down at his papers. “Yes, I have decided to resign,” he replied, in tones which he strove to make sound businesslike and matter-of-fact.

“We’re awfully sorry to hear it, Mr. Hanks,” said Jeffrey earnestly.

“Terribly sorry,” said Hope.

“Very,” said Gil.

“You bet,” said Jim.

Poke growled something inarticulate.

Mr. Hanks glanced around in surprise and embarrassment.

“Why—er—that’s very good of you all, very kind of you, I’m sure,” he murmured. “I—I regret the necessity of leaving, myself. I was getting very fond of the school, quite attached. And this place—” he looked about the room—“suits me very well. The light is excellent, you see, and owing to the fact that my eyes are not what they used to be I have to be very particular about—er—about light.”

“Yes, sir,” said Jeffrey. “Mr. Hanks, maybe we’re sort of intruding on your affairs, sir, but when we heard about your leaving we got to talking it over and we decided that we’d come up here and ask you to—to reconsider.” Mr. Hanks opened his mouth to speak, but Jeffrey hurried on. “We may be wrong, sir, but our idea is that you’re leaving because some of us haven’t been acting very well in class.”

“I think I have no complaint to make about any of you young gentlemen,” replied Mr. Hanks, looking from one to the other and allowing his eyes to rest on Poke, for what the youth thought was an unnecessary length of time. “But I

won't attempt to deny that your—your assumption is correct, Latham. The fact is that I am, I find, quite unsuited to the work here. The position I have tried to fill requires a man with more experience than I have had.”

“May we talk right out plain, Mr. Hanks?” asked Jeffrey.

“Why, I think so,” replied the instructor, a trifle bewildered.

“Then what we came up here to say, sir, is just this. There isn't any reason why you should leave us on account of what's been going on in class. Of course we fellows haven't any right to act the way we've been acting, but I guess it's more than half your fault, Mr. Hanks. You see, sir, if you'd started right with us we'd have behaved ourselves, but you didn't understand, I guess. If you'd sent a couple of fellows up to Mr. Gordon the first time there was trouble the whole thing would have stopped right there, but you didn't and the fellows think now they can do as they please. That's where the trouble is.”

“Er—yes—I dare say. Yes, I realize now that I should have acted—er—differently, that I should have been—er—stern.” (Gil tried not to grin at the thought of Mr. Hanks being stern.) “Doubtless, I have, as you say, followed a mistaken course with the classes. I see that now. But the damage is done, Latham, and so—so I think the best thing to do is to retire in favor of some man who can—er—who understands you young gentlemen better than I do.” Poke thought he detected a faint emphasis on the word gentlemen. He hadn't meant to open his mouth, but he suddenly found himself speaking.

“What’s the use, sir?” he asked. “Why don’t you stick it out and start over, sir? Kick a few fellows out of class, send a few up to J. G. and sock some extra work onto a few more? That’ll fix ’em in the shake of a lamb’s tail! It isn’t too late, Mr. Hanks.”

Mr. Hanks shook his head, however. “I’m afraid it is,” he said. “Anything I might do now would be quite futile. They have—er—taken my measure, so to speak.”

“I don’t agree with you, sir,” said Gil. “I think Poke is right. I think if you’ll start in to-morrow and sit down hard on the first fellow who starts anything you’ll have things in shape in no time at all. Of course, you’ll have to keep it up for awhile, sir, but it won’t be long before the fellows will find out that you’re not to be monkeyed with. You see, sir, the fact is none of us have anything against you; I guess we all like you pretty well; anyhow, this bunch here does; it’s just that here at Crofton every new faculty has to be hazed a little. Usually they stand about so much of it and then something drops and it’s all over. You didn’t quite understand, sir, and you let things run along. Why not do as Poke says, Mr. Hanks? Why not stay where you are and hit out from the shoulder once or twice?”

“Hit out from—You don’t mean *strike* any one?” gasped the instructor.

“No, sir,” Gil laughed, “not actually. I mean punish some one good and hard; set an example for the whole class.”

“Oh!” Mr. Hanks was visibly relieved. “You—you think that would—er—accomplish something?”

“I’m certain of it,” replied Gil decidedly.

“Sure to,” said Poke.

Mr. Hanks played with his pen for a minute. Then he looked up with a helpless smile at Gil.

“What—what could I do?” he asked.

“Why, sir, the first time any fellow does anything in class he shouldn’t, call him down.”

“Call him down?” questioned Mr. Hanks, at a loss.

“Reprimand him, I mean. Then if he doesn’t behave send him to Mr. Gordon. Mr. Gordon will stand back of you, sir; he always does. Take Gary for instance, sir. If you did that just once with him he’d come back as meek as a kitten.”

“And what would Mr. Gordon do to him?”

Gil shrugged his shoulders. “He might do most anything, sir. It would depend on what Gary had done. He might put him on probation, he might send him home for the rest of the term, he might expel him for keeps.”

“But I shouldn’t want anything like that to happen to the boy,” said Mr. Hanks in alarm. “He has been very trying to me; in fact, I have sometimes suspected that in a way he has been at the bottom of most of my troubles, what I might call a ringleader, Benton.”

“Yes, sir, that might be,” replied Gil gravely.

“Yes. But even so I should very much dislike to be the cause of his being sent from school even temporarily.”

“He wouldn’t be if you told J. G. to be easy with him,” said Poke. “That’s what Gary needs, though, Mr. Hanks, a



good scare. You throw one into him and see what a difference it will make.”

“I do wish you’d try it, please, sir,” said Hope.

Mr. Hanks was silent a moment. Once he sighed deeply. Once he smiled slightly at the pen he was rolling between his long fingers. Finally he looked up.

“This has been very kind of you,” he said quietly. “I appreciate your—your interest. I thank you—all.”

“And you’ll try it?” cried Hope eagerly.

Mr. Hanks smiled and shook his head. “I must consider it,” he answered. “The plan is—is revolutionary. I have great doubts of my ability in the rôle you have assigned me. But—I will think it over.”

“And meanwhile you’ll stay, won’t you, sir?” asked Jim anxiously.

“Yes, I shall—er—postpone any action in regard to my resignation for the present. I—I have no wish to leave here. My room is very comfortable and the light is—er—excellent.”

“Well, we don’t want you to leave,” said Poke gruffly. “And I guess you won’t need to if you take our advice, sir. Good night, sir.”

“Good night,” responded Mr. Hanks, rising, “good night. I thank you all very much.”

“Shall I take your tray away?” asked Hope.

“Eh? Why—er—no. I rather think I’ll eat a little of the—er—whatever it is. I really feel a bit hungry.”



# CHAPTER XI

## ON THE SECOND

Whether Mr. Hanks meant to profit by the advice so frankly given him remained a question for several days. On Friday his classes in Latin and history presented the usual disordered appearance and the instructor's attitude remained the same. It seemed to Gil, however, that Mr. Hanks was a little quieter and a little less nervous than usual; that he was silently studying the situation. But Gil may only have imagined that. There were no actual outbreaks of disorder on Friday, although Brandon Gary and his crowd indulged to their hearts' content in minor annoyances. Saturday Mr. Hanks had only classes in Latin and for almost the first time since his appearance at Crofton recitations went off quietly and in order, due to the fact that the first football game of the season was to be played that afternoon and every fellow in school was much too absorbed in that to have either time or inclination for mischief.

On Friday Jim had weathered another day of practice without results damaging to his reputation for skill and experience. He had signal practice with the third squad and by dint of maintaining an appearance of ease and doing what the others did as best he could he had managed to deceive even Johnny Connell. Johnny was puzzled however. He confided as much to Duncan Sargent.

"I don't understand how he can handle himself as awkwardly as he does, Cap," said Johnny. "He seems to

know what to do all right, but he makes all sorts of false moves while he's doing it."

"He can play, though, can't he?" asked Sargent, his mind only half on the subject.

"Yes, it looks so," answered Johnny.

"Well, let's see what we can do with him. If we take Curtis from the second squad we'll need some one in his place who can put up a fight against Cosgrove. Think Hazard would fit in?"

"I guess so. He's got the build and he's strong as a colt—and just about as awkward. Of course, that may be because he hasn't had much practice."

"I shouldn't wonder," murmured the captain. "What time is it? Can we start the scrimmage?"

On Saturday all Sunnywood went to the game, Gil and Poke to play, Jim to sit on the substitutes' bench, Jeffrey, with Mrs. Hazard and Hope as his guests, to follow the play with the keenest enjoyment and to elucidate to his companions what everything meant. Crofton High School was not a dangerous opponent, although in the matter of practice she was a whole fortnight ahead of Crofton. Her work showed a finish that was quite absent from that of the home eleven and only the fact that her team was lighter and her plays old fashioned allowed Crofton to win the contest. At the end of the second period Crofton had a touchdown and a safety to her credit and High School had only once been dangerous. Then a try at goal from the twenty-five yards had gone badly astray. In the third period four substitutes went in for Crofton and there was no scoring by

either team. The fourth period began for the Crimson-and-Gray with what was practically an entirely new eleven, only Tearney at right end and Poke at right half remaining in. The periods were ten minutes long and when only six minutes of the game remained Crofton High began to make headway through the Academy's line and at last secured a second try at goal from the field. This time her kicker was successful from the thirty-two-yard line and High School chalked three points to her credit. It was after that feat, while the teams were resuming their places for the kick-off, that Johnny beckoned to Jim, who, sandwiched in between big Andy LaGrange, the first string center, and "Punk" Gibbs of the second, had been comfortably watching the progress of the conflict with no thought of participating. Jim stared unbelievably until Johnny called him impatiently and Gibbs dug an unkind elbow against his ribs. Then Jim squirmed from the bench and struggled with his sweater.

"Go in for Curtis at left tackle," said Johnny. "You know the signals, don't you?"

Jim nodded, trying hard to recall one single thing about them!

"All right. Hurry up. Show me what you can do. And play low, Hazard!"

Jim sped out on to the gridiron, searching wildly for the referee, his heart thumping alarmingly as he realized that he was to take part in an actual contest. He found the official, sent Curtis off grumbling and took his place. Perhaps luckily for Jim he was not called on for any special feats of prowess during the short time that remained, for he was decidedly nervous. To his credit, however, it may be said that he broke

through well and, on the defense, held his adversary fairly. There was no more scoring and just as Jim had regained his confidence and was beginning to enjoy the fray the final whistle was blown and it was all over, the score 7 to 3 in favor of the Academy.

In the gymnasium later Jim ran into Duncan Sargent. Sargent, his powerful body, scantily draped with a bath towel, glowing from the effects of a shower, stopped him.

“Good work, Hazard,” he said cordially. “I watched you to-day. Keep it up and we’ll find a place for you before the season’s done. There’s just one thing, though, old man, and that is: *Play low!* Try to remember that, will you?” And the captain passed on with a smile and a nod, leaving Jim very pleased and a little remorseful.

Perhaps no one was more delighted with the events of the afternoon than Hope. She made heroes of Gil and Poke and Jim, and especially Jim. “You played perfectly jimmy!” she declared. “And I saw Grace Andrews there and I was just as proud and sticky as—as anything! Wasn’t it too funny, Jim, you should have played against her brother?”

“Was that who he was?” asked Jim. “I didn’t know his name. He’s pretty light for a tackle.”

(Jim, you see, was already talking like an expert.)

“Well, anyhow, you played all around him. Jeff said so. And we beat them, didn’t we?”

“We ought to. We were pounds heavier, sis.”

“I wish you could have seen Lady when Jeff told her that you were going to play. She covered up her face with her

hands and then looked through her fingers every minute!”

That was Jim’s baptism by fire and those few minutes of play gave him new courage to go on with his rôle. On Monday practice was lengthened and the work became a good deal like drudgery. One had to have a real passion for football in order to really get any enjoyment out of the proceedings. For the first part of the week scrimmaging was abandoned entirely, and Johnny, who had detected a lack of fundamental knowledge in the players, took them back to first principles, and even Duncan Sargent himself was put to tackling the dummy and handling the ball. On Thursday the one scrimmage of the week was held and Jim fought through ten minutes on the second team at left tackle and had his hands very full in keeping Cosgrove and Shepard, who opposed him, from making him look like the inexperienced player he was. But Jim kept his wits about him, worked hard, bluffed harder, and pulled through creditably. And every day now he was gaining knowledge and knack and football sense. And every day the awkwardness which had puzzled the trainer was wearing off. Jim had strength of body and plenty of sound sense, and he was developing both every day. And so, by the end of that week, the school was taking notice of him and fellows were discussing his chance of ousting Curtis from the second team. In short, he had made good. And Poke was as pleased as might be.

“What did I tell you, Jimmy, my boy?” he asked that Friday night. “Didn’t I tell you I’d make a real player out of you? Didn’t I tell you you’d be down on your knees thanking me for my efforts in your behalf, you ungrateful pup?”

“Well, I’m not going down on my knees,” laughed Jim. “They’re much too lame.”

“Look here, Jim,” broke in Jeffrey excitedly, “if you can manage to get on the first team before the season’s through think what it would mean! Why, out of eleven men there’d be three from Sunnywood!”

“Rah for Sunnywood!” cried Poke. “Don’t you worry, Senator; Jim will make the first yet. I’ve got it all doped out. Listen, my children: Marshall won’t last long. He’s a good player, but he had whooping cough or something—”

“Measles,” corrected Gil.

“Well, measles, then, in the summer, and he can’t stand the pace. Johnny sees that already. That’s why Curtis has been playing at left tackle in practice. But Curtis is too slow. He may stay first choice, but it’s pounds to pennies that if Jim keeps on coming he will find himself first sub when the Hawthorne game comes along. Now you fellows mark my words!”

“You’re a wonderful little prophet, Poke,” said Gil. “Still, I shouldn’t be surprised if things turned out something like that. Keep it up, Jim. You’re doing fine!”

“Think I’ll get in to-morrow?” asked Jim anxiously.

“Sure to for a while,” replied Poke. “Why, Dun Sargent’s tickled to death with you. He’s thanked me half a dozen times for getting you out. And now he thinks I’m the one best bet as a football scout. Wants me to keep my eyes open and find him a good left end in Gil’s place.” And Poke scampered before Gil could reach him.



Jim did get into the next day's game, just as Poke had predicted, and although he had one bad fumble to his discredit he played a good game through one whole period and more than atoned for his fault. And Jim was not the only one to fumble the pigskin that day. Even Gil lost the chance of a clean touchdown by letting the ball roll out of his arms when tackled on the five-yard line, while Arnold, the quarterback, twice offended. But in spite of these misadventures Crofton had no trouble in rolling up seventeen points against her adversary.

Meanwhile Mr. Hanks had given no sign. There was less trouble in his classes nowadays, possibly because the whole school was so much interested in football, and it began to look as though the instructor's troubles were over. But on the following Tuesday, Brandon Gary, realizing possibly, that he had neglected his duties as a cut-up, gave his attention again to Mr. Hanks. That was at five minutes past ten.

At a quarter past ten Gary was sitting in Mr. Gordon's office.

At twelve o'clock it was known all over school that Bull Gary was on probation.

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## CHAPTER XII

### GARY IS SURPRISED

Let Gil and Poke tell about Gary's surprise party, for they were eye-witnesses.

"You could have knocked me over with a feather," declared Poke—the four Sunnywood boys were on their way back to the cottage at noon—"and I never thought Nancy Hanks had it in him! Here's the way it was. Most of the class were in their seats and Mort Nichols—he's monitor, you know—was calling the roll. When he got to the G's he skipped Bull's name because he could see that Bull wasn't there. Mort's rather a chum of Bull's, you know. But Nancy was on to him. 'You've left out a name, Nichols,' says he. 'Go back, please.' So Mort gets sort of red and calls, 'Gary.' And Bull, who had just come loafing in at the door says, 'Dead on the field of battle,' and the fellows began to laugh. It really was funny, wasn't it, Gil?"

"Rather."

"Pshaw! You laughed, too. I saw you. Well, Nancy never turned a hair—"

"The funny thing," interrupted Gil, "was the way Mr. Hanks was looking. He was sort of white and frightened and he had his mouth set in a straight line like—like this." And Gil illustrated. "I never saw him look that way before."

"And he had a funny little sparkle in his eyes," said Poke. "Did you notice that, Gil?"

“Yes. He really looked kind of dangerous and I was mighty glad I wasn’t Bull Gary just then.”

“Well, get on with your story,” said Jim. “Then what happened?”

“Then,” replied Gil, “Mr. Hanks said, ‘Are we to understand by that cryptic remark, Gary, that you desire to be marked as present?’ And Bull was so flabbergasted that all he could do was stammer, ‘Y-yes, sir.’ ‘Mark Gary present,’ said Mr. Hanks. So Mort went on with the roll and we began the recitation, all the fellows looking at each other and wondering what had happened to Mr. Hanks. Marshall was reciting when there was a crash at the back of the room. It seems that Bull had reached out with his foot and poked over a pile of books on Punk Gibbs’ desk. Mr. Hanks held up a hand and Marshall stopped. ‘Whose books are those?’ he asked. ‘Mine, sir,’ replied Punk very, very meekly. ‘Pick them up, please.’ So Punk picked them up and put them back and the room was very quiet. Every one was grinning, but no one made a sound. Marshall started off again when—*bang!* went the pile of books once more. Mr. Hanks lifted his hand. ‘Whose books are those?’ he asked again. ‘Mine,’ said Punk, looking sort of scared. ‘Pick them up, please.’ ‘I didn’t knock them off,’ grumbled Punk. ‘Who did?’ asked Mr. Hanks. But Punk wouldn’t tell. Then Mr. Hanks said, ‘The student who pushed those books onto the floor will kindly pick them up.’ No one moved for a minute. ‘We will wait,’ said Mr. Hanks, and sat down again in his chair. Finally Punk grumbled something and started to pick them up, when Mr. Hanks said: ‘Let them alone, Gibbs!’ And Punk sat up as though he was shot. Another minute or so passed. Some one began to snigger nervously at the back of the room. ‘Who’s that

laughing?” asked Mr. Hanks. After that there wasn’t a sound. Finally Mr. Hanks looked at the clock. ‘I’ve given you plenty of time,’ he said, ‘but you may have thirty seconds more in which to replace those books,’ and he looked straight at Bull. Bull grinned, but didn’t move.”

“Just the same,” broke in Poke, “he was getting pretty nervous.”

“We all were,” said Gil. “Finally Mr. Hanks said, ‘Time’s up, Gary. You’re delaying the recitation.’ ‘I didn’t knock them off,’ said Bull in his ugliest tones. ‘You didn’t?’ asked Mr. Hanks very quietly. ‘Think well, Gary, before you answer.’ Bull looked around and grinned. ‘No, I didn’t,’ said he. And then Mr. Hanks, our quiet little Nancy Hanks, exploded a bombshell. ‘Report to Mr. Gordon, Gary,’ said he sternly. Bull sat and looked at him with his mouth wide open, too surprised to speak, and the rest of us just gasped. Finally Bull said, ‘What for, sir?’ in that bullying way of his, and Mr. Hanks came back at him like a flash. ‘For disturbance in class and lying!’ he said!”

“And that,” murmured Poke, “was the way the battle was fit.”

“Gee!” said Jim. “Gary must have been surprised.”

“Did he go right away?” asked Jeffrey.

“Like a lamb,” answered Gil. “And then, ‘Please continue, Marshall,’ said Mr. Hanks. And there wasn’t a better-behaved class in school than we were!”

“Just what we told him would happen,” declared Poke. “He ought to be mighty grateful to us for giving him the tip.”

“He will probably send up a set of engraved resolutions, thanking us,” said Jim dryly.

“What I want to know is,” remarked Jeffrey as they passed through the cottage gate, “what the team’s going to do without Gary at right guard.”

“I wonder myself,” mused Gil as they took their places on the porch. “Probably they’ll bring Parker over from the second. But it’s going to weaken the team like anything.”

“How long will J. G. keep him on pro?” asked Poke.

“Search me. Maybe he will let him back in time for the big game. That’s not much more than a month away now.”

“I hope he will,” said Jeffrey. “We certainly need him in the line.”

“But think of Nancy rearing up and being saucy like that!” marveled Poke. “I could hardly believe my own little eyes, fellows!”

“It’s a case of the worm will turn,” observed Jeffrey.

“And here comes the worm,” whispered Jim.

Mr. Hanks came along the road with a bundle of blue books under his arm. He had discarded his straw hat for a faded black Fedora that was perhaps two sizes too large for him and that settled down over his forehead in a desperate and rakish manner. To-day it seemed to the boys on the porch that the instructor held his head more erect and stepped out more briskly. When he came up the steps they were all on their feet and unconsciously there was a new respect in the way in which they stood at attention and took off their caps. Mr. Hanks bowed his jerky bow and passed them silently.

When he was heard mounting the stairs Jim observed thoughtfully:

“‘Nancy’ doesn’t seem to fit him so well to-day, fellows.”

Naturally enough Mr. Hanks’ astounding change from the meek and lowly victim to the high-handed martinet was a nine days’ wonder. During that nine days three other members of his classes were punished in various ways and from that time on recitations in Latin and history were conducted with a decorum that soon became the envy of other instructors. Mr. Hanks never spoke to Gil or Poke, Jim or Jeffrey about the matter, nor did he ever show them any special consideration in class, but in some way they all understood that he was grateful, and with their new respect for him was a stronger liking.

In the meanwhile football affairs were at sixes and sevens for the better part of a week, for Gary’s probation prohibited him from taking part in athletics and when he left the team the team lost one of its strongest units. Parker was tried, but found wanting. Springer, left guard on the second, was brought across to the first but fared badly in the first game played. Finally Cosgrove, right tackle on the first, was moved to Gary’s vacant place, and Curtis, of the second, was promoted to right tackle on the first. Whereupon, presto!—Mr. James Hazard found himself with disconcerted suddenness playing left tackle on the second team! And the season was half over and already the Hawthorne game loomed large and impending on the horizon.

To say that Jim was pleased is putting it but mildly. To say that he was secretly alarmed is no more than the truth. It is one thing to serve as a substitute and be put in for five or ten

minutes when the game is safe and quite another to be a first string man. On defense Jim found himself opposed to Tearney, right end on the first, and that was not so bad, but on the attack he had Cosgrove in front of him and Cosgrove was an old and experienced player with a most irritating trick of coaxing Jim off-side, for which, for the first week or so, Jim was forever being censured by coach and captain and quarter-back. Of course playing on the second team is not as momentous an affair as being on the 'varsity, but it's the next biggest thing, and if any one thinks that a second team doesn't take itself very seriously they should have watched proceedings at Crofton that fall. The second, captained by Page, the tiny quarter-back, went into every tussle as though the fair honor of Crofton was in their keeping. The second regretted the loss of Curtis, but speedily made Jim welcome to their ranks. He soon got close to several fellows well worth knowing and within a fortnight was "Jim" to every member of the team.

At Sunnywood, true to their promise, [Gil and Poke assisted in the household duties](#) every morning and evening. Mrs. Hazard had instead of one majordomo three cheerfully willing assistants. Chilly weather had come and the furnace had begun its duty, and in the morning the three boys descended to the cellar and put it in shape, raking out ashes and sifting them, shoveling coal, picking over cinders and splitting kindling for the kitchen. Jeffrey, although barred from taking an active part in the chores, made himself useful whenever possible. In the evening a somewhat similar program was carried out, and at ten o'clock Poke, who had evolved certain theories for the scientific management of furnaces, went down and fixed the fire for the night. In this

way Jim had plenty of time to pursue the gentle art of football.



[Gil and Poke assisted in the household duties.](#)

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## CHAPTER XIII

### POKE ON CANOES

It was shortly after Mr. Hanks' disconcerting assumption of the rôle of despot that Jeffrey crossed the hall to Gil and Poke's room one Friday evening.

"Are you fellows still grinding?" he asked.

"We are still studying," responded Poke. "Please try to abstain from slang, Mr. Latham. I don't care so much about myself, but it sets a bad example for my friend across the table. I have to be very careful about him. His parents have placed him in my charge, you see. Well, what's on your mind, old top?"

"I've been thinking," said Jeffrey gravely.

"I know." Poke nodded sympathetically. "It does make you feel sort of queer, doesn't it? Have a glass of water?"

"That might give him water on the brain," observed Gil, looking up from his book.

Poke observed him sorrowfully. "Your humor, Gil, is heavy, very heavy. Go on with your Latin, my poor fellow."

"How the dickens can I, when you two chaps are talking?" asked Gil mildly, pushing his book away.

"I thought you'd be through," said Jeffrey. "I'll come in again later."

“Sit still, Jeff. I am through. I was just taking a fall out of Monday’s stuff. Where’s Jim?”

“Over there; studying math.” Jeffrey indicated his room with a jerk of his head. “I’ve been thinking—”

“You said that before,” interrupted Poke sweetly.

“Shut up, Poke! Let him think if he wants to. Just because you never do it—”

“Let him tell it, Gil, can’t you? Always interrupting and annoying folks with your beastly chatter. Go ahead, Jeff; don’t mind him; you’ve been thinking; now what’s the rest? Bet you I know the answer!”

Jeff aimed a blow at Poke’s shins with the end of a crutch and Poke kicked his feet up just in time. “He’s getting crutchity, Gil,” he said sadly.

Gil threatened him with a book from the table and Poke retired to the other side of the room.

“You see,” said Jeff, taking advantage of Poke’s retreat to state his errand, “you see, fellows, I’ve been thinking—”

There was a chuckle from the window seat which turned quickly into a cough as Gil swung around in that direction, the book still in his hand. Jeffrey smiled.

“Thinking,” he went on, “about getting a canoe.”

“Gee, but I’m glad you aren’t thinking about getting a steam yacht!” ejaculated Poke. “You’d have brain fever by this time!”

“They say there’s a man named Sandford up the river who makes corkers.”

“There is; at Riverbend. There are two or three up there who make canoes,” replied Gil.

“Well, I’ve always heard that Sandford’s were the best. I think—”

“He’s at it again!” groaned Poke, who had fortified himself with half a dozen cushions. “He’s at it again!”

“I think I’ll buy one. Oughtn’t I get a pretty good one for thirty dollars, Gil?”

“I really don’t know, Jeff. Never bought a canoe in my life. I would think so, though. How about it, Poke?”

“Oh, am I to be allowed to speak?” asked Poke in a muffled voice from behind his breastworks. “Had to come to old Poke when you wanted to know something, didn’t you?”

“Oh, shut up, you idiot!” laughed Gil. “How much do canoes cost?”

Poke emerged in a shower of cushions. “Canoes?” he asked. “Well now, what kind of canoes? There are canvas canoes, wooden canoes, paper canoes, birch-bark canoes, steel canoes, dug-outs—”

“Dug-outs, of course,” replied Gil sarcastically. “Those are what Sandford makes, I suppose?”

“Irony doesn’t become you,” responded Poke critically. “Irony, Gil, should be indulged in only by those having an iron constitution. Returning to the subject of canoes and the cost thereof—”

“Thirty dollars will probably buy you a first-class one, Jeff,” Gil interrupted. “When are you going to—”

“Thirty dollars will buy a very fair one only,” Poke corrected. “Allow me, if you please, to speak on this subject. I suppose there is no one in Crofton who has more knowledge of canoes than I, Jeff. Canoes are—are an open book to me. I can tell you where to buy them, how to buy them, when to buy them—and when not to! Also, I have full knowledge of what to feed them and how to bring them up. I suppose I’ve brought up more canoes—”

“Honestly, Poke, you’re silly,” said Gil disgustedly. “We’re talking seriously, so shut up or get out, will you?”

“I can be just as serious as you can, you old Mr. Grouch!” Poke returned to his chair at the table, wearing an expression of intense dignity. “Sandford’s eighteen-foot canoe, Jeff, costs forty-two dollars, but you can get a dandy sixteen-footer for thirty-five. It isn’t finished quite as nicely, I believe. Sometimes you can pick up a good second-hand one up there. Perky Wright has one he only paid about fifteen for. I don’t think it came from Sandford, though. What’s that other fellow’s name up there, Gil?”

“I don’t know. There are two or three others, aren’t there? Was Perky’s second-hand when he got it, Poke?”

“Yes, and he had the fellow paint it all up as good as new. You’d never have known it had been used before he got it, Jeff.”

“I think I’d rather have a brand-new one,” said Jeff doubtfully. “And I wouldn’t want an eighteen-footer; sixteen is long enough. Couldn’t you fellows go up there with me in the morning and help me buy it?”

“I guess so,” Gil answered. “We’d have to go early, though; dinner’s at twelve to-morrow on account of the game.”

“We can go up on the train,” said Poke. “Take the eight-something and be there in five minutes.”

“I thought we might paddle up,” suggested Jeff. “It wouldn’t take very long.”

“Hm, and who would do the paddling?” asked Poke with elaborate carelessness.

“I’d do most of it,” Jeffrey replied, “if some one would take a hand in the bow.”

“That’s Gil, then. He’s tried it and I never have. How many can we get in a canoe? Is Jim going along?”

“No, he says he can’t. But I thought we might take Hope if she’d like to go.”

“Four of us in one frail bark?” demurred Poke.

“Of course; easy as pie.”

“I’ve seen six fellows in some of our canoes here,” said Gil. “But I’m afraid you and I’ll be a bit tired by the time we reach Riverbend, Jeff. However, we can come back with the current.”

“Gee,” exclaimed Poke, “I wish we didn’t have a game to-morrow. We could take some grub with us and have a picnic.”

“Fine! Couldn’t we do it anyway?” Jeff asked eagerly.

“Why not, Poke? Johnny will let us off,” said Gil. “We’ll get Lady to put us up a nice big basket of grub and we’ll find a place along the river and have a fine old time! Why can’t Jim come along?”

“He says he has to attend to some things around the house in the morning,” answered Jeff.

“Shucks! Where is he? I’ll attend to him!” And Poke disappeared across the hall.

“We’ll have to make sure and be back by one-thirty,” said Gil. “Game’s at two-thirty to-morrow, you know. We’ll put on our old things so we can fall overboard if we want to. By the way, Jeff, what would happen to you if the old thing did upset?”

“I’d swim ashore, I hope,” laughed Jeff.

“Really? Can you swim with—with those?” Gil was looking at the crutches.

“No, I usually leave these behind when I go in swimming,” replied Jeffrey with a smile. “Swim is one thing I can do fairly well, Gil. Funny, though, isn’t it? I suppose I do most of it with my good leg, although I seem to get some push with the other, too. If we upset, you look after yourself; don’t worry about me; I dare say I’d be ashore as soon as you.”

“Here he is!” cried Poke in the doorway. He had Jim by the coat collar. “Now apologize to Mr. Latham for so rudely refusing his kind invitation!”

“I apologize,” laughed Jim.

“Then you’ll go with us?” cried Jeffrey.

Jim hesitated. "I oughtn't to," he began.

"Oh, feathers!" said Poke, giving him a shake. "Of course you'll come. What have you got to do here, I'd like to know?"

"Lots of things; lay a carpet, for one."

"Lay it after you get back," suggested Jeffrey.

"I want to see the game, thank you. Maybe, though, I can do it to-morrow evening."

"Of course you can; carpets lay better in the evening, anyhow." And Poke released his prisoner.

"Will Hope come along?" asked Jeffrey.

"I guess so," Jim replied. "Want me to find out?"

"Yes, and say, Jim, while you're about it see if Lady will get up some sandwiches and things for us, will you?"

"Of course she will." Jim went out to seek his mother and sister, and Poke began to chuckle.

"What are you crying about?" asked Gil.

"Oh, nothing much, thank you. I was just wondering which of us, if Hope comes, is to swim. For I'll be switched if I want to go five in a canoe."

"That's so," said Jeff. "I hadn't thought of that. Couldn't we take two canoes, Gil?"

"If we can get them, but some one will have to get to the boat-house pretty early or they'll be taken; that is, if it's a decent day. And who will paddle the second one?"

“Jim,” replied Jeffrey. “He can paddle very well now. I’ve been showing him how.”

“And who will take the bow paddle?” asked Poke uneasily.

“You, you lazy dub,” responded Gil promptly. “If you can’t paddle a canoe it’s time you learned how. You and Jeff can go in one canoe, with Hope, and Jim and I will take the other.”

“All right, but don’t blame me if something awful happens. I am subject to cramps, and if I have a cramp I can’t paddle, and if I can’t paddle we’ll upset, and if we upset—”

“You’ll get wet,” ended Jeffrey. “So I guess we’ll let you and Jim take care of the luncheon, Gil.”

“I won’t go if you’re going to put the luncheon in his care,” declared Poke. “Why, there wouldn’t be a smutch of it left by the time we got to Riverbend. I insist on staying close to the grub!”

“As close as you want, but in another boat, sweet youth,” replied Gil. “Here’s Jim. What did she say, Jim?”

“Which she? Lady says she will give us all the lunch we want and Hope says she would like to go very much indeed. To be quite exact, fellows, she said it would be ‘perfectly jimmy!’”

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## CHAPTER XIV

### UP THE RIVER

They were off at nine o'clock the next morning, Jeffrey and Poke in one canoe and Jim and Gil and Hope in another. The basket of luncheon reposed between Jeffrey and Poke, the latter declaring that it was needed as ballast. Their canoe was not a very good one and was the smaller of the two, and Poke had only secured it, from two juniors who were in possession of it when he arrived at the boat-house, by his moving eloquence. It was a fine autumn morning, warm and sunny, and it seemed that the whole school had elected to spend the forenoon on the river. For the first quarter of a mile the stream was alive with canoes and skiffs. Then the throng dwindled and soon the voyagers had the river to themselves.

Poke was making hard work of paddling, although all that Jeffrey required of him was "push," as he put it. "Just stick your blade in, Poke, and push it back. I'll look after the steering."

"That's all very well," answered Poke, "but I keep skinning my knuckles on the side of the canoe."

"Then put your left hand higher up on the paddle," Jeffrey laughed. "And when you get tired, change over to the other side."

"I'm not comfortable," Poke grumbled presently. "This thing you call a seat is as hard as a rock. Why don't they

have cushions in canoes?”

“Some do,” Jeffrey replied. “When I get mine I’ll have a cushion especially for you, Poke, with your initials on it.”

“Just as long as you don’t ask me to sit on it, all right. I say, Gil, how are you getting on?”

“Pretty well, thank you. How are you?”

“Oh, fine! I guess I’m doing most of the work from the feeling of my arms. Say, wouldn’t it be great if the silly old river would run the other way for awhile?”

“I wish there was another paddle,” said Hope disconsolately. “I could help if there were.”

“You’d upset the canoe if you tried to paddle from the middle,” said Jim. “How much further is it, Gil?”

“About a mile, I guess. Getting tired?”

“N-no; a little. It surely gets your muscles, doesn’t it?”

“It surely does!” agreed Gil. “It’s getting muscles I didn’t know I had!”

“Keep farther away,” warned Poke. “I need lots of room when I paddle, and you make me nervous when you come so close. Get out or I’ll splash you, Gil!”

“Don’t you try it, son! And for goodness’ sake don’t wriggle around so in your seat. If you upset we’ll lose the luncheon. I knew we oughtn’t to have let you take it.”

“Isn’t it most time for luncheon now?” asked Poke. “We might just rest a while and have a sandwich, eh?”

“Get out! It isn’t ten o’clock yet,” Gil jeered.

“Isn’t it?” asked his chum pathetically. “My arms feel as though it was twelve!”

“Rest awhile,” said Jeffrey from the stern. “I can work it alone here. The current isn’t so hard now.”

“No, I’ll keep at it until I fall in a swoon,” answered Poke. “One arm’s numb clear to the elbow now and doesn’t hurt so much. I dare say I’ll soon be beyond all pain.”

“Let’s paddle in to the bank,” Jim suggested, “and take a rest. I’m just about all in, fellows.”

So they turned the canoes to where the branches of the trees overhung a little stretch of pebbly beach and ran the bows of the craft ashore. Poke laid his dripping paddle across his knees, murmured “Good night!” and apparently sank into slumber. They were all, excepting Jeffrey and Hope, glad of the respite, for paddling against the current, even for those accustomed to it, is no light task. Hope wanted to get out and “explore,” but her brother hard-heartedly commanded her to sit still and not overturn the canoe.

“Isn’t the river perfectly beautiful!” she exclaimed.

There was a deep sigh from Poke. “It is indeed paradise,” he murmured. Presently he raised his head and looked about him, passing a hand across his damp forehead. “Where am I?” he asked dazedly. “Ah, I remember all! I thought ’twas but a dream!”

“Well, suppose we dream some more,” laughed Jeffrey. “After we get to Riverbend we can rest as long as we want to. You fellows ready?”

“Yes, come on,” answered Jim. “Push her off, Gil.”

“Aren’t we going to have our luncheon now?” asked Poke in injured surprise. “Only the thought of food has kept me alive thus far. Let’s every one have a sandwich, fellows, just one miserable little sandwich.”

“Oh, come on, Poke,” said Gil. “Get a move on. Jeff wants to buy his canoe some time to-day.”

“Well, just a half a sandwich,” pleaded Poke. “Honest to goodness, fellows, I’m faint with hunger and fatigue.”

“Shall I give him one?” asked Jeffrey laughingly.

“Not a bite!” replied Gil. “He wouldn’t do another stroke of work if you fed him now. All he wants to do after he has eaten is lie down and go to sleep.”

“Gee, I want to do that now!” ejaculated Poke, raising his paddle wearily and pushing the bow of the canoe from the sand. “When I fall in a dead faint in the bottom of the canoe you fellows will be sorry you treated me so meanly. Jeff, will you push the basket this way a little farther, please? I just want a smell of it to encourage me!”

A half-mile farther up the stream they began to encounter other crafts. Riverbend was a veritable canoeing center and on fair days, and especially on Saturdays and holidays, hundreds of persons were to be found on the river thereabouts. As early as it was, the stream was pretty well populated as they drew near their destination. There were red canoes and blue canoes and white canoes and green canoes, and canoes of half a dozen other colors or tints. Many of them were really luxurious, with mahogany seats and embroidered cushions, while one craft that they passed, occupied by a man and a woman, was floating lazily down

the stream with a graphophone playing in the bow. That was too much for Poke. He stopped paddling and stared at it most impolitely with open mouth. Finally he shook his head.

“It’s no use,” he said discouragedly. “I can’t do any more. My mind is wandering. I’m seeing things and hearing music!”

“Well, we’re just about there, I guess,” laughed Jeffrey. “There’s a boat-house ahead of us now, although I don’t know that it’s the one we want.”

“I will essay a few more faltering strokes then,” replied Poke. “Shall you have one of those music affairs in your canoe, Jeff, or are you going to have a church organ?”

“A music box, I guess. There’s our place, Poke; see the sign?”

Poke shook his head. “I see nothing clearly,” he muttered. “All is a blur before me.”

“There’s Sandford’s,” called Gil from the other canoe which had drawn ahead. “Shall we go over there now?”

“Yes, let’s look at his canoes first. Then we’ll have something to eat, eh?”

“Eat!” shouted Poke. “Who said eat? Do my ears deceive me?”

“Back water!” commanded Jeffrey. “That was a narrow squeak, Poke.” A pea-green canoe crossed their bow, while the single occupant of it asked them scathingly if they were blind. It required some care to cross the river, which here widened into a very respectable basin, without scraping somebody’s paint, but it was at last accomplished and the

two canoes sidled up to a long sloping float which presented a very busy scene. Canoes were being brought from their racks in the big shed and placed in the water, and dozens of persons were embarking or awaiting their turns. Paddles and cushions and lunch-boxes littered the float. Through the open doors of the boat-house canoe after canoe could be seen housed on racks in the dim interior.

“Great Scott!” exclaimed Jim. “I didn’t know there were so many canoes in the world!”

They pulled their own craft onto the float and looked about them. Across the basin was another boat-house bearing the name of a rival maker. Near at hand a high bridge spanned the river. Beyond it the stream turned to the left and still more boat-houses showed through the leafless trees that lined the banks.

“It’s just too—too jimmy for words!” cried Hope. “It must be perfectly stunning up here in summer, mustn’t it? Jim, will you bring me up here sometime and paddle me around?”

“We’ll all come up and make a day of it next spring,” said Gil. “It’s really very jolly in warm weather, when the leaves are out, you know, and the birds are singing—”

“Listen to him!” hooted Poke. “Listen to old Gil rhapsodizing! ‘Trees and birds’! Say, Gil, what you need is a bite to eat.”

“Let’s get busy, then,” said Jeffrey. “I wonder where the office is.”

“At the other end,” said Poke. “I’ll show you. Only—” He stopped and viewed the luncheon basket thoughtfully.

“Only,” he went on, “I don’t want to take any chances about losing that grub. Shall we take it with us?”

“Oh, come ahead; no one’s going to steal it,” said Gil. “Besides, if they do we can buy luncheon here. There are two or three places up there towards the station.”

“That’s so,” responded Poke in relieved tones. “Come on, then.”

Buying a canoe was not as easy as it had seemed. Not that there was any scarcity of the articles, however. That was just where the difficulty lay. There were so many of them, new and second hand, of all colors and sizes, that it took a lot of deciding. Poke had been very nearly right as to prices. In the end, after fully a half hour of viewing and discussing, Jeffrey made his decision. The canoe he selected was sixteen feet long, with a white cedar body and red cedar trim. It was painted crimson and the varnish shone until the boys could almost see their faces in it. It had been difficult at the last to choose between crimson and blue in the matter of color, for the blue was a most enticing shade. But Gil reminded Jeffrey that crimson and gray were the school colors and patriotism cast the deciding vote. Then came the extras; paddles, seat-backs and cushions. Jeffrey tried a half-dozen paddles at the edge of the float before he decided on the model he liked best and ordered two. One seat-back was all he wanted, and that was only in case Hope should honor the canoe with her presence. Three cork cushions completed his purchases and almost exhausted the fifty dollars that he had brought with him. (The canoe was thirty-seven dollars and a half.) Then came the subject of having a name printed on the bow, and Jeffrey was nonplussed.

“I think that would be nice, don’t you?” he asked the others. They agreed that it would and immediately suggested names. But none of them seemed to please Jeffrey and finally he told the man that they would think it over and let him know about it in an hour or so.

“I suppose, though,” he said with a trace of disappointment in his voice, “I’d have to wait for it if you painted the name on.”

The man replied that it would require several days to perform the work and dry the paint.

“That means that I’ll have to come up again and get it, then.”

“Oh, no, sir. We’ll deliver it for you at the school. Just take it down with our launch.”

“Well, then I guess I’ll have a name on it,” replied Jeffrey. “And I’ll let you know in about an hour.”

So they left matters that way and went back to their canoes for the luncheon basket. With this in hand they started out to find a suitable place to eat and at last succeeded, discovering a sunny nook a little way down the river where a row of willows shut them off from the observation of the people in the passing canoes. Mrs. Hazard had provided liberally. There were sandwiches galore, tongue, ham and lettuce; a thermos bottle filled with coffee that was as hot when Hope poured it into the drinking cups as when it had been put into the bottle; another thermos filled with milk; a dozen hard-boiled eggs; much cake and some bananas. Poke heaved a sigh of contentment as Hope and Jim spread the contents of the basket out on two napkins.



“Great!” he said. “There’s as much as I can eat there. I wonder, though, what the rest of you are going to do.”

“We’ll show you in a minute,” said Gil. “All gather around, ladies and gentlemen. Who wants milk and who wants coffee?”

“I,” said Poke promptly.

“Well, which?”

“Both, please.”

“You’ll not get both. Which do you want, Hope?”

“Milk, please. Have a sandwich, Poke?”

“A sandwich?” murmured Poke, helping himself liberally after determining the kind he wanted. “Why put the ‘a’ in?”

“Now,” said Jeffrey presently, when the first pangs of hunger had been assuaged, “let’s talk about a name for the canoe, fellows.”

“Mayn’t I help too?” asked Hope.

“Why, of course; I want you to!”

“You said ‘fellows,’ and I didn’t know.”

“Excuse me,” Jeffrey laughed, “I should have said ‘Lady and fellows.’ I tell you how we’ll do it. We’ll start and go around the circle in turn. You’re first, Jim. What do you say?”

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# CHAPTER XV

## THE “MI-KA-NOO”

“Let some one else start it,” said Jim. “I’m not much good at names.”

“All right. You’re next, Gil.”

“Well, how would ‘Crofton’ do?”

“Punk!” said Poke promptly. “What you want to call it, Jeff, is something—”

“Kindly await your turn, Mr. Endicott,” said Jeff. “What do you say, Hope?”

“I think something like—like ‘Dragon Fly’ would be pretty.”

“That’s not bad,” said Gil.

“Now, Poke.”

“‘Tippy,’” replied Poke promptly.

“It isn’t tippy,” denied Jeff.

“All canoes are tippy. Call this one ‘Tippi-canoe,’ only call it ‘Tippy’ for short. Get me?”

There was a groan of disapproval and Jeffrey looked at Jim.

“I don’t know,” said Jim. “I think what Hope suggested is pretty good. Or you might call it ‘Kingfisher.’”

“Yes,” said Jeffrey, “or ‘Lotus.’”

“Yes, or ‘Pink Carnation,’” jeered Poke. “Or ‘Canary Bird.’ Why don’t you think of something appropriate? Now, ‘Tippy’—”

“Is idiotic,” interrupted Gil. “I think you need a short name, Jeff; something with ‘go’ to it—”

“That’s it!” exclaimed Jim, almost upsetting his coffee cup.

“What’s it?” they asked.

“‘Go To It!’”

“Really, that’s not bad,” commented Poke.

The others agreed, all save Hope. Hope said she thought it was a bit slangy.

“But that’s the kind of name you want,” insisted Gil. “Something snappy, Jeff.”

“Why not call it ‘Poke’?” asked that youth.

“Yes, ‘Slow Poke,’” amended Jim. “But I don’t call that snappy. What’s the matter with something Indian?”

“That’s the ticket!” cried Poke. “Jimmy, old boy, you’re coming on. Let’s call it ‘Laughing Water.’”

“Or ‘Minnehaha.’”

“Or ‘Silver Heels.’”

“‘Rain-in-the-Face!’”

“Oh, cut it out, Poke! Be sensible.” This from Gil. “I guess all the Indian names have been used up, Jeff. Why not call it

‘Hope’?”

Hope laughed merrily at that, and Poke grinned. “I wish you would,” he said eagerly. “You certainly would get your share of joshing, Senator.”

“Well, it’s getting on, fellows, and we don’t seem to have found anything very good yet. Can’t any one think of anything?”

There was a depressed silence until Jim said feebly: “Call it ‘Noname.’” This met with the reception it deserved. Hope knitted her brows and forgot, in her absorption, to finish the slice of cake she held. Finally Poke broke the stillness. “Who’s got a pencil?” he asked.

“Give it back?” inquired Jeffrey.

“I certainly will,” replied Poke, viewing it in disgust. “Now who’s got a piece of paper?”

“Any other little thing you’d like?” asked Gil, tossing him a box-lid. “A twenty-dollar gold piece or a silk hat?”

“Yes, I’d like silence,” said Poke severely. He began to write on the lid and the others, glad of a respite from thinking, watched him curiously. For a minute Poke scribbled and erased and frowned, but finally a satisfied smile dawned over his countenance.

“I’ve got it,” he announced. “Gil said all the Indian names had been used, my friends, but Gil, as usual, was wrong. Here, Jeff, is the name of your canoe.”

He tossed the box-lid to Jeffrey. On it he had printed in big letters:

## MI-KA-NOO.

“What’s that mean?” asked Jeffrey. Then it dawned on him and he burst into a laugh and handed the inscription on to Jim. “That’s bully, Poke! It really does look like Indian at first, too!”

“My Canoe,” Jim translated as he passed it on. “How did you think of it, Poke?”

Poke waved his hand airily, signifying that the thing was too trivial to be worth attention.

“The only thing,” said Gil, with a grin, “is that you’re pretty sure to call it ‘Mike’ for short.”

“Great!” laughed Jim. “You wanted something short and snappy and there it is; Mike. You can’t beat it.”

Hope was less enthusiastic about the name than the others, and said she thought it would be a shame to call anything as pretty as the crimson canoe, “Mike,” but Jeffrey was delighted with the suggestion. “It will look bully when it’s painted on,” he declared. “I suppose they’ll do it in gold, won’t they, Gil?”

“If you tell them to they will, I guess. Let’s get a move on, or we won’t get home before the game begins. Toss me another banana, Poke.”

“How many have you had already?” asked his chum severely.

“Only one; honest.”

“All right; catch. Who wants some more cake? There are three bananas left, too. Have one, Jim? Any one else in the

audience like a banana? Shove the basket over, Hope, and I'll dump these things in. What time is it?"

"After twelve," replied Gil. "We'll have to hurry a bit."

"It won't take us twenty minutes to get back after we're started," said Jeffrey. "We've got the current with us, you know."

"That is indeed painful news," grunted Poke. "I hoped to be able to paddle back."

"Jeff," asked Hope as they retraced their steps, "will you teach me to paddle sometime? I'd love to know how. It isn't hard, is it? It doesn't look hard, anyway."

"No, it isn't hard, except when you're going against the stream or the wind," Jeffrey answered. "I'll show you how any day you like after I get 'Mike.'"

Hope made a face. "I think that's a perfectly—perfectly suggy name, Jeff."

"Suggy? What's suggy?"

"Horrid, of course."

"I see; the antonym of jimmy."

"I guess so," replied Hope. "I don't believe I know what an-an-anto—what that is, though."

They returned to the float, and while Jeffrey and Gil went on to the office to see about having the name put on the canoe, Jim and Poke launched the craft and made ready for the return trip. Then, as the others had not come back, Poke excused himself with the vague explanation that he thought he'd just look around a minute, and disappeared up the hill.

Jeffrey and Gil returned presently and after they had waited several minutes for Poke that young gentleman sauntered into sight with a huge bag of peanuts from which he was industriously eating.

“Pig!” shouted Gil scathingly.

“For that,” remarked Poke tranquilly, “you get none, my friend. Who wants some peanuts?”

It seemed that they all did, for Gil and Jim captured the bag by main force and made an equal distribution of its contents. As Jim remarked a few minutes later, it was a lucky thing that they did not have to paddle going back, for paddling would have interfered seriously with eating the peanuts. As it was, they left a floating trail of shells all the way from Riverbend to the boat-house at Crofton.

Jeffrey and Hope returned to Sunnywood, but the others remained at school to await the time for the game with St. Luke’s Academy. Poke declared that Jeffrey was going home to get more dinner, and showed a strong disposition to accompany him. Gil and Jim, however, restrained him by force of arms.

“Oh, I don’t want anything myself,” he said, “but some one ought to go along and see that those two don’t get any more. My—my motive, Gil, was quite disinterested.”

“You’re coming back to see the game, aren’t you, Jeff?” called Jim.

“Yes, indeed. So is Hope. And we’re going to bring Lady if she will come,” answered Jeffrey.

The three seated themselves on the steps of the gymnasium and watched Jeffrey go swinging along with the aid of his crutches, Hope beside him suiting her steps to his.

“He gets along mighty well, doesn’t he?” observed Gil. “Gee, if I was in his shoes, fellows, I’d have a grouch all the time. Think of knowing that you’ve got to go through life like that! Br-r-r!”

“Think of not being able to play football or tennis or any of the things we do,” said Poke soberly. “That’s what would get me, I guess.”

“He certainly can handle a canoe, though,” said Jim.

“And he told me last night that he could swim,” Gil added. “In fact he seemed to think he could do that about as well as I can.”

“I should hope so!” exclaimed Poke. “You’re a punk swimmer.”

“Am I? I noticed that I had no trouble swimming all around you last summer, Pokey.”

“Shucks! I wasn’t well that day. You know I’d eaten too much breakfast.”

“You usually do,” replied Gil sweetly. “I suppose you can swim like a fish, Jim?”

“N-no, I can’t swim much; I mean I can’t do many fancy tricks like fellows I’ve seen. I can keep it up a long time, though. I swam six miles one day last summer.”

“Six miles!” Poke whistled expressively. “What for?”

“Nothing; just to see if I could.”



“Weren’t you dead when you got through?”

“A little tired; not much. I swam out to the island first; that’s nearly a mile; and then I went to the breakwater, which is a good two miles, and then back the same way. It makes a good swim.”

“Oh, yes,” said Poke carelessly, “but a trifle short; what? Did you rest any?”

“No, not to speak of. I stayed in the water all the time, but I rested a couple of minutes at the island and about as long as that at the end of the breakwater. I didn’t stop at all coming back.”

“Where’s this place you live?” asked Gil. “Near here, isn’t it?”

“Yes, just over there.” Jim nodded in the general direction of the coast. “Only about thirty miles. Essexport, you know.”

“I’ve heard of it. Folks go there in summer, don’t they?”

“Some, but it isn’t a fashionable summer resort at all. A good many artists go there. You stumble over them all the time on the wharves and around the harbor. They sit under white umbrellas and paint any old thing they can find. They’re rather nice folks, artists.”

“I should think it would be fun,” said Poke vaguely. “Are you going home in the summer?”

Jim shook his head. “I don’t know. You see, we’ve rented our house. We might go back for a little while, I suppose. I dare say it’s pretty hot here in summer.”

“I’ll bet it is!” said Gil. “It was so hot last spring at commencement that we nearly died. Had to dress up in our best togs, you know, and make a hit with our relatives.”

“And other fellows’ relatives,” growled Poke. “I nearly danced my poor little heart out that night, Gil. It was my fatal fascination, Jim. The girls simply *had* to have a dance with me!”

“Dance!” scoffed Gil. “You don’t call what you do dancing, do you?”

“I certainly do,” replied Poke with dignity. “It is the poetry of motion. Gil is envious,” he explained, turning to Jim. “He dances like a trained bear on the end of a chain. Ever see one? Like this.” And Poke began to revolve around and around on the landing in ludicrous imitation of a bear. Even Gil had to laugh at the performance. Then Poke declared that he had to have a drink of water and they sauntered over to Memorial, meeting a few late diners on the way. After that it was almost time to think of dressing for the game, and they returned to the gymnasium, loitered awhile on the steps and then descended to the locker-room and leisurely got into their togs.

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# CHAPTER XVI

## MR. HANKS AS A NOVELIST

Jeffrey and Hope failed in their plan to entice Mrs. Hazard to the game that afternoon. When they reached Sunnywood dinner was just over and Mrs. Hazard and Mr. Hanks were coming from the dining-room.

“Did you have a nice time, dear?” asked Hope’s mother.

“Oh, just scrumptious!” Hope answered. “And Jeff bought the darlinest, jimmiest canoe you ever saw! And its name is ‘Mi-Ka-Noo.’ And Jeff is going to teach me to paddle, aren’t you, Jeff?”

“If Lady doesn’t mind,” replied Jeff. “Do you like canoeing, sir?” he asked, turning to Mr. Hanks, who, during the conversation had been surreptitiously striving to edge his way past the group and reach the stairway.

“I—I have never tried it, Latham. But isn’t it—er—a bit unsafe? I’ve always understood that canoes were—er—very unstable boats.”

“Well, you have to be careful in them,” Jeffrey allowed. “But they’re not quite as bad as folks try to make out. As long as you can swim there’s no danger, sir.”

“I suppose not; no, not so long as you can—er—swim. I regret to say that swimming is an accomplishment I have never mastered.”

“I don’t know about this canoeing,” said Mrs. Hazard doubtfully. “Hope can swim a little, but—”

“Why, Lady, you know I can swim beautifully! I swam seventy-five strokes last summer!”

“Well, that would be enough to take you ashore anywhere on this river,” laughed Jeffrey. “I don’t think you need be alarmed, Lady. I’ll be very careful of her.”

“But—but can you swim all right yourself, Latham?” asked Mr. Hanks.

“Oh, yes, sir, I get along better in the water than I do on land.”

“Well, I suppose you can go, then, if you want to very much,” said Mrs. Hazard. “But do be careful; and sit very quiet. Are you going this afternoon?”

“Oh, no, Lady. Jeff hasn’t got it yet; not until next week. He’s having the name painted on it. This afternoon we’re going to the football game. We’re all going, aren’t we?” She turned questioningly to the instructor. “You are coming with us, aren’t you, Mr. Hanks?”

“Er—why, thank you,” he stammered, “but I have so much to attend to, Miss Hope. I—I think I won’t go. Much obliged. I—I must really get back to my work.” He moved toward the stairway, nodded embarrassedly and disappeared up the stairs.

“Well, you’re coming, aren’t you?” Hope demanded of her mother. But Mrs. Hazard shook her head smilingly.

“Not to-day, dear. I’ve too much to do. I’ve told Jane she might go to the village and do some shopping, and—”

“Then I shall stay at home and help you,” declared Hope cheerfully. “You won’t mind, will you, Jeff?”

“Oh, but Jeff will mind!” said Mrs. Hazard laughingly. “He will mind terribly! And, besides, my dear, I don’t need you a bit. So run along and don’t be late.”

“There’s lots of time,” said Hope. “Are you quite, *quite* sure there’s nothing I can do, Lady?”

“Quite sure. So you go and see the football. Did you have luncheon enough? Don’t you want something now?”

“No, ma’am, we had plenty,” replied Jeffrey. “In fact, we didn’t eat quite all of it.”

“We had a lot of peanuts, too,” laughed Hope. “Poke bought them, and Jim and Gil took them away from him and we all ate them coming home. And, Lady, it’s perfectly beautiful at Riverbend, and we saw thousands and thousands of canoes, and—”

“Isn’t that a great many?” asked her mother smilingly.

“Well, not thousands, but hundreds, Lady. We did see hundreds, didn’t we, Jeff?”

“Well, let’s say dozens, Hope, and be on the safe side,” Jeff replied with a laugh. “Sometime I’d like you and Hope to let me take you up there in the canoe, Lady, and show you how pretty it is. Sometime in the spring would be best, I suppose.”

“I should love to go,” replied Mrs. Hazard, “but I’ll have to learn to swim first. Now run along to your football game. Is Jim going to play to-day, Jeff?”

“No, ma’am, I think not. At least, I’m afraid he isn’t.”

“Well, I was afraid he was,” Mrs. Hazard laughed. “It’s all in the point of view, isn’t it? Do you think you ought to walk so much, Jeff? You must be careful and not get too tired.”

“Oh, I don’t mind it. It’s just my shoulders that get sort of tired sometimes, but they soon feel all right again. I think I’ll go up and put some decent clothes on, Hope. It won’t take me very long.”

“And I’m going to do the same,” Hope replied. “And it will take me a full half-hour. So you needn’t hurry. We’ve got plenty of time, haven’t we?”

“Over an hour,” Jeffrey replied. “So you can just doll yourself all up, Hope.”

“Doesn’t he use awful language, Lady?” asked Hope. “I’d be ashamed if I were a senator’s son, wouldn’t you? I’ll be all ready in just exactly half an hour, Jeff.”

“All right; I’ll be waiting for you.”

When he reached the head of the stairs he noticed that Mr. Hanks’ door was partly open. It was usually closed tight when the instructor was inside, and Jeffrey wondered. And he wondered more a moment later when the sound of quick, nervous footsteps reached him. He paused a moment and listened. Back and forth paced Mr. Hanks, the length of the room, the tail of his coat appearing at the opening of the door each time as he turned.

“I wonder,” reflected Jeffrey, “what the trouble is with Nancy. He sounds like a caged lion. I guess somebody must have turned in some pretty bad papers. Hope it wasn’t me!”

True to her promise, Hope was ready at the end of the half-hour, looking very neat and pretty in her blue dress. Jeffrey had changed his old clothes for a suit of dark gray, and they were a very nice-looking pair of youngsters as they left the cottage. Jeffrey said something complimentary about Hope's gown, and Hope smiled demurely down at its trim folds.

"It is nice, isn't it?" she asked. "I like blue better than any other color. I suppose I ought to like crimson, oughtn't I? Because that's the Crofton color. But I couldn't wear crimson, could I? Not with yellow hair."

"Never mind," laughed Jeffrey, "you'll make an awful hit with the St. Luke's fellows. Their color's blue, you see."

"Not really, Jeff?"

He nodded. "Of course, their shade of blue isn't like your dress, but they'll know you're for them, Hope."

Hope tossed her head. "They'll know nothing of the sort. I shall borrow somebody's flag and tie it around my neck! They won't beat us, will they?"

"St. Luke's? I don't think so, but you can't tell. Gil says we're going to have a rattling good game, so I suppose that means that it will be a close one."

"I hope so. I don't care how close it is as long as we win. That Gary boy can't play to-day, can he?"

"No, not for a good many days. He fixed himself for awhile, I guess. Wasn't Mr. Hanks funny when you asked him to go with us? I thought he was going to fall in a faint."

“I don’t see why, do you? It would do him good to get out of doors and forget his silly work now and then.”

“I guess it would. When I went upstairs he was walking back and forth in his room just like a lion in a cage at the zoo. I guess something must be troubling him.”

“Oh, that’s nothing,” said Hope. “He often does that. You can hear him in the dining-room when you’re setting table or something. He does it sometimes for ten or fifteen minutes, and then he’s as quiet as a mouse for hours and hours! I suppose it’s his writing, Jeff. He—he is seeking inspiration.”

“I hope he finds it before your carpet is worn out!” Jeffrey laughed. “I wonder what he is writing, Hope.”

“I think it’s a book,” said Hope.

“What kind of a book?”

Hope shook her head. “I don’t know. Perhaps—perhaps it’s a novel, Jeff.”

“A novel! Fancy Nancy Hanks writing a novel!” Jeffrey laughed at the thought of it.

“I don’t see why not,” Hope demurred. “I think he’s awfully smart, Jeff, don’t you? Don’t you think he knows a terrible lot?”

“Y-es, I suppose he does, only—only he doesn’t look like a novelist, does he?”

“I don’t think Sir Walter Scott looked much like a novelist, but he was one. And—and I don’t suppose all novelists can look the same, anyway.”



“I suppose not. But I’ll bet you that book of his is some sort of a history or a Latin text-book. Why, Nancy wouldn’t waste his time on anything as—as flippant as a novel, Hope!”

“I don’t think novels are flippant,” Hope replied rather indignantly. “You don’t call *Ivanhoe* and *David Copperfield* and—and all those flippant, do you?”

“No, but I wasn’t thinking of that sort of novels. If that’s what he’s doing—”

“You can’t tell. He might be. If he is I do hope he will tell us about it when it’s done. Wouldn’t you like to read it, Jeff?”

“I don’t know; I dare say. Anyhow, I know mighty well I’d rather read it than any old Latin book he could write!”

They found the grand-stand well filled when they reached the field, and after securing seats they had to wait but a minute or two before the visiting team appeared. Hope was relieved to find that the St. Luke’s blue was a very light shade of the color, although Jeffrey gravely assured her that blue was blue and that St. Luke’s wouldn’t mind if she didn’t wear the exact shade.

“There’s Brandon Gary over there,” said Jeffrey sotto voce as he indicated the direction with his glance. “I should think he’d feel pretty mean to be sitting up there not able to play.”

“Who is the nice-looking boy this side of him?” asked Hope. “The one leaning forward.”

“Joe Cosgrove. He’s baseball captain, you know. He is nice looking, isn’t he? They say he’s a dandy player.”

“I don’t care much for baseball, do you?” said Hope.

“Crazy about it.”

“But you don’t like it as well as football, Jeff?”

“I don’t know. I think I do. Perhaps one reason is that a fellow can see a baseball game and not freeze to death or get soaking wet. Still, come to think of it, I did get pretty well drenched once at a baseball game. I’d rather see a boat race, though, than either.”

“I’ve never seen one,” said Hope. “Not a rowing race, I mean. I’ve watched lots of yacht races, but I never can make out which boat is ahead. There are always so many of them. And lots and lots of them aren’t racing at all; just following; and I never know which is which. I suppose a rowing race isn’t like that, though.”

“Not a bit. I’m going to try for the crew in the spring, but I don’t suppose I’ll make it. Anyhow, it’s fun trying, and I love to row. Here comes our fellows, Hope.”

The cheer leaders were on their feet and in an instant the sharp cheer rattled out; *Crow, crow, crow, Crofton! Crow, crow, crow, Crofton! Crow, crow, crow, Crofton! Crofton! Crofton!* Then came a cheer for St. Luke’s, and a moment after some thirty devoted sons of that alma mater gathered together across the field and returned the compliment, making up in vigor what they lacked in numbers. Then Crofton lined her warriors across the gridiron, St. Luke’s scattered her defense over the opposite territory and Duncan Sargent kicked off.

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# CHAPTER XVII

## THE GAME WITH ST. LUKE'S

That kick-off was a fizzle. St. Luke's got the ball on her twenty-five yards, ran it back ten and then her full-back broke through the Crofton left side for twenty yards, and there was great joy where the handful of St. Luke's supporters were gathered. After two tries had yielded but four yards the St. Luke's captain and left half-back kicked to Arnold on Crofton's fifteen-yard line. A very considerable little wind had come up since noon and it lengthened the kick. Arnold ran back fifteen yards before he was downed. Two plays were tried and Crofton was penalized for starting before the ball. After Arnold had broken through the center for four yards he kicked and a moment later the St. Luke's captain started the Blue's rooters again by tearing off a fifteen-yard run through center on a delayed pass. On the next play a St. Luke's back fumbled and LaGrange recovered the pigskin, for the Crimson-and-Gray.

Poke beat off nine yards at St. Luke's left end and Arnold followed with a plunge of five yards through the middle. Smith then failed to gain, and Arnold got off a poor punt which the St. Luke's right end captured. On the first play the Blue's quarter-back tried for distance through the Crofton center, only to fumble and have Benson of Crofton recover the ball.

Arnold kicked, and as Gil was interfered with, the ball was brought back and Crofton was presented with ten yards. On

the next play Arnold made five yards, and then Poke shaking off his opponents, ran thirty-seven yards, placing the ball within ten yards of the St. Luke's goal line. Smith tried to gain on the right of the Blue's line but failed, and a forward pass, Arnold to Poke, was intercepted by the St. Luke's captain on his own four-yard line. He scampered and dodged back to his ten-yard line before he was brought down, with half the Crofton team sitting on and about him. On the first play the Blue's captain fumbled while going through the line and Duncan Sargent grabbed the ball for Crofton on the nineteen yards. Two plays by Arnold and Poke netted seven yards. Then, with Arnold back, a forward pass, Arnold throwing the ball to Poke, brought the first score. Poke caught the ball on the twelve-yard line and scampered over the last white mark before he was pulled down. The punt-out was a failure, the ball striking the ground.

But Crofton cheered and made known her approval. The playing for the rest of the first period was in the middle of the field, although at one time Arnold was forced to punt from behind Crofton's goal line, after a mess had been made of the handling of one of the blue captain's kicks. The quarter ended with the ball in St. Luke's possession on her own forty-six-yard line.

In the second period St. Luke's was on the defensive. Fumbles enabled Crofton to get the pigskin to within twenty-five yards of St. Luke's goal line, where Benson, on a forward pass, ran over the goal line, only to be called back because Poke had held an opponent. Some two minutes later the period ended and the teams trotted off.

“The teams are pretty evenly matched,” said Jeffrey, “and Gil was right about it being a stiff game. I guess we’re a little heavier than they are, and I think our offense is better. One thing is certain, though, and that is that we’re away ahead of them at handling the ball. They made some awful fumbles in that last quarter, didn’t they?”

“Yes, but it helped us, Jeff. I don’t see why that mean old thing of a referee wouldn’t let us have that last touchdown. Do you think that was fair?”

“Of course it was,” Jeffrey laughed. “Poke was holding one of the St. Luke’s fellows and the officials caught him. So we got penalized and lost our touchdown. Too bad, too, for that was a corking pass, and Benson handled it finely. There wasn’t a soul near him when he got the ball.”

“Then it was Poke’s fault?” asked Hope sadly.

“I’m afraid it was. I don’t suppose he meant to hold. A fellow gets excited and doesn’t realize sometimes. I guess Poke feels as badly as anybody about it. But never mind, we’ll trim them all right. We should get at least one more touchdown in the next two periods.”

“I hope we get a dozen,” declared Hope. “And wasn’t that run of Poke’s perfectly jimmy? I guess we can forgive him for losing us that other touchdown, don’t you?”

“Yes, especially as he made the first one. I wonder if Johnny will put in any substitutes now.”

“I wish he’d let Jim play,” said Hope.

“Jim may make the team yet,” replied Jeffrey. “Cosgrove is playing a mighty good game in Gary’s place, by the way. I

wonder what Gary is thinking about it. Here they come again. Now let's see. No, the team's just the same, I guess."

Crofton was on the defensive throughout the whole of the third period, the St. Luke's captain having ordained it so when his long kick rolled to Crofton's twenty-yard line before Arnold recovered it. It was then that the Blue's supporters took heart, and from across the gridiron came cheer after cheer as St. Luke's worked the ball by a series of plays in which three successful forward passes figured down to within eight yards of the Crofton goal line. St. Luke's looked really dangerous for the first time and on the Crofton side of the field her supporters watched uneasily as the St. Luke's backs settled for the next play. It was another forward pass and a sigh of relief went up from the Crimson-and-Gray as the ball was fumbled and went to Crofton as a touchback. Out to the twenty-five yards went the ball and Crofton put it in scrimmage. St. Luke's made several other attempts in that period to get across her opponent's goal line, but never again secured such another chance as the one she had wasted.

The last quarter found Crofton forcing the playing and St. Luke's again on the defensive. Arnold tried a goal from placement from the Blue's forty-yard line, but the ball went wide of the posts. St. Luke's chose to kick from behind the twenty-five-yard line, but it was not long before Crofton had the ball back in the Blue's territory. Failure to gain ground at rushing caused Arnold to punt, and a substitute left half-back who had taken the place of the Blue's captain a moment before, muffed the ball. LaGrange fell on it for Crofton on St. Luke's ten-yard line, and before St. Luke's realized what had happened Poke tossed the pigskin on a forward pass to Gil at left end and the second touchdown was made. This

time Sargent kicked the goal and Crofton's score was 11. For the remainder of the contest the ball hovered about the middle of the gridiron, St. Luke's, recognizing defeat, being content to keep her opponent from approaching her goal line again.

It had been a good game from a Crofton point of view, and, to quote Hope, a "perfectly jimmy" one for Sunnywood. Poke and Gil had played finely and had scored the only touchdowns that had been made. But it was Poke's work especially that brought them joy and sent the whole school away in a glow of enthusiasm. He had been far and away the most spectacular performer of the afternoon. He had contributed the best individual work in carrying the ball, once having made a run of thirty-seven yards at St. Luke's left end, and, later, one of forty-five yards around the enemy's right end. Whether on the directing or the receiving end of the forward pass, he had been excellent. Crofton's first score had been made with Poke on the receiving end, while the second score had been the result of his accurate throw to Gil.

Arnold, too, however, was a hero that day. The quarterback had used the best of judgment in the selection of plays, while at ground gaining he had performed well. Several times he had torn through the St. Luke's center for good distances. His punting also had been good and the enemy's backs had found a great deal of difficulty in handling his kicks. LaGrange at center had shown a wonderful nose for the ball, and his recovery of the pigskin which opened the way for the second touchdown had been a fine effort. Gil at end, Benson at full-back, Sargent at left guard and Smith at left half-back all distinguished themselves that day. On the

whole Crofton went home from the game very well satisfied with her team. Even Johnny's countenance gave one the impression that he was pleased. And he was. The only place that was worrying the coach was the position of left tackle. Marshall had not been up to the rest of the line that day, and it was becoming more and more evident that a better man must be found for his place.

There was great pride and much rejoicing at Sunnywood that Saturday night. Hope, could she have had her way, would, I am certain, have crowned Poke and Gil with wreaths of laurel!

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### GARY CHALLENGES

The canoe came on Wednesday. Of course by this time, as Gil had predicted, its name had been shortened to “Mike,” which was a very plebeian title for such a handsome craft. It was quite the best looking canoe in the school boat-house, although Brandon Gary and “Punk” Gibbs owned between them a craft that, when new, had been a marvel of white and gold. Now it was pretty well scratched and battered, and there were palpable patches showing along the bottom. Jeffrey was properly proud of his new possession, and spent most of Wednesday afternoon in or about it. It paddled beautifully, he decided, sat well on the water and was altogether a treasure. He paddled far down the river in the Mi-Ka-Noo and worked back in the golden glory of an autumn sunset, with the afterglow tingeing the surface of the little stream with coppery lights and the blade of his paddle trickling golden drops as it hung between strokes above the placid surface. In the boat-house he found an empty rack and saw the canoe carefully laid away on it, holding his breath for fear the boatman might mar the glistening varnish of its sides.

The next forenoon he and Poke hurried down to the boat-house between recitations. Sammy, the boatman, left his bench in the repair shop and lifted the Mi-Ka-Noo into the water for them. Jeffrey got into the stern and Poke settled himself in the bow and they started up-river. Poke was eager

now to learn how to paddle and so there was a ten-minute lesson. By the time they had dropped Biscuit Island from sight he was doing very well, although he had not yet mastered the twist of the paddle at the end of the stroke. Jeffrey, however, kept the canoe in its course and Poke persevered in his efforts to “get the hang of it,” as he said. Half a mile up-stream Jeffrey called a halt and they pulled the canoe in under the branches of the trees and rested awhile, Poke ascertaining, by a glance at his watch, that they still had a full half-hour before them.

“It’s funny how it tires your shoulders,” said Poke, as he dropped his watch back. “I believe I can get onto it all right, though.”

“Of course you can,” Jeffrey responded. “There’s no trick to it. It’s just a hard, steady drive and then a half-turn of the blade before you take it out.”

“I know, but it’s that half-turn that puzzles me. I get it sometimes, and then the next time I almost lose my paddle.”

“Want to try the stern going back?”

But Poke shook his head. “I don’t think I’d better yet. I might put Mike onto the bank or into a snag. Here’s some one coming up. Looks like Bull Gary. Not only looks, but is. And Gibbs with him.”

They watched the white canoe approach, drawing the bow of their own canoe further toward shore, for the stream was narrow here and Jeffrey wasn’t going to risk his paint. Gary was paddling in the stern and Punk Gibbs was in the bow. Gary recognized Poke when some distance away and waved

his paddle to him. Poke waved back, and when the white craft was within speaking distance Poke called:

“Hello, Bull! Hello, Punk! That the same old mud-scow you used to have?”

Gary turned his canoe toward the opposite side, Gibbs seized a branch and they came to a pause. Gary laid his paddle across his knees, said “Phew!” eloquently and grinned at Poke.

“Yes, same old mud-scow,” he said. “Where’d you get that thing, Poke? It looks like a fire-engine. Did they have any red paint left?”

“This,” replied Poke, “belongs to Latham. You know Latham, don’t you, Bull? Latham’s the chap who has the room you liked the looks of, Bull. Jeff, the other gentlemen is Mr. Gibbs. Punk is all right, but he’s terribly careless about the company he keeps. What do you think of this for some canoe, Punk?”

“She’s a peach,” replied Gibbs admiringly. “Where did you get her, Latham?”

“Sandford’s,” answered Jeffrey.

“How do you pronounce that name?” asked Gary, who had been frowning at it for a minute. Poke told him and the frown vanished. Gary chuckled. “Pretty good, eh, Punk? Mi-Ka-Noo! I thought it was some Indian gibberish.”

“Go pretty well?” asked Gibbs.

“Like a breeze,” replied Poke. “She paddles herself. Fastest thing on the river except the varsity shell!”

“I’ll bet you this old tub can run rings around her,” grunted Gary. “Even if she is two years old and has forty-eleven patches on her!”

“Oh, that’s been a good canoe in its day,” answered Poke airily. “But they’re making ’em better now, Bull. Look at the lines on this old top. Pretty neat, what?”

“Too broad,” said Gary. “She’s built for comfort but not speed, Poke.”

“Speed! Why, this canoe has the Empire State Express spiked to the rails! Speed! Honestly, Bull, you pain me.”

Gary grinned. “We’ll race you back to the boat-house,” he offered. “If we don’t beat you by half a dozen lengths I—I’ll \_\_\_”

“Apologize,” suggested Poke. “We accept your challenge, sir.”

“But, Poke,” said Jeffrey, “they’re bound to beat us.”

“Of course we are,” Gary laughed. “Latham’s got a lot more sense than you have, Poke.”

“He is thinking of the fact that I am a very poor canoedler,” said Poke. “This is only the second time I’ve ever tried it. But that doesn’t matter because, as I have previously remarked, Bull, this canoe paddles herself. Turn your old derelict around and get ready.”

“Don’t you want me to take the stern?” asked Gibbs. “You paddled all the way up.”

“Pshaw, I’m not tired,” answered Gary. “Let the bow come around.”

“Right-O!” cried Poke as the two canoes lay side by side.  
“Give the word, Bull.”

“All right. Are you ready? ... Go!”

Off they went, all four paddles digging hard. Poke was apparently trying to lift the bow of the Mi-Ka-Noo out of the water in his wild efforts, and Jeffrey called to him to slow down.

“Longer strokes, Poke, and make them tell! That’s it!”

For a moment during that first excited spurt the two canoes were in danger of colliding, but Jeffrey managed to swing away and in that instant the white canoe gained a slight lead.

In some places the channel was scarcely wide enough to allow the two canoes to travel side by side, since there were many snags along the banks. And so when the white canoe took the lead Jeffrey was content to let it keep it until they had passed the next turn and the channel widened. But the Mi-Ka-Noo hung close to the stern of the other craft in spite of Gary’s strenuous paddling, and presently, when the boat-house came into sight ahead, Jeffrey passed the word and slowly the Mi-Ka-Noo crept up foot by foot until it was even with its competitor.

Poke was not yet a scientific paddler, but he had plenty of muscle, meant to beat Gary if such a thing were possible and so toiled like a hero in the bow. At the stern Jeffrey’s experience made up for the fact that he hadn’t the strength to put into the strokes that Gary had. But it was, I think, the Mi-Ka-Noo that won its own race, for the crimson canoe was undoubtedly faster than the white one. Some fifty yards from

the boat-house float the Mi-Ka-Noo's curving prow drew away from the rival craft. Then Jeffrey, crouching at the stern, was even with the center of the white canoe, and Gary, paddling madly and grunting with every stroke of his flashing blade, called on Gibbs for a spurt.

“Come on, Punk! Get into it! Make her go!”

Gibbs tried his best, but his strokes when they grew faster grew also weaker, and the crimson canoe gained steadily until there was open water between her stern and the white bow.

“Not too fast!” warned Jeffrey. “Make them hard, Poke!”

And Poke, who was getting excited by the prospect of victory, steadied down again. Then Gibbs “caught a crab” with his paddle, Gary lost his temper and called him names and the Mi-Ka-Noo shot past the float a good length and a half ahead!

Poke subsided over his paddle and fought for breath while Jeffrey, backing water and paddling, turned the canoe about and went back to the float.

“I guess this one's a bit faster than yours, Gary,” said Jeffrey. “She sits out of the water more, I think.”

But strangely enough Gary had an affection for his battered craft and was up in arms at once.

“It wasn't a test of the canoes,” he said indignantly. “This one is twice as fast as yours. If Punk hadn't nearly lost his paddle we'd have shown you. Besides, I was tired. You fellows had been resting up there.”

Poke lifted his head, gave a gasp for breath, and said:

“You couldn’t have beat us if you’d just got out of bed, Bull.”

“Couldn’t I? I’ll row you again any time you like; if I can find some one to take the bow,” he added with a disgusted glare at Gibbs.

Gibbs grinned and winked at Poke. “What you want in the bow, Bull,” he said, “is a gasoline motor!”

“I tell you what I’ll do with you,” offered Poke quietly. “I’ll race you Saturday morning up-stream from the old bridge to the landing here. You take any canoe you like and I’ll do the same. It isn’t the canoe, Bull, it’s science that counts!”

“Science!” scoffed Bull. “Why, you couldn’t paddle that far to save your life!”

“Don’t let that worry you,” Poke replied soothingly. “Will you try it?”

“What would be the use? You say yourself that you’ve never paddled a canoe before.”

“I know, but I’m awfully quick to learn, Bull. I’m a clever little lad that way. What do you say, now? Try it? We’ll start at the old bridge and I’ll beat you to the boat-house here. If I don’t get here at least a length ahead of you I’ll black your shoes for you on the front steps of Mem!”

“I hope you lose,” said Gibbs vindictively. “Bull’s shoes need blacking most of the time.”

“All right,” said Gary. “I’ll race you. And if I don’t beat you I’ll—I’ll—”

“Careful now! Don’t say anything you’ll be sorry for!”  
laughed Poke.

“—I’ll black your shoes!”

“Done, old scout! It’s a bargain. You fellows are witnesses.”

“Saturday morning, you said. What time?”

“Oh, say eleven; or later, if you like,” replied Poke.

“Eleven’s all right for me. And I don’t have to use this canoe unless I want to.”

“Use any canoe you like and as many as you like as long as they don’t have motors in them. We’re to start at the old bridge and finish here at the corner of the float. And if I get here first you black my shoes. And if you get here first I’m to black yours. Right?”

“Yes,” said Gary; and Jeffrey and Gibbs nodded.

“And there’s one other thing,” said Poke. “I want a good job done, Bull; no skimping the heels, you know!”

Gary grinned. “If you don’t get your shoes blackened until I do them, Poke, they’ll be sights.”

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# CHAPTER XIX

## POKE ADVERTISES

“What made you do such a silly thing?” asked Jeffrey of Poke as they hurried back to Academy Hall. “You know very well he can paddle faster than you can.”

“Ah,” replied Poke gravely, “the race is not always to the swift, Jeff.”

“Well, a canoe race is. You’d better put in all your spare time to-day and to-morrow practising. You’ll have to learn to keep your canoe straight first of all, Poke.”

“I shall take several lessons. I engage you now to impart to me all the knowledge you have, Jeff, of the gentle art of canoedling. If I can get the hang of that twist I’ll be all right.”

But Jeffrey shook his head. “He will beat you to a frazzle,” he said dejectedly. “We won to-day because our canoe was the faster of the two. Gary is a good paddler, and he’s as strong as an ox.”

“Tut, tut, my tearful friend! I have the strength of a team of oxes—I mean oxen. I’m like a horse, Jeff; I don’t know my own strength yet.”

“Well, you’ll know it Saturday forenoon! Of course you can use Mike if you want to, but I think you’d better take one of the shorter canoes; it would be lots easier to handle.”

“I mean to. I mean to take the shortest and lightest one I can find. Can you give me a lesson after football practice this afternoon, Jeff?”

“Yes, but you’ll be too tired, won’t you?”

“I never tire,” replied Poke grandly. “I’ll meet you on the gym steps at five sharp.”

“It will be almost dark by that time,” Jeffrey objected.

“Never mind. We’ll take a lantern, Jeff. Maybe, though, we can start before five. You be there at a quarter to. Or, better still, you go down to the boat-house and get your canoe over and ready, and I will come as soon as I can skip off. How’s that?”

“That’s better. I’ll be all ready for you at four-thirty, and you get there as soon as you can. I’ll put you in the stern this time.”

“All right. I wonder how a little resin would go on my hands. They’re getting full of blisters!”

Poke’s challenge created quite a sensation at dinner time. Gil told him he was a chump, and Jim, without actually saying so, confirmed the judgment. Only Hope refused to see defeat in prospect.

“Of course you can beat him!” she declared cheerfully. “I think Brandon Gary is a perfectly horrid boy!”

“That doesn’t alter the fact that he’s a pretty good chap with the paddle,” said Gil dryly, “or that Poke doesn’t really know one end of a canoe from the other.”

“Nobody does,” replied Poke untroubledly, passing his plate for a second helping of vegetables. “They’re exactly alike!”

“Well, we will all be there to see you finish,” laughed Jim.

“And we’ll all be there to see him black Bull Gary’s shoes,” added Gil.

Poke viewed him sorrowfully. “It pains me deeply, Gil, to find you have so little faith in me. I used to think you were my friend.”

“You can show him all about rowing a canoe, can’t you, Jeff?” asked Hope anxiously. “I should think if he practised hard to-morrow he’d just beat that Gary boy all to bits!”

“There will be very little left of him but bits after the race,” said Poke. “I feel sorry for him, fellows; I actually do.”

The rest hooted.

Poke proved a diligent pupil that afternoon. Jeffrey gave him the stern paddle and Poke labored hard with it. And by the time darkness drove them back to the boat-house Poke had actually mastered the trick of holding the canoe straight after the stroke. The next day, which was Friday, there were two sessions on the river, one in the morning, between Latin and English recitations, and one again after practice in the late afternoon.

“You really did very well,” said Jeffrey as they went back to Sunnywood through the chilly twilight. “If you can do a little bit better to-morrow you may stand a chance of finishing pretty well.”

“I shall win,” replied Poke with deep conviction.

By Friday noon the entire school was in possession of the fact that Gary and Endicott were to have a canoe race and the fellows were discussing the event with much interest and amusement. It was no secret that Poke was a veritable tyro at the paddle, but every one who knew Poke was certain that in some way, by luck or pluck or sheer impudence, he would give his opponent a hard race. To make sure, however, that the world at large should know of the event, Poke himself printed out and posted on the notice board in Academy Hall a highly alluring announcement, which read as follows:

EXTRAORDINARY SPORTING EVENT!  
EXCITING CANOE CONTEST BETWEEN  
TWO  
INTREPID MEMBERS OF THIS  
SCHOOL!

At eleven o'clock on Saturday morning Mr. Brandon Gary and Mr. Perry Endicott will participate in a Canoe Race to decide the Championship of Crofton Academy. The start will be made at the Old Bridge near Saunder's Farm and the contest will finish at the Boat-House float. According to the terms of the Contest, the Loser is to black the shoes of the Winner on the steps of Memorial Hall immediately after the conclusion of the Race, the Loser to provide his own Blacking and Brushes and not to skimp the Heels. For further

particulars, arrangement of Special Trains,  
excursion rates, etc., see Daily Papers!

COME ONE! COME ALL!

Gary didn't altogether approve of that notice. It sounded as though Poke meant to make a spectacle of him, although he couldn't just see how that was to be accomplished. "The silly chump can't paddle a canoe to save his neck," he confided to a friend. "So what does he mean by all this nonsense?"

"They say he's been practising three or four times a day," replied the other.

"He will need more practice than that if he is going to beat me," grunted Gary. "I've a good mind to tear that notice down."

But he didn't, and the notice continued to provide mirth for the passers. On Friday afternoon a complication arose and threatened to put an end then and there to the contemplated event. Johnny Connell put his foot down.

"Look here, Endicott," he said in the gymnasium before afternoon football practice, "don't you know we've got a game with Frawley's to-morrow?"

"Of course I know it, Johnny. Why?"

"Then you cut out this canoe race business, my boy. I'm not going to have you get tired and go stale at this time of the season."

"But, Johnny—"

“Cut it out, I tell you! If you don’t I’ll see Sargent and you’ll get in trouble.”

Poke thought hard for a moment. Then he drew the coach aside and there ensued a whispered conference in a corner of the locker room, during which a smile crept into Johnny’s face, a smile that finally became a full-fledged grin.

“Oh, well, all right, if that’s it,” he said at last. “But mind you don’t get tired, now.”

“I won’t,” Poke promised. “And don’t you say a word to any one, Johnny. If you do you’ll spoil the whole show.”

“I won’t. What time’s this race to be?”

“Eleven sharp, from the old bridge down the river.”

Johnny chuckled. “I guess I’ll have to see it,” he said.

That evening Jeffrey and Jim accompanied Gil and Poke to Plato Society. It was not a business meeting to-night and there were quite a few invited guests present. It was too cold to sit out of doors and so the social room was filled to its capacity. As usual, there was music and the evening passed very pleasantly. Both Jeffrey and Jim were introduced to a number of fellows they had not met before, and each had a very good time. Poke’s appearance was the signal for wild applause, and the others had a good deal of fun with him over to-morrow’s canoe race. Later on Gary came in, and he, too, was hailed with cheers, although as he had never been very popular with the other members of the society, his advent caused less of an ovation.

Gary had accepted his punishment with smiling indifference, and at first the school at large had been inclined

to sympathize with him. But his attitude had soon changed that. No longer on the football team, and with no prospect of rejoining it this fall, he pretended a vast contempt for it and frequently predicted defeat in the Hawthorne game. For some unknown reason his resentment appeared to be against Duncan Sargent and Johnny Connell instead of Mr. Hanks or the Principal, and he was forever criticizing the former's efforts at leadership and coaching. If he felt any anger against Mr. Hanks—and I am inclined to believe that he did not—he never betrayed it. Having learned his lesson, Gary was quick to profit by it, and no member of his classes was any more docile and well-behaved than he.

The Platonians tried to get Poke and Gary together that evening and have them talk on the subject of the race, but each fought shy of the other, although each seemed willing enough to talk about it when the other was out of hearing.

“He hasn't the ghost of a show,” declared Gary. “I don't know what his game is. I guess he just wants to make a sensation. Why, he never paddled a canoe in his life until the other day!”

“I don't believe that,” said some one. “Who says so, Bull?”

“He told me so himself,” replied Gary. And it was a tribute to Poke's veracity that no one suggested a doubt after that. Poke when baited waved a hand airily and shrugged his shoulders.

“I'm sorry for Bull,” he said with regret in his voice. “I suppose I shouldn't have led him into it. But, after all, it's just a little fun. He will get over his disappointment in time.”

His audience chuckled and winked.

“But they say, Poke,” said one of his hearers, “that you don’t know how to paddle.”

“Don’t know how to paddle! Me? Well, if you want to believe everything you hear, that’s not my fault. Without desiring to appear conceited, fellows, I think I may lay claim to being the nicest little paddler in this state, if not in the country. I can paddle with my eyes shut and one hand tied securely behind my back. I am the only successful exponent of the Bob Cook stroke.”

“That’s a rowing stroke, you crazy chump!”

“What of it? I have adapted it to canoeing,” replied Poke calmly. “It is the stroke with which I shall win to-morrow’s classic event, gentlemen. I trust that you will all be on hand to see how it is done.”

“We’ll be on hand to see how *you* are done,” a fellow laughed. “Honestly, Poke, you’ve got more cheek than any fellow in the country!”

“I?” said Poke with a demure smile. “You surprise me. It shows how you misjudge my character, Tom. I am a modest little violet, did you but know it.”

“We didn’t but know it, Poke,” replied Tom.

“The kind of a violet he means,” said another, “is about the size of a soup plate, is yellow and grows in the sun.”

“Get out,” said Poke, “that’s a forget-me-not! You’d better go back to the Junior Class and study your botany again.”



“Well, we’ll all be on hand to-morrow morning, Poke, to root for you. And, say, Poke, if you lose, you know, I’ll lend you my blacking set!”

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# CHAPTER XX

## AN EARLY MORNING PRACTICE

Poke possessed the ability to awake in the morning at approximately whatever hour he had decided upon the night before, a most convenient gift that saved the price of an alarm clock. On Saturday Poke made use of this ability and was out of bed long before any one else in the house was stirring and out of the house without having awakened even Gil. It was fortunate that he had put a sweater on under his jacket, for the morning was cloudy and chill as he set off along the road toward the school and the river. But early as he was, Sammy was ahead of him at the boat-house. The latter was just unlocking when Poke arrived, and he displayed an unflattering surprise at his appearance.

“Likely you been up all night,” he said, struggling with a yawn as he ushered Poke into the house.

“Had your breakfast, Sammy?” Poke asked.

“O’ course I have,” replied the boatman indignantly. “Most time for dinner it is now.”

“Wish I had,” sighed Poke. “What’s the smallest and lightest canoe you’ve got, Sammy?”

“I dunno. There’s all kinds here. Take your pick o’ ’em.”

“No, you show me, Sammy. I don’t know much about the things.”

Sammy walked along the racks, chin in hand, mumbling. Finally,

“Here be it,” he announced, placing his hand on a green canvas canoe. “Light and short, sir, and paddles itself.”

“All right. Put her over, Sammy.”

“Be you goin’ out now?” asked the boatman in surprise.

“Of course. A little exercise before breakfast, you know. I’m troubled with dyspepsia. Doctor’s orders, Sammy.”

“You be over young to have dyspepsy,” said Sammy, shaking his head disapprovingly. “Too many sweets, likely. What kind o’ paddle, now; double or single?”

“Single, please. That’s the ticket. See you later, Sammy.” And Poke dipped his blade and leisurely headed downstream. If his purpose was to practise for the race he gave but small indication of the fact, for he only put his paddle in the water when the slow current threatened to send him toward the banks. Presently he had passed under the bridge at Birch Island and was out of sight. Sammy, who had watched from the float, turned and ambled back to the work-shop, shaking his head.

“It’s puttin’ a lot o’ rich victuals in their stummicks as does it,” he muttered as he set about lighting the stove. “Dyspepsy be the curse o’ the age. That,” he added as he felt a twinge in his knee, “that an rhumatics.” He dropped some fresh sheet-glue in the glue pot, set it over the fire and glanced out the window. “’Twill be soon clearin’,” he murmured. “Likely I’d best finish paintin’ that canoe so ’twill dry.”

It was about half an hour later that he heard a noise at the float and saw Poke lifting his canoe out of the water. Poke had acquired very red cheeks and a hearty appetite, but whether he had acquired more skill at paddling remained to be seen.

“You be soon back,” observed Sammy, putting his head out the shop door. “Likely you be thinkin’ some o’ breakfast by now.”

“I’m thinking of nothing else, Sammy,” replied Poke heartily. “And, Sammy, I want you to do me a favor.”

The boatman immediately looked dubious. He didn’t believe overmuch in doing favors. But Poke’s next action cleared his face. Poke put his hand in his trousers pocket and brought out a bright quarter.

“I’m going to have a race with a fellow at eleven o’clock,” he went on, “and I want this same canoe. See that I get it, will you? And here’s something for your trouble.”

“That be easy,” replied Sammy, “and I’ll not be taken siller for’t.” But he did nevertheless, slipping the quarter into the pocket of his overalls even as he spoke. “Leave it to me, sir, an’ ’twill be here when you come.” He lifted the green canvas canoe and placed it athwart a couple of horses in the shop. “Likely,” he added, “it be in need o’ repairin’.”

Poke just barely got into chapel in time. Afterwards Gil and Jim and Jeffrey were curious to know where he had been.

“I’ve been on the river,” replied Poke. “I thought it would be a good idea to have a sort of dress rehearsal, you see.”

Gil viewed him suspiciously. Finally, “Look here, Poke,” he said, “is this on the level, this race?”

“No, on the river,” replied Poke flippantly, “and you know they’re never quite level.”

“Do you mean,” asked Jeffrey, “that you went down at six o’clock and paddled over the course?”

“Something like that. But it was before six, I think. Say, you chaps, for the love of Mike, walk up, will you? I’m just about starved to death! I came mighty near nibbling the varnish off the settee in chapel. This before-breakfast exercise is great stuff, I tell you. You ought to try it, Jeff. You never eat anything to speak of. Get into your little canoe some morning and paddle a couple of miles and just see how it tones you up. It’s marvelous! Anybody got any chocolate about their person? Or a slab of chewing gum? Or any other little thing that will keep life in my starving body?”

But nobody had. Jim offered a cough-drop from the corner of his waistcoat pocket, but after looking it over Poke refused it indignantly. “I can get all the dirt I want without having to take paregoric with it,” he said.

Gil had gotten it into his head that there was something “fishy,” as he put it, about the race, and tried his best to get Poke to confess to some scheme of villainy. But Poke only looked hurt and injured and said he was sorry that a fellow he had always liked and respected should entertain such doubts as to his integrity. However, as he said most of it with his mouth filled with breakfast, the full effect was lost.

But I am certain that the reader is quite as interested in the race and as anxious to witness it as was the school in general;

although I trust he does not share Gil's miserable suspicions; and so I will hurry on to the appointed moment. Long before eleven o'clock practically every canoe, skiff and tub in commission was on the water and the boat-house was emptier than it had ever been since spring. Sammy was dazed and indignant. Some few fellows who did not trust themselves to manage an oar or paddle elected to see the contest from the bank, and the more energetic of these got away early and walked down to the starting-point. Most, however, were satisfied to see the finish of the race from the stone bridge over Birch Island or from the float itself.

Now for a thorough understanding of this terrific contest it is incumbent on the reader to know a little about the course of the river. What Poke called the old bridge was a wooden structure which crossed the river about half a mile below the school as the crow flies and about a mile as the river runs. For the river turns thrice in that distance, curving once to the north-west in a wide sweep and then again to the south-east and finally a third time toward the west. It describes a giant S, with the upper loop, viewed from the school float, round and large and the lower loop smaller and flattened. After finishing the second loop the river meanders south-westerly in a generally straight direction. Imagine, then, the start of the race to be at a point about at the middle of the top curve of the S and the finish at a point just beyond the final end of the letter. What, then, would have been scarcely more than a mile could one have walked the distance in a straight line, was fully twice the distance by boat. And a mile against the current is no light feat for one whose canoeing experience has stretched over such a small space of time as a week.

Both contestants were on hand early at the boat-house. At twenty minutes to eleven Poke stepped majestically into the Mi-Ka-Noo and, in company with Gil, Jim, Jeffrey and Hope, put off for the starting-point. Behind the Mi-Ka-Noo bobbed the little green canoe that Poke had chosen in the morning. The Mi-Ka-Noo was pretty well loaded but stood the ordeal beautifully. Poke was calm and heroic, Gil suspicious, Jim frankly amused, Jeffrey anxious and Hope so excited that she could scarcely sit still. She did, however, because Jim nipped every wriggle in the bud, so to speak. Accompanying the Mi-Ka-Noo, for all the world as though it was the Royal Barge of an Eastern Potentate—the expression is Poke's, not mine—went a flotilla of canoes and boats filled with laughing boys in a very holiday mood. Poke was the recipient of much advice and the butt of many jokes, but Poke this morning was absolutely impressive. I have said that he was calm, but that scarcely expresses the quiet, almost haughty, determination of his countenance. Hope was positively fascinated by him and deliberately seated herself with her face toward the stern, so that she could feast her eyes on the noble hero.

Brandon Gary had preceded them down the river, paddling in the blue canoe he had selected for the race. This, explained Poke, was a mistake. It was unwise to exert one's self before the contest. He believed in saving his strength. Gil, who was doing his best at the bow, to keep the Mi-Ka-Noo from colliding with the other boats, grunted ironically. The starting-place looked like the English Thames on a regatta day. The sun had come out gloriously and the variously colored canoes and cedar boats glistened in the sunlight. Joe Cosgrove, the baseball captain, had been chosen official,

combining the duties of referee, judge, timer and starter. Joe had provided himself with a small pistol and was determined to do his part in ship-shape fashion. He was also determined to waste no time, having an engagement to play golf at a quarter past eleven with Mr. Arroway, the English instructor. So he watched impatiently while Poke stepped carefully into his green canoe—Poke still held canoes in deep respect and boarded them circumspectly—with all the impressiveness possible under the circumstances.

“Paddle over here, Poke, and get in place,” he called.

Poke, without replying, took up his paddle and looked it all over, much as a batsman examines a favorite bat or a billiard player his cue, much to the amusement of the spectators.

“It’s all right,” called Gil. “It isn’t loaded, old man.”

Poke thereupon carefully placed the tip of the paddle in the water, moved it experimentally, withdrew it and once more scrutinized it carefully. Cosgrove sputtered.

“For goodness’ sake, Poke, get a move on, can’t you?”

Poke appeared to have heard him for the first time and glanced across inquiringly. “Are you waiting for me?” he asked surprisedly.

“Get in line with Gary there,” directed Joe. “Get those bows even. Are you ready?”

Poke agreed that he was, and so did Gary.

*Bang!*



That was Joe's pistol. Gary dug his paddle and the blue canoe darted ahead. Poke dug his paddle and the green canoe followed, but more slowly. Poke, agreed the crowd, was going to let Gary set the pace. You couldn't fool old Poke! You'd have to get up pretty early in the morning to get ahead of him! The flotilla followed, cheering and laughing and shouting advice to the contestants.

“Go it, Bull! You're doing fine!”

“Keep after him, Poke! Wear him out! That's the stuff!”

“Rah for Endicott!”

“Rah for Gary!”

The great race had begun!

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# CHAPTER XXI

## THE GREAT RACE

**F**or a time it seemed that the race would come to an ignominious end then and there, for the other canoes, or such of them as were paddled by two or more fellows, followed so closely that at the end of the first hundred yards they were on both sides of the contestants and even in front of them!

“Get out of the way, can’t you?” bawled Gary. “Give me room!”

Poke, a length and more behind, was not bothered by the convoy, and chuckled at Gary’s dilemma. But Joe Cosgrove came to the rescue. Joe was sculling in a tub.

“Keep back there!” he shouted. “Keep back of the race or I’ll call it off!”

“If they don’t get back I’ll claim a foul!” shouted Gary, encouraged by the referee’s support.

“So will I!” announced Poke. “I’ll claim two fouls!”

But the referee’s command had the desired effect and Gary’s blue canoe swept out of the press, followed by its green competitor. Joe followed close behind Poke and the rest of the craft came bobbing along back of Joe in merry, laughing confusion. The Mi-Ka-Noo had been lucky enough to secure a position well in the lead of the followers from

where during the first stage of the race both canoes were in plain sight.

“Poke’s just simply going to pieces,” mourned Jeffrey. “Look at him! He can’t keep her nose straight at all!”

“He can’t paddle, and he knows it,” answered Gil. “What I’m wondering is what’s his idea? I’ll bet anything he never thought of winning this race by paddling.”

“Maybe he’s got a motor hidden in his canoe,” suggested Jim with a laugh.

“If he has he’d better start it going,” said Jeffrey. “He had to stop paddling then and straighten his canoe out. Why doesn’t he remember what I told him?”

“Is he much behind?” asked Hope anxiously, craning forward.

“About three or four lengths,” answered Jim. “Sit still or you’ll have us overboard!”

“He’s just doing that to fool him,” said Hope. “You wait!”

But if Poke was playing fox he was overdoing it, for now Gary was increasing his lead with every stroke of his paddle. The blue canoe was going finely, Gary’s bare arms working the paddle with the power and regularity of a piece of machinery. He was at the end of the first loop of the course now and the starting-point was already hidden from sight by the trees which grew to the water’s edge on both sides. The sound of the accompanying boats grew less and less, showing that Poke, keeping them back, was rapidly losing. But it was not until the stream turned to the right again on the beginning of the second loop that Gary allowed himself to

turn and look behind him. When he did so he smiled. Not a canoe was in sight on so much of the winding stream as lay within his vision. In another moment, easing a little from the pace he had been setting, he was around the point, keeping as close to the bank as the channel would allow. He was beginning to be aware of aching muscles in arms and legs and back, and so he shifted his paddle to the right for a few minutes. The river still turned so that he could see only a hundred feet or so ahead of him at a time, but presently the bridge at Birch Island crept into sight down the stream; first the tip end of it on the Crofton side of the river, then the second stone pier and the edge of the island and then the whole bridge. There were spectators on it. They were waving to a youth on the bank who was in the act of dropping a green canoe into the water. The green canoe, which had a strange likeness to the one which Poke Endicott was in, disappeared under the further arch of the bridge and went out of sight. The fellows on the bridge disappeared, too, running to the other side to watch it. But by the time Gary neared the bridge they were back again, shouting to him and cheering loudly. Gary experienced a glow of pleasure at the discovery of such a warm sentiment in his favor. As he neared the faces leaning over the parapet he was puzzled, however, to account for the expressions on them, and for the burst of laughter that greeted him. There was something ironic in that laughter, and he realized dimly that the shouts of encouragement were not altogether sincere.

“Go it, Gary! Eat ’em up! Paddle hard!”

“Dig, Bull! You’ll get him yet! That’s the boy!”

The shouting died away as he swept his canoe out from under the old stone arch and left the bridge and the island behind. Ahead was the boat-house and the float and the end of the race—and victory! And ahead, too, was a green canoe, a green canoe with a boy in the stern whose back looked marvelously like Poke Endicott's! Of course it couldn't be Poke, for Poke was yards and yards behind. Gary turned and looked. Just beyond the bridge came the pursuit. He could see the boats under the arches. Which was Poke's he couldn't tell, but Poke was there somewhere, vanquished and discomfited. Of course, only—*who* was the boy ahead? And why were the watchers on the float waving to him and shouting? Now he had stopped paddling and they were helping him out and slapping him on the back and cheering. Of course it wasn't Poke; that was impossible; but it looked —

*It was Poke!*

The fellow had turned and Gary had seen his face. For a moment Gary stopped paddling and stared open-mouthed as though at an apparition. What did it mean? Poke had not passed him on the way up. Or—was it possible that he had passed and that he hadn't seen him? That was an awful thought, for it suggested that he was losing his senses! Nonsense! It was some trick, some—

Then Gary saw it all! Poke had carried across the point!

Gary realized that the current was carrying him downstream and dug his paddle again. After all, it was all right, for plenty of fellows could testify to having seen Poke put his canoe back into the river at Birch Island. Why, Gary had seen that himself! And others must have seen him leave the water

on the other side. Poke had fooled him, and he supposed a lot of the fellows would think it a good joke and try to jolly him about it, but he had won the race fairly and squarely, and he could afford to let them laugh. He went on to the float leisurely. The other canoes were almost up to him now. The crowd at the landing watched him approach and cheered him a little for consolation. At the edge of the float stood Poke, bearing his honors as modestly as might be. He leaned down and held Gary's canoe for him.

“Well paddled, Bull,” he said heartily. “But what was the trouble? Did you strike a snag or run aground?”

“You think you're smart, don't you?” replied Gary indignantly. “Gee, you couldn't do a thing, Poke, without trying to make a silly farce of it! You make me tired!”

“Farce!” repeated Poke in amazement. “Oh, now, I say, Bull, don't be grouchy because I beat you. Shake hands and let's forget it. It isn't my fault if I can paddle faster than you can, is it now?”

“Paddle!” fumed Gary, climbing onto the float. “Run, you mean! You cheated!”

Poke shook his head and viewed sorrowfully the fellows who had huddled around at the first sounds of the altercation. “I thought you were a good loser, Bull,” he sighed.

“Loser! I am when I lose. But I haven't lost. You carried across the point to Birch Island. Why, dozens of fellows saw you!”

“Oh, cut it out, Bull,” said one of the audience. “Don't get sore about it. He beat you fair and square—”

“Of course I did,” agreed Poke soothingly.

Gary sputtered with indignation. “Fair and square! Why—why, he took his canoe out of the water and ran across the point with it, I tell you!”

“What! Oh, get out, Gary!”

“You’re sore, Bull!”

“You didn’t, did you, Poke?”

“Sure I did. It was quicker that way. I wonder you didn’t think of it, Bull.”

“What did I tell you?” demanded Gary in triumph as the other canoes and boats began to unload their passengers. “He knew he couldn’t win fairly and so—”

“Now you hold on a minute, Bull,” commanded Poke smilingly. He pushed his way toward the other end of the float. “Jeff, where are you? Who’s seen Punk Gibbs?” Punk answered from nearby and Jeffrey hobbled through the crowd. “Now, then,” resumed Poke. “Bull says I didn’t win the race fairly. What do you fellows say? You were there when we made the agreement.”

Jeffrey hesitated. “Well,” he said, “you know you carried your canoe across the land, Poke.”

“Of course. What of it? What were the terms of the challenge?”

“You were to start together at the old bridge,” spoke up Gibbs, “and the one who got here first was to have his shoes blacked by the other fellow. That’s the agreement, because I took notice that you didn’t say anything about canoes.”

“Is that the way you remember it, Jeff?” asked Poke.

“Yes, it is. But it hadn’t occurred to me—”

“It was understood that we were to race in canoes,” exclaimed Gary hotly. “If you’d meant a running race—”

“You may have understood it that way,” said Poke, “but I certainly didn’t.” He looked at his shoes. “Got your blacking handy, Bull?”

“No, and don’t you think for a minute that I’m going to black your shoes for you! You didn’t race fair, and every one knows it! I won that race—”

But the sentiment of the crowd was against Gary. It was too good a joke to be spoiled by quibbles.

“Cut it out, Bull!”

“Of course he beat you! He didn’t say anything about staying in the canoes!”

“Go on and get your blacking, Bull!”

“Every one over to Mem!”

And the crowd, jostling and laughing, swept Gary and Poke with it up the bank, Gary asking excitedly where Joe Cosgrove was.

“Wait till you hear what the referee says!” he demanded. “He hasn’t given his decision yet! Where is he? Any one seen him?”

But Joe was half-way to the links by that time, and when, hours later, Gary ran him down, he was suffering from a strange lapse of memory.



“Race? Oh, I’ve forgotten all about the race, Bull. What of it?”

“Well, didn’t I win?” demanded Gary. “Poke carried his canoe half the way.”

“That’s a very serious accusation to make,” said Joe gravely. “Can you substantiate it, Bull?”

“Of course I can! Dozens of fellows saw him do it! Why, you must have seen him yourself!”

“N-no, I don’t think I could swear that Poke carried his canoe. I did see him haul it up on the bank once, but there’s no rule to keep a chap from taking a rest if he wants to. All I know is that he arrived at the boat-house first, and that gives him the race, Bull.”

“But he cheated, I tell you! Don’t you understand that?”

“I tell you what you do, Bull,” said Joe finally. “You bring some good, reliable witnesses to me to prove that Poke carried his canoe instead of paddled it and I’ll—I’ll hear ’em.”

But Gary had cooled down by the next day and the witnesses never testified. I don’t think Gary ever saw the humor of that memorable aquatic contest, but he got so after awhile that he could grin when he was teased about it, and that wasn’t so bad for Gary. But he never blackened Poke’s shoes. And I, for one, don’t blame him!

The school enjoyed the event for days afterward and some of the Juniors got together and presented Poke with a loving-cup—which had all the ear-marks of a tin gallon measure—suitably inscribed in black paint. In the inscription Poke was

referred to as the “Champion Dry-Ground Canoist of the World.”

“But do you mean to tell me,” asked Jeffrey after the race that forenoon, “that you went down this morning at half-past six or some such unearthly time and carried that canoe through the woods for practice?”

“Why not?” asked Poke. “You see, I wasn’t certain it could be done, on account of the bushes and things.”

“Nice time to find out about it,” laughed Jim. “Suppose you had found that it couldn’t be done?”

“Then I’d had to follow my original plan, which was to use two canoes.”

“Two canoes? How could you have done that?”

“Why, I’d have started in one, left it on the bank, hot-footed it through the woods and picked up another which would have been waiting for me. But I didn’t quite like to do that. It didn’t seem quite fair, you see. Of course there was nothing in the agreement prohibiting the use of two canoes, or twenty, but—well, there’s the spirit of the law to consider as well as the letter.” And Poke looked as virtuous as a saint.

“You’re a silly chump,” observed Gil with conviction. “Why did you let Jeff here wear himself out trying to teach you to handle a paddle if you didn’t mean to use it?”

Poke grinned. “Because Jeff was troubled about me and I knew he’d feel a lot better if he thought he was teaching me how to win the race. I didn’t want to cause him any uneasiness, Gil.”

“You and your uneasiness!” scoffed Gil. “If I were Jeff I’d punch your head for you!”

“I’ll do worse than that some day,” laughed Jeffrey. “I’ll take him out in a canoe and leave him there helpless!”

Poke laughed. “It was funny, though, fellows,” he said, “to see the look on Bull’s face when he saw me on the float. He was so flabbergasted that he sat with his paddle in the air and let the canoe drift down-stream with him! I’ll bet that for a minute he thought it was my ghost he saw!”

Hope, I think, was a little disappointed in the outcome of the race. She had wanted Poke to prove a hero and instead of that he had only proved a practical joker. And Hope, while her sense of humor was extremely well developed, failed to appreciate the joke as much as the boys did. She confided to Poke some days later that she wished he would learn to paddle perfectly jimmy and then beat “that Gary boy” in a real race. And Poke gravely consented to think the matter over.

For awhile speculation was rife as to the duration of Gary’s term of probation, but after Cosgrove had settled into the position of right guard and it was observed that that side of the line appeared as strong as ever the school became less concerned with Gary’s fortunes. Cosgrove, although he had never played the position before, soon became a proficient right guard, and Curtis, accustomed to the other side of the line, took very kindly to his change. Crofton met and defeated three adversaries and then ran into a snag in the shape of Chester Polytechnic. “Poly” swept the Academy team off its feet and won the game in a romp. But “Poly” had a way of doing that, and Crofton was not disheartened. The

game proved that the weakest place in the line was at left tackle, where Marshall, willing and hard-working, hadn't the stamina for the position. And yet Marshall was the best material in sight and Johnny decided to keep him, trusting that in the Hawthorne game Sargent, on one side, and Gil Benton, on the other, would help him out. After the Polytechnic game came a battle with Cupples Academy, and Crofton crawled out victor by a single goal from field. With two contests remaining before the Hawthorne game the season settled into the home-stretch. Graduates ran out to Crofton for a day or two at a time and looked the team over and gave advice and sometimes took a hand in the coaching, and ran back to college or business quite satisfied with their devotion to alma mater. But the man behind the team was Johnny, and Johnny pursued the even tenor of his way, undisturbed. Rumors of exceptional ability on the part of the Hawthorne eleven might cause uneasiness to others, but Johnny paid them no heed. He had heard that sort of thing many, many times before.

Meanwhile Jim was getting on with rapid strides, and there came a day when the name of Hazard was on every tongue. For on that day Jim broke through Curtis, blocked a kick, captured the ball and sped forty yards for a touchdown. As the first team's best that afternoon was a field goal, Jim's feat brought a victory to the second, and he went off the field a hero in the eyes of ten panting, happy players. But brilliant tricks of that sort are not the common lot of tackles and Jim's best work was of the sort that doesn't show much. By now he had learned how to handle Cosgrove, while Curtis and he battled day after day with honors fairly even. But while Jim was making fine progress on the gridiron he was scarcely

holding his own in class. A boy must be peculiarly constituted to work heart and soul for the success of his team and yet not show a falling off at recitations. And Jim, since it was his first attempt at serving two masters, was beginning to find himself at outs with his instructors. Oddly enough it was with Latin that he had the most trouble those days and it was Mr. Hanks who first scared him.

“It won’t do, Hazard,” said the instructor one day. “You’ll have to give more time to your Latin. Don’t let me find you unprepared again this month, please.”

That night Jim settled down in the quiet and seclusion of his own room and dug hard. And the next day, and the next after that, Mr. Hanks viewed him kindly. But in specializing on Latin Jim had neglected his other studies and he heard from that. Two weeks before the final game Jim was looking worried and had become so irritable that Hope declared she was certain he was about to be ill. And unfortunately his troubled condition of mind reflected itself in his playing and on the second team it was whispered around that Jim was getting “fine.” And then came the game with Fosterville School, one crisp Saturday afternoon in the first of November. And when it was over, with the score 12 to 5 in favor of the enemy, the future looked pretty dark for Crofton. For Marshall had been dragged out of a play limp and white, his usefulness to the team a thing of the past. The doctor declared it only a severe wrench of the left shoulder but Marshall took it badly and Johnny knew that even if Marshall pulled around in a week the accident had taken every bit of fight out of him. And so it was that the second lost another lineman to the first team, for by the middle of the following week, after trying out Parker and Hazard for

the position, the much coveted, but un hoped for, honor fell to Jim.

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# CHAPTER XXII

## THE SWORD FALLS!

Jim broke into the first team on Wednesday.

That night there was a celebration at Sunnywood. Jeffrey began it with two bottles of ginger ale which he produced after study hour. They drank Jim's health in that enticing beverage and then Poke suggested that some cake wouldn't be half bad. So Hope was summoned and Mrs. Hazard was appealed to and the party adjourned to the dining-room where a spread worthy of the occasion was speedily forthcoming. Every one was very merry save Jim. Jim was wondering when the sword would fall, for he had flunked badly that morning in mathematics and had barely scraped through in Latin. And that was why he protested when Poke had the merry thought of inviting Mr. Hanks to the feast.

"Oh, no," said Jim, "let him alone, Poke."

"I think he ought to participate in our merry-making," Poke persisted. "You run up and invite him down, Hope."

"Shall I?" asked Hope, her eyes dancing.

"No," said Jim. But the others insisted and Hope hurried away on her errand.

"Well, anyway, he won't come," predicted Jim. But he did. He didn't quite know what it was all about, but he and Hope were very good friends by now and he came unquestioningly,

smiling and blinking behind his huge spectacles. It was explained to him that Jim had that day attained to the utmost pinnacle of success by being taken onto the Crofton Academy Football Team, and Mr. Hanks murmured “Dear, dear! I want to know!” nibbled at a piece of cake and wondered how soon he could in decency return to his interrupted labors upstairs. Finally he did go back, shaking hands with Jim in an absent-minded way first, with one of Mrs. Hazard’s serviettes dangling from his coat pocket. The party proceeded quite as merrily without him, however. Poke rallied Jim on his quietness.

“I fear the sudden honor is too much for you, Jim. You used to be rather a merry youth. To-night you remind me of a graveyard gate post. Why so sad?”

“I’m tired,” murmured Jim.

“Then, Jim dear,” said Mrs. Hazard, “I really think you had better not eat any more cake. I’m sure that must be your fifth slice. And you ate a great big supper.”

“You don’t mean to say you’ve been counting the slices!” ejaculated Poke. “Why, that’s not like you, Lady.”

“She couldn’t count all you’ve eaten,” declared Hope. “You’re a—a gridjon!”

“A what-on?” asked Poke anxiously.

“A gridjon. A gridjon is a person who eats too much.”

“Webster or Hazard?” laughed Jeffrey.

“It’s a perfectly good word of my own,” replied Hope with dignity.



But although Jim tumbled into bed in short time he didn't go right to sleep. Instead he lay awake for quite a while wondering how long, if he didn't make a much better showing in class, faculty would allow him to enjoy his new honors. And when sleep did come to him finally it was because he had comforted his conscience with the firm resolve to buckle down to-morrow and study as never before.

But, alas, how many of our good resolutions survive the night? The next day was filled with new experiences for Jim, and much hard, gruelling work on the field, and a blackboard lecture in dining hall after dinner. And so, when study time came, he was tired and nervous and his thoughts absolutely refused to concern themselves with studies. And the following day Mr. Groff, the mathematics instructor, lectured him in front of the whole class, which didn't improve Jim's state of mind a bit, and Mr. Hanks viewed him sadly but forebore to reprimand him. In his other studies he was doing fairly well as yet.

There was no practice on Friday and Jim locked himself up in his room, in spite of the fact that Johnny had instructed them to stay out of doors and take mild exercise, and heroically studied. But the faculty of assimilation seemed to have deserted him of late and it was the hardest sort of work to make anything stick in his memory for more than a minute. But he kept at it until supper time and then emerged tired and fagged.

In the Merton contest the next day, the last before the "big game," Crofton showed flashes of first-rate football. Although he didn't say so, Johnny was well satisfied, for he knew that, barring accidents, his team would play at least

twenty per cent. better a week from that day. Crofton was still coming, and a team that is coming is better than one that has reached the zenith of its development. Merton went down in defeat, 17 to 8, after a hard-fought battle. Best of all, Crofton emerged from the fray with scarcely a scratch, at all events with no real injuries to any of her players. Jim played well in that game. For four twelve-minute periods he forgot all about Latin and mathematics and thought and lived football. And Johnny, who hadn't liked the haggard look in Jim's eyes, concluded that his fears were groundless, and confided to Captain Sargent after the game that "That fellow Hazard is the best find of the season."

And then, on Monday, the sword fell!

He was summoned to the office at noon. What Mr. Gordon said and what excuses Jim offered are of small consequences. We are interested in results. The result in this case was that Jim emerged from Academy Hall feeling that life was indeed a very tragic thing. That afternoon Parker played at left guard on the eleven and all the school knew that Hazard was "in wrong with the Office."

Johnny was a philosopher. Such things had happened to him before. He wasted no breath in regrets nor recriminations. He picked the next best man for Jim's place and went ahead. Perhaps he was a little grimmer in the face that afternoon and a little more silent, but that was all. Duncan Sargent, his nerves already jangling as a captain's nerves are likely to jangle when the last week of the season arrives, was in despair.

"First it's Gary," he groaned, "and then it's Marshall and now it's Hazard. Well, I'd like to know what's going to

happen next! We might as well hand the game to Hawthorne and save the trouble of playing!”

Poke, to whom these remarks were addressed just before the beginning of practice, was as gloomy as his captain. He had known nothing of Jim’s misfortune until a few minutes before, for Jim had not shown up at dinner hour and Poke had not glimpsed him since morning.

“Gee,” he muttered, “it’s all a surprise to me. I never suspected that Jim wasn’t getting on all right in class. You don’t suppose J. G. will let him back in a day or two?”

“I don’t know,” answered Sargent despondently. “What if he does? A fellow can’t drop training for two or three days on the eve of the big game and then play decently.”

“Jim could,” said Poke thoughtfully. “I wonder where the chump is. I suppose he isn’t here, eh?”

“I haven’t seen him.” Sargent shrugged his broad shoulders. “What’s more, I don’t want to. If a fellow doesn’t think enough of the success of his school to study a few silly lessons we’re better without him.”

“Oh, be good,” Poke chided. “It was only two years ago that you were off for a whole week for the same reason, Dun.”

“And I learned my lesson,” said the other gloomily.

“Well, I suppose Jim Hazard’s learning his,” replied Poke. “Only I wish he’d chosen some other time. How’s Parker going to fit?”

Sargent kicked viciously at a football that had rolled up to them. “Rotten!” he said.

Practice went badly that day, just as it's likely to on the Monday after a hard game, and there was a general air of discouragement about coach and players alike. The second team, grumbling over the loss of another lineman, smashed vengefully at their opponents and tied the score in the second half of the scrimmage. And so it stayed and the second credited themselves with what was virtually a victory. Gil, Poke and Jeffrey walked home together after practice and talked over Jim's predicament.

"Success," said Gil, "was too much for him."

"That's not fair," remonstrated Poke. "Jim got onto the team late and has had to learn a whole lot in a short time. Hang it, Gil, I haven't been doing any too well at studies, myself, and I've been playing football long enough to know the ropes. I don't wonder that Jim fell behind. The question now is can he catch up and square himself with the Office before Saturday?"

"Is it all studies or one or two?" asked Jeffrey.

Poke shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. Why didn't he say something to some of us? I noticed that he seemed rather down in the mouth, but I didn't suspect this. I thought he was just worried for fear he wouldn't make good at playing."

"Who do you suppose started the trouble?" asked Gil. "Who do you and Jim have, Jeff?"

"Hanks in Latin and history, Groff in math, Arroway in English, Lewellyn in French and Thurston in physics."

"Well, it might be 'Gruff,'" said Gil, "or it might be 'Boots.' ('Boots' was the popular name for Mr. Thurston.) It

isn't likely that Hanks had anything to do with it; nor Lewellyn. As for English, why, no fellow has trouble in that course."

"I'm not so sure about Nancy, though," said Jeffrey. "Ever since we turned him into a tyrant he's been pretty fussy about us having our lessons. But I think it was probably Groff that started the trouble. He gave Jim a calling-down in class last week."

"Gruff always was a tartar," grumbled Poke. "I never knew a mathematics instructor who wasn't."

"Well, the question is," observed Gil, "is there anything we can do to pull Jim out of his hole? There's five days yet before the game. Something might be done."

"I don't believe Johnny would let him play after being laid off," said Poke gloomily. "Dun's got a grouch against him, too."

"Well, the first thing to do is to find him," said Jeffrey. "I haven't seen him since physics."

"I suppose he's feeling so mean he's hiding out somewhere," Poke suggested. "I don't blame him for being cut up about it."

Jim, however, wasn't very far off when the trio entered the gate. He was sitting at the table in his room with his books spread before him looking disconsolately out of the window. "No more athletics, Hazard, until your marks are considerably better in all studies, Latin and mathematics especially," had been Mr. Gordon's ultimatum. Jim had spent the dinner hour sitting on a pile near the bridge, gazing into the water and wondering on the lack of gratitude displayed

by Mr. Hanks. For Mr. Gordon had distinctly said that it had been the Latin instructor who had made complaint. Jim was through with the team and wouldn't have shown up at training table for anything. Nor did he want to go home and face his chums at Sunnywood just then. Besides, he was much too disappointed and miserable to want anything to eat. Of course, he had reflected, it was all his own fault, but that knowledge didn't seem to make the situation any easier. He found a little satisfaction in calling Mr. Hanks names. It seemed to him that after the way they had come to Nancy's assistance with advice the least he could have done was to have been a little more lenient with Jim Hazard. He wished he had never gone in for football; wished he had never come to Crofton. Then the bell rang and he dragged himself back along the river to Academy Hall and a French recitation. After that there had been physics, and then, when most of the fellows were setting their faces toward the field, he had hurried home and shut himself in his room. His mother had sought entrance and he had put her off with the plea that he was busy studying, but as a matter of fact there had been very little studying done that afternoon. His thoughts simply refused to stay on his books. It was almost dark now in the room, and through the window the western sky was paling from orange to gray. He heard the gate click and then came the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Some one knocked imperatively at his door.

“Hello?” he growled.

“We want to come in, Jim.” It was Poke's voice. And the tone told Jim that Poke had heard.

“I'm working,” replied Jim, more gruffly.

“It’s time to quit. Open up, like a good fellow.”

“Too busy,” replied Jim. There was a whispered conference beyond the door and then footsteps died out along the hall. Jim felt more lonely than ever then and wished he had let them in. But pride kept him there behind the locked door until the supper bell rang, and then until Hope came up to find why he wasn’t down. Hope had to beg her hardest before she was admitted. Then Jim said he wasn’t hungry and wanted no supper. All he wanted was to be let alone. So Hope went out quietly, closing the door after her, and, being a rather wise young lady, prepared a tray. After she had taken her departure for the second time Jim sat and looked at the tray for a long time; to be exact, just as long as his courage lasted. Then he gave in and ate everything in sight. After that life didn’t look quite so dark, and when, presently, Poke came knocking at the door again, Jim bade him enter.

They talked it all over then, Gil and Jeffrey sort of happening in, and Poke was highly incensed at Mr. Hanks’ conduct.

“After what we did to help him!” he said disgustedly.

“He has only followed the advice we gave him,” observed Gil dryly. “What goes for one goes for all, Poke.”

“He hasn’t a grain of—of gratitude,” spluttered Poke. “And what’s more, I’d like to tell him so, too.”

“If you talk so loud you won’t have to,” said Jeffrey. “He will hear you now.”

“Let him! He’s the limit!”

“Stop calling names and let’s see what’s to be done,” Gil counseled. “Think you can catch up by Friday, Jim?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I can’t seem to get down to studying. I’ve been trying to all the afternoon.”

“Well, I can’t promise that Johnny will take you on again even if you get square with the Office,” said Gil, “but seems to me it’s worth trying. You get your books and go over to Jeff’s room. After awhile we’ll go over to-morrow’s stuff with you. Maybe between us we can coach you up, Jim. I’m not much of a Latin student myself, but Poke gets on pretty well in that; so does Jeff. As for math, why, I’ll do what I can for you there. What do you say?”

Jim thought a moment. He was still inclined to feel hurt and imposed on. But the offer was too good to be refused, and so,

“All right,” he muttered. “I’ll try it.”





Hope, being a rather wise young lady, prepared a tray.

Jim's showing in class the next day was not much better, but on Wednesday there was a marked improvement. Every night Gil, Poke and Jeffrey took him in hand and put him through his paces in mathematics and Latin. Jim was not stupid, and now that he had more time and constant encouragement he went ahead in good shape. If Mr. Hanks suspected the sudden coolness exhibited toward him by Jim and Poke he made no sign. Personally I don't believe that he gave it a thought. He had done what his duty required of him in Jim's case and that was all. That his action had cost Jim

his position on the football team and deprived the team of a good player he did not know. He went his way serenely unconscious of the trouble he had caused.

Meanwhile the team worked like Trojans every afternoon, the football enthusiasm and excitement grew to fever heat and Thursday dawned. Thursday was the last day of practice. The whole school marched to the field at four o'clock, cheering and singing. Even Jim allowed the others to persuade him to attend the final practice, and he and the rest of the Sunnywood, saving Mrs. Hazard, who had lost her interest in football, now that Jim no longer played, followed the procession, Hope wildly enthusiastic and attracting many admiring glances on the way.

There was nothing spectacular about practice that afternoon. After the preliminary work the rest of the time was spent in a hard signal drill and one fifteen-minute period of scrimmaging, the latter being halted for minutes at a time while one or other of the coaches, who had grown quite numerous by now, criticized and lectured, begged and threatened. Around the field, outside the ropes which were already in place for Saturday's game, all Crofton cheered and sang. Then the final whistle sounded, the second team gathered together and cheered the first, the first tiredly returned the compliment and players, coaches and onlookers trailed back to the gymnasium.

Poke, a faded blanket hanging about him, found Jim on the way out.

"I spoke to Sargent about you, Jim," he panted, "and he says if you can get square with the Office by Saturday he's willing to give you a chance in the game if he can. That is, of

course, if Johnny says so. I haven't talked with him yet, but I will. Of course, Jim, you won't get in at the beginning. You see, Parker's doing pretty well and it wouldn't be fair to throw him out at the last moment, would it? Besides, you might be a bit stale, you know."

Jim nodded gloomily. "I know. Much obliged to you, Poke, but I guess it's no use. I don't even know that J. G. will give me leave to play yet. I'm pretty square with Groff, but Nancy doesn't love me much, I guess. Don't bother about speaking to Johnny. It's all right."

"Oh, I'll see Johnny," responded Poke heartily. "You do the best you can and go and have a talk with J. G. to-morrow. Why, supposing you don't get in for the whole game, Jim, even a couple of periods is better than nothing at all. And you'll get your C if you only play two minutes. Buck up and never say die, old chap!"

Jim nodded again and Poke, clapping him on the shoulder, hurried into the gymnasium. They were cheering again now, cheering each member of the team in turn, from Sargent down to the latest member, Parker. There was no cheer for Hazard, though. Jim had got parted from Hope and Jeffrey, and presently he edged his way out of the gathering and strode home alone and forlorn through the twilight.

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# CHAPTER XXIII

## FRIDAY AND ILL-LUCK

“I think,” remarked Mr. Groff, the next morning, “that I could count on one hand the students who have studied their algebra. Wyman, Latham, Nutter, Hazard—if there is another I’d like to hear from him.”

Thirty-odd hands went up. Mr. Groff smiled gently and sorrowfully.

“If football plays may be worked out by algebra, I believe you. We will repeat to-day’s lesson to-morrow. I trust that as the football season will be over on Monday we may then return to our studies. Dismissed.”

Events transpired so rapidly that day that it is difficult to tell of them in order. First of all, though, just before noon it was known that Curtis, formerly of the second and now playing right tackle on the first team, had been summoned home because of sickness in the family. Consternation prevailed. At two o’clock Curtis went off, bag in hand, torn between anxiety and disappointment. Before that Duncan Sargent and Johnny Connell had spent a troubled hour trying to rearrange their line of battle. At dinner time Johnny pedaled along the road, jumped from his wheel in front of Sunnywood Cottage, rang the bell impatiently and demanded Jim.

“Look here, Hazard,” began Johnny when Jim reached the porch, napkin in hand, “we’ve lost Curtis. He’s gone home.

Some of his folks ill. We've got to have another lineman. There's no one on the second heavy enough to stand up in front of Hawthorne. Either you or Gary must come back. I don't care which, but the first of you to report to me, all square with the Office, starts the game to-morrow. I've seen Gary and told him the same thing. Now you have a talk with Mr. Gordon right away, understand? And let me know what he says. Come to me after school. If he lets you play you'll have to learn the new signals this evening. Now hurry up and finish your dinner, and don't stuff yourself. Then see Mr. Gordon at once."

"All right," replied Jim, his heart thumping hard at the thought of getting back to the team. "I'll see him in fifteen minutes. Where will I find you?"

"I'll be in the gym at two. Before that you'll find me around Academy somewhere. Get a move on. Tell Gordon you've *got* to play; tell him we've got to have you!"

And Johnny hurried through the gate, jumped on his bicycle and tore back to school. Fifteen minutes later Jim, breathless and anxious, ran up the steps of Academy Hall, hurried down the corridor and entered the Office.

"Can I see Mr. Gordon, please?"

"Mr. Gordon has gone to Boston," replied the secretary in his best official voice. "He left at twelve o'clock."

Jim's heart sank. "When will he be back, please, sir?" he asked. The secretary frowned.

"He is not in the habit of informing me very closely as to his plans. I believe, however, that he expects to return sometime to-morrow forenoon."

“To-morrow forenoon!” gasped Jim.

“Exactly.” The trouble in the boy’s face softened the secretary’s manner. “What was it you wanted? Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No, sir, thank you,” answered Jim. He went out, closed the heavy oak door softly and dragged his feet along the corridor. At the corner he drew aside and Brandon Gary hurried by him in the direction of the Office. Jim smiled wanly. Gary and he were in the same boat.

On the front steps he paused, hands thrust deep in his pockets and tried to think what to do. It still lacked twenty minutes of recitation time and he had the sunlit entrance to himself. But he could see no way out of his quandary. Only Mr. Gordon could lift the ban and Mr. Gordon had gone away. Jim seated himself on the top step and stared unseeingly at the wooded slope beyond the river. Footsteps echoed in the corridor and Brandon Gary came out. He saw Jim, hesitated and then leaned against the doorway. Jim looked up and their eyes met. Gary nodded.

“Hello,” said Jim morosely.

“Say, Hazard, you and I are both up against it, aren’t we?” said Gary. “I’d like to know what business J. G. has going away at a time like this.”

“I suppose to-morrow morning will be too late,” responded Jim discouragedly.

“Oh, he won’t be back until noon. He’ll come on the express that gets in just before dinner. Gee, Hazard, I’d like to play to-morrow! I’ve been thinking he might let me off before this, but he didn’t, and I made up my mind I wouldn’t

ask. But now it's serious. With Curtis gone the old team's up against it, I guess."

Jim nodded. Gary seated himself on the other side of the steps. Silence held them for a minute. Then Jim sighed.

"Well," he said, "I guess I'll look up Johnny and tell him. I promised to let him know."

"So did I," said Gary. "Look here, Hazard, do you think it would do any good to talk to Nancy?"

Jim considered a moment.

"I don't see what he could do, Gary."

"He might telegraph to J. G. and ask him to let us off."

"I don't believe Nancy would do that," replied Jim doubtfully. "Besides, we don't know where he is, do we?"

"Mrs. Gordon can tell us. Look here, will you go and see him with me? Maybe we can talk him into it. I'll apologize to him, if he wants me to. I'll do anything to help the team out."

"Yes, I'll go," answered Jim, brightening a little. "If we walk up the road maybe we'll meet him."

They sprang up and hurried off side by side, choosing the road instead of the wood path, since if they took the latter they might miss the instructor. They hadn't far to go. As they walked briskly around the curve behind the Principal's residence Mr. Hanks came into sight a few rods away.

"You start it," whispered Gary. "You know him better. I'll dig in afterwards."

“Mr. Hanks, may we speak to you a minute, sir?” asked Jim as the instructor met them. Mr. Hanks dropped the hand holding the book he had been reading and brought his thoughts back with a visible effort.

“Er—certainly.”

“Gary and I, sir, are both in wrong at the Office, as you know. Now Curtis has gone home and the team’s in a bad way for a fellow to take his place in the line. We’ve been to see Mr. Gordon and he’s gone away and may not be back until to-morrow noon. That will be too late, sir. Wouldn’t you be willing to say a good word for us, sir, to Mr. Gordon? Tell him we—we’re sorry and—and all that, and ask him if we can’t play to-morrow?”

Mr. Hanks looked blank. “I—I don’t quite understand,” he said. “You want me to intercede for you with Mr. Gordon?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Gary. “I guess I deserved what I got, Mr. Hanks, but I’ve been on probation for nearly a month now. I’m sorry for what I did and I—I beg pardon, sir, I wouldn’t have asked any favors for myself, sir, but the team’s in a rotten mess now that Curtis can’t play and it needs me badly, needs both of us.”

“I—I’m afraid, I don’t quite get your meaning about this—this team. What sort of a team is it, Gary?”

“Why, the football team, sir! To-morrow’s the big game of the season, you know; Hawthorne. And we’re going to get licked as sure as shooting if either Hazard or I don’t get back.”

“Am I to understand,” asked Mr. Hanks in puzzled tones, “that Mr. Gordon has forbidden you to play in the game?”



“Why, of course,” replied Gary a trifle impatiently. “I haven’t played since he put me on probation. And Hazard here had to give up last Monday. You can’t play if you don’t keep up with your studies.”

“Really! I didn’t know that. I fear I am not sufficiently conversant with the customs here. I understand, then, that you want to take part in this—this contest to-morrow. Is that it?”

“Yes, sir,” chorused Gary and Jim eagerly.

“Why—why—yes, I shall be glad to say a good word for you both. Your work in class has been very satisfactory since—since the occasion we both, I am sure, regret, Gary. As for Hazard, he seems to have taken hold earnestly with his studies of late. But—but if Mr. Gordon is away I don’t just see how—that is—”

“We thought you might send him a telegram,” said Gary, boldly. “Tell him we’re needed on the team and that you’re willing we should play and ask him to give us permission.”

“Do you think,” asked Mr. Hanks doubtfully, “I should be within my—er—authority? It—it has the appearance of interference with the Principal’s affairs.”

“No, sir, it would be all right. It’s been done lots of times. You see, Mr. Hanks, you had us punished and you have a right to ask for pardon. And, besides, sir, it isn’t just for us personally, it’s for the whole school! If we don’t play we’ll be licked by Hawthorne! And you don’t want that to happen!”

“Er—no, I suppose not. Naturally a victory is much to be desired. But—but a telegram? Wouldn’t a letter do?”

“He wouldn’t get it in time, sir. We’ll have to know right off; to-night or to-morrow morning at the latest. Please say you will, Mr. Hanks!”

“We-ell, yes, Gary, I’ll do as you ask. Now what is the address?”

“We don’t know yet, sir. We’ll ask Mrs. Gordon for it. If you will just write out the telegram now, sir, I’ll get the address and take the message down town right after school.”

“Very well. If you will accompany me to the hall I will—er—attend to it.”



**“We thought you might send him a telegram,” said Gary, boldly.**

At a few minutes before four o’clock Gary sent the message at the telegraph office in the village. Mrs. Gordon had willingly supplied her husband’s address in Boston. There was nothing to do now but wait. Johnny was far from

satisfied with events, but told Gary and Jim to report that evening and receive instructions in signals. Jim was a different boy now. At Sunnywood excitement reigned supreme. Supper was a very perfunctory meal, for every one was too busy listening for the footsteps of a messenger boy to eat much. Even Mr. Hanks, suddenly drawn into the swirl of school affairs, displayed a mild interest in events. At eight o'clock no reply had been received and Hope put forward the explanation that Mr. Gordon, who was stopping at an hotel, had gone out to dinner with friends.

“He will find the telegram when he gets back to the hotel this evening,” she declared cheerfully. “There’s no use getting worried, Jim. It will be all right. You see if it isn’t.”

Right or wrong, Jim was forced to leave the house at twenty minutes past eight and hurry to the locker rooms in the gymnasium, where Sargent, Johnny and Arnold, the quarter-back, were awaiting him and Gary. For a solid hour and ten minutes the two boys were coached in the new signals, and not until they were letter-perfect were they allowed to depart. By that time Jim’s head was in a whirl. He and Gary walked back together through the frosty darkness, discussing the chances of the telegram coming that night and speculating as to what its tenor would be when it did come.

“Like as not,” said Jim, who was tired and low-spirited by this time, “he will refuse to let us off.”

“I have a feeling it’s going to be all right,” answered Gary cheerfully. “Guess I’ll walk on to your place and see if it’s come.”

And it had. Hope met them at the door with the news and they went upstairs to Mr. Hanks' room. The instructor fumbled around on his desk and finally found the message. He handed it to Gary. Gary read it with a broad smile, that trailed away toward the end, and handed it to Jim. This was the message:

MR. ARTEMUS HANKS,  
CARE MRS. HAZARD, Crofton, Mass.

Gary's probation lifted. Please inform him.  
Hazard must pass examination in Latin before he  
can take part in athletics.

JOHN GORDON.

Jim reread the telegram and then laid it back on the desk. "That lets me out," he said quietly. "I'm glad you're all right, though, Gary. If you play they won't need me, anyway. Thank you, Mr. Hanks."

"You're very welcome, Jim. I—I regret that the result in your case is so disappointing."

Jim went down to the door with Gary and bade him good night. "Glad you can play, Gary," he said. "And I hope we win."

"We will if I can bring it about," replied Gary warmly. "I wish you were going in, too, though, Hazard." He hesitated a moment on the steps. "Thanks for helping me. Come and see me some time, will you?" At the gate he turned again. "Oh, Hazard, I say!"

"Yes?" replied Jim from the doorway.

“How about your rooms here? Haven’t got one I could have after Christmas recess, have you?”

“Yes, there’s one empty. It isn’t as good as—as the one you saw, Gary, but it’s not bad.”

“I’ll come around and have a look at it some day. Jones’s is the limit! Good night.”

“Good night,” answered Jim tiredly.

Then he went upstairs to face the sympathy of Gil and Poke and Jeffrey.

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# CHAPTER XXIV

## HAWTHORNE COMES TO CONQUER

The day of the Hawthorne game dawned cold and gray, with a chill breeze out of the east that held a tang of the ocean thirty miles away. Hawthorne came along, nearly two hundred strong, early in the forenoon and took possession of the village, taxing the capacities of the railroad restaurant and the various lunch rooms to the limit. At Sunnywood Gil and Poke, veterans though they were, showed unmistakable nervousness all the morning, and it took the required efforts of Jim and Jeffrey to amuse them. By eleven o'clock the sun had peeped for an instant through the gloom, promising better things for the afternoon. The football team dined at twelve that day, so at Sunnywood the dinner hour was set forward correspondingly. At one Gil and Poke, happy and cheerful now that the time of waiting was past, set off to the field.

“If you don't win, Poke Endicott,” called Hope from the porch as the boys started down the road, “I'll never speak to you again!”

“After that threat,” laughed Poke, “I shall simply eat 'em alive, Hope!”

The rest of the household, Jim, Jeffrey, Hope, Mrs. Hazard and Mr. Hanks started an hour later. Mr. Hanks, having had football thrust suddenly into his philosophy, displayed an

amazing interest and curiosity. “You see,” he confided to Mrs. Hazard, “I have never witnessed a game of football. This may seem strange to you, for my college was, I believe, very successful at the game. The fact is, however, that I never had time to attend the contests. I am really quite curious to see how the game is played. I think it must be—er—quite interesting.”

When the Sunnywood party arrived Hawthorne, looking in its black and orange like an army of young Princetonians, was on the gridiron warming up for the fray. Along the ropes on the other side of the field Hawthorne’s supporters were already shouting to the sky. The sun, still coy, broke through every few minutes and cast a pallid wash of gold over the sere turf. It was cold enough for rugs and heavy coats, and Hope was secretly pleased that she had managed to snuggle in between her mother and Mr. Hanks. Beyond Mrs. Hazard sat Jim with Jeffrey beside him. By a quarter to two the Crofton side of the field was three and four deep along the ropes and at ten minutes to the hour two things happened simultaneously; the Crofton eleven, brave and colorful in new uniforms of crimson and gray, trotted onto the field, and the sun burst through the murk in a sudden blaze of glory.

“That,” cried Hope ecstatically, “means that we shall win!”

Crofton took the field for practice, Gary, back in his togs once more, racing down the gridiron like a colt. A moment later Gil ran up and called to Jim across the rope.

“Come on and be our linesman, Jim. You see,” he continued as Jim ducked under the barrier and strode across the field with him, “you’ll be nearer things and can watch the



game a heap better. There's your partner in crime over there with the chain. Introduce yourself like a gentleman, shake hands and welcome him to the funeral. They've got a pretty husky set of men, haven't they? That's Gould, the little chap talking to Johnny. He's the man we've got to watch to-day. Gee, I wish you were playing, Jim!"

"So do I. Is Gould their quarter? He doesn't look such a wonder, does he?"

"Wait till you get a good look at his face. There's the whistle. Wish us luck, Jim!"

Jeffrey moved into the seat next to Mrs. Hazard, depositing an extra coat beside him so that Jim might have his place if he returned. Hawthorne spread herself over the west end of the field to receive the kick-off, Duncan Sargent patted the tee into shape, poised the ball and looked around him. "All ready, Hawthorne? All ready, Crofton?" questioned the referee. Both teams assented, the whistle blew, Sargent sent the ball spinning down the field and the game was on.

Crofton displayed her offensive ability at the start. Johnny had instructed the team to get the jump on Hawthorne in the first minute of play and carry her off her feet if possible. Arnold obeyed directions to the letter. From the first line-up, after the full-back had caught and carried the ball to his thirty-five yards, Poke Endicott tore off eighteen yards outside of tackle and began a rushing advance that took the ball to Hawthorne's fifteen-yard mark. Hawthorne stiffened as the play neared the goal line and Arnold tried a forward pass to Tearney, right end. This failed and the ball went to the Orange-and-Black. But on the very next play Hawthorne's left half fumbled and Benson, Crofton's full-back, dived into

the scramble and recovered the pigskin. Crofton's machine started up again and after three rushes Poke shot through and over the goal line for a well-earned touchdown. Sargent kicked goal.

The crimson-and-gray flags waved madly and three hundred voices cheered and yelled. In just five minutes Crofton had swept her opponent off her feet and scored six points! That was surely cause for rejoicing. Even Mrs. Hazard clapped her hands, and Mr. Hanks, just beginning to understand the scheme of things, beamed delightedly through his spectacles. As for Hope, why Hope was already breathless from screaming and trembling with excitement. Jeffrey, seeing more of the game than the others, better appreciated the *coup de main* that had put Crofton in the ascendancy at the very beginning of the battle. But he wondered whether the Crimson-and-Gray would show an equally good defense. That was the only scoring in the first period of fifteen minutes. Crofton suffered a penalty for holding shortly after the touchdown had been made, and later was set back for off-side. However, the loss of twenty yards had no effect on the final result, for neither side came near scoring, and the quarter ended with the ball in Crofton's possession on her rival's twenty-seven yards.

Hawthorne's chief mainstay was her quarter-back, Gould, a remarkable all-around player. A brainy general, a certain catcher of punts, a brilliant runner either in a broken field or an open and a clever manipulator of the forward pass, Crofton held him in great respect. Hawthorne's team was, in a manner, built around Gould, and in that lay whatever weakness it possessed. Johnny had coached his players for a fortnight to stop Gould, knowing that aside from his

performances Hawthorne had very little to offer in the matter of ground-gaining feats. And throughout the first period Gould failed to get away with anything. Crofton watched him as a cat watches a mouse and every move of his was smothered. One twenty-yard sprint around Tearney's end was the best he could do, while whenever he caught a punt in the backfield Tearney and Gil were down on him to stand him on his plucky little head the instant the ball was in his arms.

The second period began with Crofton in high feather. Benson and Smith, left half, each made short gains, and then Arnold tried a forward pass from Hawthorne's twenty-five yard mark. He threw too far, however, and the Orange-and-Black received the ball on its thirteen-yard line. Gould kicked, and, thanks to two holding penalties, Crofton was forced back into its own territory in the next few minutes. Then Arnold's punt went to Gould on his forty yards. With the first real flash of form he had shown, the little quarter-back tore off fifteen yards. From the center of the field and close to the side-line he made his first successful forward pass, a long, low throw along the edge of the field to his right end who caught the ball over his shoulder and ran to Crofton's thirty-four-yard line. A try at the line netted two yards. Then Gould again hurled the pigskin, this time selecting his left end for receiver and sending a low drive to him on Crofton's twenty-five-yard line. For a moment it looked as though Hawthorne would score there and then the runner sprinted to Crofton's eight-yard line before he was pulled down from behind. Across the field Hawthorne was wild with joy and two hundred of her loyal sons shouted and danced with delight. Then Hawthorne tried one rush and lost a yard. Crofton was now plainly over anxious and when, on

the next play, Gould sent his right half-back at the right wing on a delayed pass, Tearney was drawn in and the orange-and-black player simply romped across the line for a touchdown. From this Hawthorne's right end kicked a goal from a difficult angle and the score was tied.

Then, it seemed, that Hawthorne had found herself. Success breeds success. The Orange-and-Black took heart and after Crofton had kicked off again Gould ran the ball back thirty yards, eluding half the Crofton team, and placed it on her enemy's forty-five-yard line. Crofton's defense was now severely tested. Gould gave the ball to his half-backs and his full-back and twice Hawthorne made first down by short line plunges. The vulnerable spot in Crofton's defense was at left tackle where Parker, willing enough though he was, lacked experience and weight. On her twenty-five-yard line Crofton stiffened up and Gould tried a forward pass that proved illegal. A plunge at center gave the ball to Crofton, and Arnold punted on the first down. Gould caught the ball and was promptly laid on his back by Gil. A penalty for holding forced Hawthorne back to her thirty yards. Gould tried an end run that gained but seven yards and punted on the next down. Crofton made three yards through right tackle and then Arnold got off a beautiful forward pass to Gil, and the latter, by squirming and crowding, finally reached Hawthorne's twenty-yard line. Two rushes failed to gain much distance and Arnold dropped back to the thirty-yard line and, with every watcher holding his breath, drop-kicked the oval over the cross-bar. It was Crofton's turn to exult and exult she did, while from the opposite side of the gridiron Hawthorne hurled defiance. A moment later the first half ended, the score 9 to 6; Crofton ahead by three points.

Jim returned to his party on the seats and squeezed himself down beside Jeffrey.

“Isn’t it just glorious?” cried Hope, her cheeks crimson and her hair, loosened by the breeze, fluttering about her face.

“Glorious!” laughed her brother. “It’s jimmy!”

“Can we hold them, do you think?” asked Jeffrey.

Jim shook his head. “I don’t know. I heard Johnny tell Duncan Sargent a minute ago that he’d give a hundred dollars if the game were over. If Hawthorne pounded away at the left side of our line she could gain like anything. Parker’s doing the best he can but he can’t stop them. How do you like the game, Mr. Hanks?”

“Very much indeed. I—I find myself quite excited. Hope has been instructing me in the—er—fine points, but I fear she has found me a very stupid pupil.”

“Well, I don’t think I can give you more than a C,” laughed Hope. “And mama gets a D minus. Awhile ago she wanted to know why the tall man in the white sweater didn’t play harder!”

“Well, nobody told me he was the referee, or whatever he is,” declared Mrs. Hazard. “For my part I think I’d much prefer to be he.”

“Jim, I hope we just—just gobble them up this half,” said Hope.

“Gobble them up,” repeated Mr. Hanks. “Is that—er—a football term or do you use the phrase metaphorically?”

“She means eat ’em alive, sir,” laughed Jeffrey.

“We won’t do that,” said Jim with a shake of his head. “All we can hope to do is hold them where they are. Isn’t Gil playing a peach of a game? And Poke, too. Did you see him go through for that touchdown? He was like a human battering ram!”

“How’s Gary doing?” asked Jeffrey.

“Putting up a great game; playing a heap better than Sargent, I think. But I suppose that’s natural enough. Sargent’s captain and that always puts a chap off his game, they say. If I was that Hawthorne quarter I’d plug away at Parker and Sargent, and I’ll bet I’d make some bully gains.”

“They probably will this half,” said Jeffrey. “Their coach has probably seen just what you have. Somebody ought to tell Gould, too, that he is punting too low. He doesn’t give his ends a chance to get down the field. We’ve gained every time on exchange of kicks.”

At that moment a voice cried, “Hazard! Hazard! Is Hazard here?”

Jim jumped to his feet and answered. A substitute player in a much begrimed uniform ran up. “Johnny wants to see you at the gym,” he called. “Come right up.”

“What the dickens does he want?” muttered Jim. “Keep my seat for me, Jeff.”

He found Johnny in the midst of wild confusion. Rubbers were busy with strains and bruises, twenty fellows were talking at once. The close air of the locker-room was heavy

with the fumes of alcohol and liniment. Johnny was deep in conversation with captain and manager.

“You wanted to see me?” asked Jim, pushing his way through the crowd.

“Yes, I do! Look here, Hazard, where do you stand?”

“Stand?”

“Yes,” replied Johnny impatiently. “Isn’t there any way you can play this half?”

“I’m afraid not,” answered Jim. “Mr. Gordon wired that I’d have to take an exam before I could play.”

“You didn’t take it?”

“No, sir. There wasn’t any way to take it that I knew of.”

Johnny looked at Sargent questioningly. “You wouldn’t risk it, would you?” he asked in a low voice. Sargent shook his head.

“I’d be afraid to. J. G.’s a tartar about that sort of thing. Better try Needham.”

“All right.” Johnny nodded to Jim. “Sorry. Thought maybe you could manage somehow to help us out. Better not go against faculty, though.”

“I’m willing to risk it if you need me,” replied Jim quietly.

“I won’t have it,” said Sargent decisively. “You’d get fired as sure as fate, Hazard. Much obliged, just the same.”

“Time’s up!” called Johnny.

Jim walked back to the field despondently. If they had given him any encouragement, he told himself, he'd have risked J. G.'s displeasure and played. When he reached his seat Jeffrey asked:

“What was it, Jim?”

“Nothing much. Johnny thought maybe I could play in this half. They're taking Parker out. Needham's going in. He will be twice as bad as Parker, I guess.”

“Didn't Johnny know?”

“About me? I guess so. He seemed to think I might have taken an exam somehow. I didn't see how I could have, do you?”

Jeffrey shook his head. “No, I don't.” Jim glanced along to find Mr. Hanks peering interestedly through his spectacles.





**Jim takes his examination on the football field.**

“Do I understand, Jim,” he asked, “that you could play if you passed an examination?”

“Yes, sir, I suppose so. That’s what Mr. Gordon wired, you know.”

“Do they—er—need you, do you think?”

“They seem to think so,” answered Jim. “They want a fellow to take Parker’s place.”

“Well—well—” Mr. Hanks’ eyes snapped behind the thick lenses of his glasses—“do you think you could pass an examination now?”

“Now!” exclaimed Jim. “Why—why—do you mean—”

“I mean now!” repeated Mr. Hanks crisply.

“Yes, sir!”

“Then I’ll examine you, and if you pass—”

“Jeff,” cried Jim, as he jumped to his feet, “run over and tell Johnny to find some one to take my place with the line. Tell him I’m taking my exam! Tell him to get me some togs and I’ll be ready to play in—” He stopped and looked at Mr. Hanks.

“Ten minutes!” said the instructor.

Jeffrey seized his crutches and hobbled quickly away, while Mr. Hanks and Jim left their seats and disappeared behind the throng. At that minute the Crofton team trotted back on to the field and the cheering began again.

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## CHAPTER XXV

### JIM PASSES AN EXAMINATION

Instructed by its coach, Hawthorne began to hammer the right side of Crofton's line at the start. Gould hurled his backs time and again at Needham and at Captain Sargent. Gain after gain was made, Needham proving no harder to penetrate than Parker had been. Sargent was a tougher proposition, but even he was weakening. The first ten minutes of the third quarter was a rout for Crofton. From their forty yards to Crofton's twenty-five the Hawthorne players swept, and then, just when success seemed within their grasp, a fumble lost them the ball. Gil reeled off twelve yards through the center of the Hawthorne line and Smith and Benson plugged away for another down. Then Hawthorne held stubbornly and Arnold kicked. After that Hawthorne came back again, slowly but surely, banging the right guard and tackle positions for gain on gain, and now and then sending Gould on an end run for the sake of variety. Both teams were tiring now and the playing was slower. After a particularly vicious plunge at his position Sargent remained on the ground when the play was over and it was a good three minutes before he was on his feet again. Then Smith was hurt and a substitute went in for him. With three minutes of the third period remaining, the ball was down on Crofton's eighteen-yard line and the Crimson-and-Gray was almost in her last ditch. Had Gould chosen to try a goal from field there he might have tied the score, but the plucky little general was out for a victory and insisted on a touchdown.

He himself took the ball for a plunge through left tackle and got by for three yards. Then a delayed pass went wrong and there was seven to gain on the third down. There was a consultation and Gould fell back as though he meant to kick. Instead of that, however, he tried a short forward pass that went to Gil instead of to one of his own side and for the moment the advance was stayed. On the second down Arnold punted to midfield. For once Gould signaled a fair catch. Again Hawthorne took up the attack, but before she had made much headway the whistle sounded.

At that minute, over behind the row of Crofton sympathizers, Mr. Hanks nodded his head twice.

“You pass, Jim,” he said.

Johnny was looking anxiously about when Jim leapt over the rope.

“All right!” he cried. “There are your togs. Get into them.”

Jim, walled from gaze by a quickly formed ring of substitutes, changed quicker than ever he had in all his life. Out on the field the whistle blew and the two lines formed again. Finally Jim was ready and Johnny seized him by the arm and led him along the side-line.

“Wait till this play is over,” he said. “Then go in for Needham, and play low, Hazard. Get the jump on those fellows and break it up! Understand? *Break it up!* You can do it; any one with an ounce of ginger can. There you are! Scoot!”

And Jim scooted!

“Left tackle, sir!” he cried to the referee. That official nodded. Needham, panting and weak, yielded his headgear and walked off to receive his meed of cheering. Arnold thumped Jim on the back ecstatically.

“Oh, look who’s here!” he yelled shrilly. “Well, well, well! Now let’s stop ’em, Crofton!”

“Look out for the left half on a cross-buck,” whispered Sargent from between swollen lips. “And get low, Hazard. We’ve got to queer this, you know, we’ve got to do it!”

“All right,” answered Jim quietly, eyeing his antagonist shrewdly. “Here’s where we put ’em out of business.”

“Hello, son,” said the opposing tackle as the lines set again. “How’d they let you in? Watch out now, I’m coming through!”

But he didn’t. Jim beat him by a fraction of a second and had his shoulder against his stomach and was pushing him back before he knew what had happened. Sargent, having no longer to play two positions, braced wonderfully. In three plays Hawthorne discovered that the left of the opponent’s line was no longer a gateway. Learning that fact cost her the possession of the ball, for she missed her distance by a half-foot. Crofton hurled Gil at left guard and piled him through for four yards. Then came a mix-up in the signals in which Smith’s substitute hit Hawthorne’s line without the ball. Arnold kicked, but his leg was getting tired and Gould got the oval twenty yards down the field. On Crofton’s forty-yard mark Gould got off a short forward pass that took the team over two white lines. Then an end run netted nothing and again Gould kicked. Benson got under the ball, caught it,

dropped it, tried to recover it and was bowled aside by a Hawthorne forward who snuggled the pigskin beneath him on Crofton's twelve-yard line. Two plunges netted nothing and Gould fell back for a kick from the twenty-eight-yard line. Although half the Crofton team managed to break through and though Gil absolutely tipped the ball with his fingers, the oval flew fair and square across the bar and Hawthorne had tied the score!

With four minutes to play the teams took their places again. Sargent kicked off and Gil and Tearney again downed Gould in his tracks. A try at a forward pass failed and an on-side kick went out at Crofton's forty-five yards. The ball was brought in and then Arnold pegged at Hawthorne's center for twenty yards. A fumble by Gil was recovered by a Hawthorne end and again the Orange-and-Black started for the Crofton goal. But there was little time left now and along the side-lines every one was agreed that the contest would end in a tie. But football is always uncertain. When two minutes remained and the ball was in Hawthorne's possession on her opponent's thirty-eight yards, after two exchange of punts, Gould dashed off around Gil's end of the line and with good interference gained almost fifteen yards. Hawthorne took heart at this and her cheers boomed across the field. A plunge at right tackle gave her five more. Then the unexpected happened.

Gould dropped back into kicking position, but when the ball went to him he poised it and waited to find his end to make a forward pass. Jim, hurling himself past his opponent, dodged a half-back and before Gould could get the ball away, was upon him. Down went the little quarter and away bobbed the ball. An instant of wild scrambling and then [Jim](#) was on

his feet again, the ball was scooped up into his arms and he [was off with a clear field ahead](#). After him came the pursuit, foe and friend alike trailing backward along the gridiron. Past the middle of the field, and still well ahead, Jim dared turn in toward the center of the middle of the field. Then Gould, making what was his pluckiest effort of all that long, hard-fought game, almost reached him. But behind Gould was Gil, and Gil it was who, just as the quarter-back's arms stretched out to bring Jim to earth, threw himself in front of the enemy. Over they went together, rolling and kicking, and Jim, with his breath almost gone, staggered and fell across the goal line.

What if Andy LaGrange, called on to kick the goal in place of Sargent, did miss it by yards and yards? The game was won! For another year the Crimson-and-Gray held the championship!

Crofton was still shouting, still waving, still cavorting when LaGrange missed that goal, and still at it when, after two plays, the final whistle sounded. Hope, standing on the seat, flourished her flag wildly.

“Isn't it perfectly jimmy?” she cried.

Mr. Hanks, beaming satisfiedly through his spectacles, assented. “It is. We—er—as you would say, ‘gobbled them up’!”

“Didn't we just? And didn't Jim do beautifully, Mr. Hanks?”

Mr. Hanks nodded slowly. “Yes,” he replied, “your brother passed a very creditable, if somewhat hurried examination.”

THE END

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## **Transcriber's Notes:**

Printer's, punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

[The end of *Crofton Chums* by Ralph Henry Barbour]