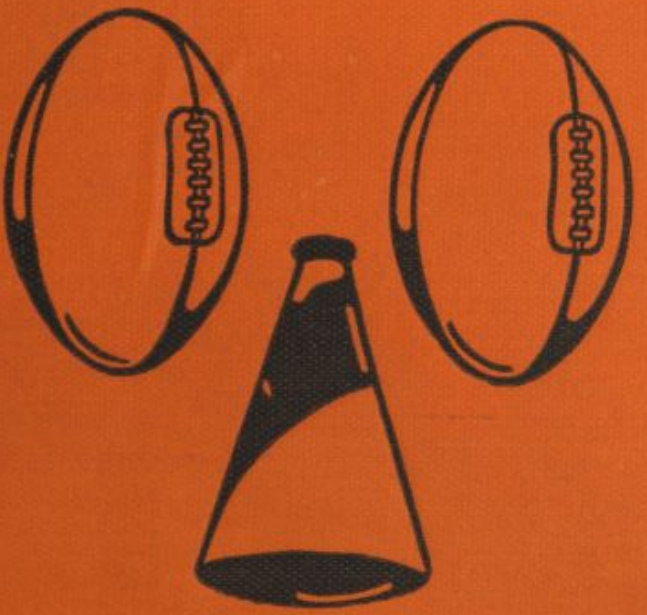
# LEFT HALF HARMON



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# LEFT HALF HARMON

**“Go out and play full-back as it should be played”**

# Left Half Harmon

BY

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

AUTHOR OF

LEFT END EDWARDS,
QUARTER-BACK BATES,
FULL-BACK FOSTER, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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# LEFT HALF HARMON

## CHAPTER I
## THE THREE GUARDSMEN

At a few minutes past three o'clock on a particularly warm afternoon in late September of last year three boys removed themselves and their luggage from the top of a Fifth Avenue stage in New York City and set forth eastward along Forty-second Street. Although decidedly dissimilar in looks and slightly dissimilar in build, they showed, nevertheless, a certain uniformity of carriage and action and, to a lesser degree, of attire. There was nothing strange in that, however, since, for the last two years, at least, they had spent nine months of the twelve in the same place, at the same pursuits and under the same discipline. The likeness of attire was less in material and color than in a certain tasteful avoidance of the extremes. Joe Myers and Martin Proctor wore blue serge and Bob Newhall a brownish-gray tweed, and in no case was the coat snugged in to the figure or adorned with a belt in conformity to the dictums of the Rochester school of sartorial art. Joe and Bob wore gray-and-gold ribbons about their straw hats, Martin a plain black. Each of the three carried a brown leather suitcase, and, had you looked closely, you would have discovered on each bag, amongst numerous other labels, a gray triangle bearing two A's in gold snuggled together in a pyramid-shaped monogram.

At Grand Central Station they crossed the street, showing a superb indifference to the traffic. The driver of a pumpkin-hued taxi-cab, whose countenance and manner of driving suggested that he had cut many notches in his steering-wheel, yielded to a momentary weakness and jammed on his emergency brake, thereby allowing the three boys to step calmly and unhurriedly from his path. They seemed not to have observed their danger, and yet, having gained the sidewalk unharmed, one of them turned and rewarded the taxi man with a grave wink which threw the latter into a state of apoplectic anger.

"Guess," observed Bob with a chuckle, "we spoiled his entire day!"

"Don't worry," responded Martin. "He'll kill enough to make up for losing us!"

Inside the station, they turned their steps toward the right and set their bags down near one of the ticket windows. "You get them, Joe," said Bob. "Here's mine." He proffered a five-dollar bill, but Joe waved it aside.

"I'll pay for them and you can settle on the train. I'll get all mixed up if you give me the money now." He took a rather fat wallet from an inner pocket of his coat and stepped into the line leading to the nearest wicket. The others moved their own suitcases and Joe's out of the way of the passers and settled themselves to wait. Martin compared the watch on his wrist with the station clock and yawned.

"Nearly twelve minutes yet," he observed.

Bob nodded. "What about parlor-car seats?" he asked.

"There aren't any on this train."

"Why not?"

Martin concealed another yawn with the back of a sunburned hand. "No parlor-car, dearie. You'll have to wait until five-ten for that, and it isn't worth it. I wouldn't wait in this Turkish bath another hour if they promised me a special train! Got anything to read in your bag?"

Bob was about to answer in the affirmative when a sudden shout from the ticket window interrupted and both boys looked across in time to see Joe clutch unsuccessfully at the arm of a man who, swinging away from the window, now started to run fast toward the nearest exit. Perhaps Bob or Martin, had he sensed instantly what was happening, might have intercepted the man, but he had a good start before either of them realized that the black object he slipped into a pocket as he ran was Joe's wallet, and so it was Joe himself who led the evidently futile chase, Joe shouting "*Stop him! Stop him!*" most lustily. Abandoning suitcases, Bob and Martin dashed after.

The thief showed skill born of experience as he dodged his way toward the door, avoiding a stout lady with two small children in tow one instant and side-stepping a bundle-laden messenger boy the next and scarcely lessening his speed. Joe had poorer luck, however, for, although he got safely past the stout lady by a miracle of dexterity, he came a cropper a stride beyond and went down in a shower of parcels!

By now the waiting-room was in wild confusion. Cries of "Thief! Thief!" filled the air; those about the entrance were trying hard to get out of the way and those at a distance were striving madly to reach the scene. Station policemen hurriedly joined the pursuit, but their quarry was already on the

threshold of freedom when a new actor made his appearance in the drama. Just as the thief swung toward the doors something shot through space, there was a crashing thud, a surprised grunt and the chase was over!

A boy of seventeen unwrapped his arms from the legs of the motionless form on the floor, arose to his feet, dusted his clothes and looked somewhat embarrassedly into the faces of the throng that had already surrounded him. A gray-coated officer pushed his way into the center of the circle, gave a quick, inquiring glance at the boy and leaned over the figure on the floor.

"He's all right. Hit his head when he went down. Give a hand with him, Conlon, and we'll get him to one side. You come along, sir, till I get the rights of it." A brother policeman aiding, the thief, now showing signs of consciousness, was lifted to one side of the entrance. By that time Joe and his companions had worked their way to the front and Joe quickly told his story.

"Grabbed your pocketbook, did he?" asked the first policeman. "Let's see has he got it. Sure, he has! Is this it? Hold on now, not so fast! What's your name?"

Martin whispered swiftly in Joe's ear, "Myers Joseph," answered Joe after a brief hesitation.

"And where do you live?"

"Philadelphia."

"Philadelphia, eh? What about making a charge against this feller?"

“I don’t see how I can,” answered Joe. “My train leaves in five minutes.”

“Never mind the charge,” broke in a new voice. “I know this duck and I’ll look after him. On your feet, Clancey!”

A clean-shaven, lean-jawed man had pushed his way through the crowd, and now he gripped the thief’s coat lapels and fairly lifted him to his feet.

“Detective,” whispered a man behind Martin.

“This guy’s wanted,” continued the newcomer. “Stand up, you’re all right, ‘Spike.’ Put up your hands.” The captive, finding that playing possum would not do, obeyed meekly and the detective ran quick and practised fingers over him. Then a pair of handcuffs were slipped onto the man’s wrists and he was being whisked through the throng.

“Here’s your pocketbook, young man,” said the policeman importantly. “You’d not have it saving this feller here.” He indicated the boy whose football tactics had ended the chase and who, hemmed in by the crowd, was now striving to get away. “Better see if the contents is correct.”

Joe had tried to express gratitude to the other boy, examine his pocketbook and listen to the low-voiced urging of Martin all at the same time, with the result that he was decidedly incoherent and confused. Martin was tugging at his arm and telling him that they had but five minutes to get the train. The policeman came to his rescue.

“Move on now! Move on!” he commanded sternly, pushing right and left. “Stop blocking up this passage!”

The throng dissolved almost as quickly as it had formed. Somehow, Joe and Martin, hurrying back to where Bob had returned to guard the suitcases, found themselves close to the boy who had made the capture. He had rescued his luggage, a large kit-bag, from a bystander and, too, was seeking the ticket window.

"I'm much obliged to you," said Joe. "I guess he'd have got away if you hadn't stopped him."

The stranger nodded. "Yes, he was in quite a hurry. I'd just come in when I saw him swing around the corner and knew that something was up. I wasn't sure he was the man they were after, but I thought I'd better take a chance."

"I'm certainly glad you did," replied Joe emphatically. "It was mighty nice of you."

"Not at all." The boy smiled and stepped into line at a window. Joe followed while Martin and Bob, bags in hand, stood ready to run for the gate. A moment later the stranger turned and found Joe behind him.

"I can get a ticket for Lakeville here, can't I?" he asked.

"Yes. Are you a Kenly fellow?"

"Not yet. I'm just entering. Are you going there?"

"No, I'm Alton." The other looked slightly puzzled and so Joe explained. "Alton Academy, you know. That's twelve miles this side of Lakeville. We play you fellows at football and baseball and so on."

"Oh, I see. Maybe I'll see you again some time then."

The purchaser in front hurried away and he turned from Joe to the ticket seller. A minute or so later, when the three were

walking along the platform, they again overtook the stranger, and Joe said smilingly: “If you’re looking for a parlor car, there isn’t one.”

“Thanks, I thought maybe it was up ahead.”

“Not on this train. Better come and sit with us and we’ll turn a seat over.”

Fortunately for that project, the car they entered was no more than half filled, and soon, having stowed their suitcases in the rack overhead, they settled down, Bob and Martin taking the front seat and Joe and the stranger the other, the latter placing his kit-bag, which was too large for the rack, between his feet. As soon as they were settled the train started.

“By the way,” said Joe, “my name’s Myers, and this is Newhall and this is Proctor.”

The other acknowledged the introductions with a smile. “Very glad to know you,” he said. “My name’s Harmon.”

“Joe says you’re going to Kenly,” observed Bob, trying hard to keep pity out of his voice.

“Yes, I’m just entering.” There was an embarrassed silence after that while the train rumbled its way through the tunnel. Then:

“Well, everyone to his taste,” murmured Martin. Joe frowned rebukingly and Martin grinned back.

“Guess you chaps don’t think much of Kenly,” said Harmon with a laugh.

“Oh, don’t pay any attention to Mart,” said Bob. “Kenly’s all right, I guess. She licked us last year, 14 to 6. Beat us at

hockey, too."

"That's right," agreed Martin, though it evidently hurt him. "Kenly's going to have a good team this year, too, I hear."

"Is she?" Harmon didn't seem vastly interested.

"Guess you play football, don't you?" asked Bob. "A fellow back there said you made a corking tackle of that thief!"

"I've played some."

Joe started. "Did you say your name was Harmon?" he demanded almost brusquely. The other nodded inquiringly. "Did you go to Schuyler High last year?" pursued Joe. Harmon nodded again. Joe shot a meaningful look at Bob and Martin. Bob answered with a slow wink, but Martin looked puzzled. Joe relapsed into thoughtful silence, and conversation ceased for a minute or two. When the train emerged from the tunnel, however, Joe settled himself further into his corner, which enabled him to see his seat companion without turning his head so far, and asked: "If it isn't too personal, Harmon, how did you happen to decide on Kenly Hall?"

Harmon looked the least bit surprised, but he answered unhesitatingly. "My brother was going to Kenly," he explained. "Then he decided he'd quit school and join the Navy. So I just thought I might as well go where he'd started for. Guess that was the way it happened. I don't really know much about the place. Dare say, if I'd heard of your school first I'd have gone there."

"Gee, I wish you had!" said Joe in heartfelt tones.

Harmon viewed him bewilderedly. Then he laughed with a suggestion of embarrassment. “Thanks,” he murmured. “Guess your school isn’t missing much, though.” He turned his gaze and busied himself with getting his ticket ready for the conductor. Bob, opposite, viewed him with flattering attention. He saw a boy of apparently seventeen years, well if not heavily built, with clean-cut features, quiet gray-blue eyes and brown hair. He was not particularly good-looking, but his somewhat serious and self-confident expression would have brought a second glance from anyone. Then, too, when he smiled he looked very likable. Bob’s thought was, as he turned his gaze away: “Thinks well of himself, but doesn’t put on any airs. Doesn’t do much talking, but thinks a lot. Looks like he’d be mighty shifty on his feet and pretty hard to stop if he once got started.”

When the conductor had taken their tickets and gone on, Bob said: “I suppose you’ll be going out for the Kenly team, Harmon.”

“I think I’ll have to try for it, but I guess I won’t stand much of a show.” Harmon smiled deprecatingly.

Bob frowned slightly. It was all right, he reflected, to be modest, but there was no sense in being a humbug! Joe laughed. “Oh, I dare say you’ll get by,” he said, faintly ironic. After a moment he added lightly: “If they turn you down, come over to us. I’ll promise you a place!”

Harmon smiled politely, and Bob leaned across to him. “Better take him up, Harmon,” he said. “Joe’s our captain, you know.”

Harmon looked with slightly more interest at Joe. “Really?” he asked. “I’ll have to remember your offer then.”

But the joking tone in his voice indicated that he wasn't taking the suggestion very seriously. While his head was turned, Bob surreptitiously reversed the leather tag that hung from the handle of the kit-bag at his feet. Behind the little celluloid window the named stared out distinctly:

Gordon Edward Harmon.

"Yes, we're both guards," Joe was saying when Bob sank back in his seat again. "In fact, all three of us are, for that's Proctor's position, too."

"Oh, I'm only a sub," disclaimed Martin, "one of the 'also-rans.'"

"'The Three Guardsmen,'" laughed Harmon. "I guess I read about you fellows once."

"Wasn't there a fourth one?" asked Bob. "I never could see why that fellow Dumas called the story 'The Three Guardsmen.'"

"That's right," said Martin. "D'Artagnan made the fourth."

"Maybe D'Artagnan was a back," suggested Joe, chuckling.

"Guess he was quarter-back," said Martin, "for he usually ran the game!"

Bob shifted his feet and stretched. "Guess I'll walk through and see if any of the fellows are aboard," he said. "Want to come along, Joe?"

"Sure." Joe arose with alacrity and joined Bob in the aisle, and they made their way forward. Martin, left alone with the new acquaintance, gazed wistfully after his friends and then, with a sigh, put his feet where Bob had sat and prepared to

make polite conversation. Martin Proctor was seventeen, rather thick-set and had a round face from which a pair of brown eyes viewed the world with quizzical good humor. Just now the good humor was slightly obscured, for he wasn't keen on entertaining this strange youth who preferred Kenly Hall to Alton Academy. However, conversation progressed well enough, once started, and presently Martin forgot his hostility.

Meanwhile Joe and Bob had come to anchor in a seat in the smoking car ahead. "It's he, all right," announced Bob triumphantly.

Joe nodded. "Yes, I guess it is."

"I don't guess; I know! Wasn't Harmon's name Gordon Harmon?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the name on his bag. I looked when he was talking to you. Gordon Edward Harmon's his name!"

Joe shrugged. "I wonder how they got him, Bob," he said.

"You heard his yarn, didn't you?" replied Bob, chuckling.

"Yes, and I believed it—not! I'd just like to know how Kenly gets all the good players every year. They pretend they don't go after them, but it's mighty funny! There's a heap more than luck in it! Here we are needing a good full-back like Harmon the worst way, and he has to select Kenly. It makes you sick!"

"Reckon he's as good as the papers made him out?"

"Of course he is! Great Scott, you can't get away from his record, Bob! Why, last year every one of the New York

papers that I saw made him first-choice full-back on the All-Scholastic Team. The man was a wonder, considering his age. Funny thing is that he doesn't look it. I mean he doesn't look as heavy as they said he was. He does look pretty good, though."

"Y-yes, but I'd never take him for a plunger. Doesn't seem to be the right build. Looks more like a fellow who'd be fast and shifty outside tackles."

"Yes," Joe agreed, "but you can't always tell by appearances. Anyway, I wish to goodness we were getting him instead of Kenly!"

Bob nodded and there ensued a long silence during which Joe looked frowningly from the window and Bob gazed fixedly at his hands. It was Bob who spoke first. "Say, Joe," he asked slowly, "you don't suppose we could persuade him to come to Alton instead, do you?"

Joe sniffed. "He looks like a fellow you could persuade, doesn't he?" he asked sarcastically. "Besides, what are you going to offer him? And if we did make him an offer we'd get in wrong with faculty. The Athletic Committee wouldn't back us up, either."

"Reckon Kenly's making it easy for him?" asked Bob doubtfully.

"I don't know. Looks like it, doesn't it? I know they pretend to have clean hands and all that, and they surely do enough blowing, but it's mighty funny they're always getting star players from the high schools and smaller prep schools. Look at last year. If they hadn't had Greene and Powers they'd never have licked us; and Greene had just entered from

that school up in Rhode Island and Powers was fresh from Stamford High. Oh, well, there's no use grouching. Let's go back."

"Wait a moment." Bob still stared at his hands and spoke thoughtfully. "Seems to me this chap's too good to lose, Joe, without making an effort."

"Sure he is," growled the captain. "What's on your mind?"

Bob looked around guardedly. "I'll tell you," he said.

# CHAPTER II
# KIDNAPPED!

"Well, our station's next," said Bob some forty minutes later. "Better change your mind, Harmon, and get off with us."

Harmon answered his laugh and shook his head. "I'd like to, but I'm booked up the line. Is Lakeville the next stop?"

"Second after Alton," answered Joe as he lifted the suitcases from the rack and handed them to Bob. "Look us up when you come over with the team some time. You'll find Newhall and me in Lykes and Proctor in Haylow." There was a warning blast from the locomotive and the train came slowly to a stop. The three Altonians shook hands with Harmon, taking, as it seemed, much time in the ceremony. Outside, on the station platform, a score or more of boys were hurrying toward the carriage stand. Bob had encumbered himself with Joe's bag and his own and it was he who led the way to the door at last, Martin following with his suitcase and Joe still making his farewell to Harmon. Then the cry of "All aboard!" came and Joe gave Harmon's hand a final clasp, picked up the kit-bag and fled down the aisle.

For a brief instant Harmon thought his sight had tricked him, but a swift glance showed that his bag was missing and in another instant he was on his feet and calling to Joe. "Hold on there! that's my bag you've got!" he shouted. But Joe evidently didn't hear, for he was through the door and down the steps before Harmon started after him. When Harmon

reached the car platform Joe and his two companions were fifty feet distant, seeking a conveyance. The train was still motionless, although, further back, a trainman was holding his hand aloft. There was but one thing to do and Harmon did it. In an instant he was pushing his way through the luggage-laden throng about the carriages.

"You've got my bag, Myers," he announced breathlessly as he laid hands on it.

Joe looked around in surprise, still holding tight to the bag. "What did you say?" he asked blankly.

Harmon tugged desperately. "My bag! Let go, will you? I'll lose my train!"

Joe looked at the bag. "Well, what do you know?" he gasped. "By Jove, I *am* sorry, Harmon! I thought it was mine! Who's got my bag? Here!" He thrust the bag at Harmon so energetically that the latter failed to grasp it. "Better hurry, old man! Your train's going!"

"Thanks!" Harmon turned and started back. He would doubtlessly have swung himself to the platform of the rear car had it not been for Bob's awkwardness. Bob was terribly sorry and apologetic about it afterwards! Just as Harmon was free of the group, a clear path across the station platform before him, Bob stepped directly in front of him! Of course you know what happened then. Harmon dodged to the right and at the same instant Bob stepped to the left, which didn't better the situation the least bit. Bob looked most embarrassed, and you could see that he felt just like kicking himself. In fact, he assured them all afterwards that he felt that way. But meanwhile he made the mistake of stepping

back to the right just as Harmon made a final despairing effort to get past him on that side, and again they collided!

Harmon set his bag down then, smiled rather a sickly smile and watched the train become smaller and smaller in the distance. Bob fairly revelled in self-reproach and abjected himself to such an extent that a heart of stone would have been moved to forgiveness. And as Harmon's heart wasn't made of any such material he gave his attention to assuring Bob that it didn't really matter. Joe and Martin were most regretful, and Joe tried to take all the blame. But Bob wouldn't allow that.

"No, if I hadn't got in the way, like a blamed idiot, he'd have got it all right," he insisted. "You see, I thought he was coming over here and so I stepped over there—like this—and he came the other way and I tried to side-step him and—"

"It doesn't matter a bit," Harmon assured them, smiling quite cheerfully now. "There'll be another train pretty soon."

"That's so!" Evidently the idea hadn't occurred to Bob before and he welcomed it with enthusiasm. "Sure, there's a train about six o'clock, fellows!"

"Well, that's nearly two hours," said Joe. "Let's put our bags inside and find some seats. No use standing up all that time."

"Oh, but you chaps needn't wait around," declared Harmon. "I wouldn't think of having you do that!"

The three looked at each other inquiringly. Then: "Can't let you wait around here all alone," said Joe decidedly; "not after making you lose your train like that. Bob, you and Martin go on up and take my bag with you, and I'll stay here."

"Why not all go up?" asked Martin. "Harmon's got nearly two hours to wait. He might as well come along and be comfortable."

"That's the ticket!" exclaimed Bob. "Leave your bag here and ride up to school with us, Harmon. We'll show you around a bit and then we'll go up to my room or Joe's and rest until about a quarter of an hour before your train goes. And I'll ride back with you!"

Harmon hesitated. "That's very nice of you," he said warmly, "but I wouldn't want to miss another one. Maybe I'd better just sit in the station and—"

"You'd die of the heat down here in this hole," said Joe. "Come on! We'll find out when the train is due, leave your bag with the agent and beat it."

Harmon allowed himself to be persuaded. After all, it was decidedly warm there at the station, and an hour and fifty-one minutes—which was what the agent made it—would be a long time to wait. And Joe insisted on waiting with him, too, and that was the strongest argument presented, for Joe and his friends had treated him mighty nicely and Harmon felt that it would be a pretty low piece of business to make any of them suffer. So off they all went presently in one of the tumble-down, creaky carriages that still competed with the few taxi-cabs at Alton, and Harmon proved himself a thoroughly good sport by appearing to forget the regrettable incident and displaying much interest in the town and, finally, the school.

The others pointed out all points of interest on the way: the Congregational Church that had the tallest steeple in New England—none of them could remember the exact figures, however—the Town Hall and Library, the rival motion

picture theaters, the Common with the statue of Nathan Hale in the center—at least Bob and Martin thought it was Nathan Hale and Joe was stoutly of the opinion that it was Lafayette—the ornate residence of Alton's richest and most influential citizen, a brownstone monstrosity almost entirely surrounded by conservatories from which a very few sun-baked ferns and palms peered forth, and so on to the school entrance on Academy Street.

"On the left," proclaimed Bob from the front seat, forming a megaphone of his hands, "the modest dwelling is the Principal's residence. Behind it—you can see it now—is Haylow Hall. Next on the right you see Lykes, especially interesting as the home of Mr. Robert Newhall, one of Alton's most prominent undergraduates. In the center of the row is Academy Hall. Directly back of it, if you look quick, you will discern Lawrence Hall. Lawrence is the most popular of all the buildings. It contains the dining hall. Further to the right is Upton, and then Borden. Behind Borden is the Carey Gymnasium. The building by itself at the further end of the Green is Memorial Hall. We are now entering the school grounds. Let me draw your attention to the German howitzer on the left, and, on the right, one of our own 25's. Both guns saw service in the World War and were presented to the school—"

"Oh, dry up, Bob!" protested Joe. "Harmon will think you're an idiot."

"Reckon he thinks so already," responded Bob sadly, "after the way I acted at the station. Jimmy, you can dump us at Lykes."

The driver of the vehicle nodded silently and turned to the left in front of Academy Hall, from the steps of which a group of boys shouted greetings, boisterous and even ribald, to the occupants of the carriage. Harmon found himself wishing that he had been included in that jovial and noisy welcome. This was his first sight of a preparatory school and he liked what he saw and hoped that Kenly would prove as attractive. Alton Academy occupied a tract of ground on the edge of the town apparently two blocks square. From the wide, well-shaded street the Green rose at a gentle grade to the row of brick and limestone buildings that fronted it, a smooth expanse of fine turf intersected by gravel roads and paths and shaded here and there by giant elms. There was no fence nor wall and from a little distance the Green seemed to run, right and left, into the flower-filled yards of the houses across the side streets. There was something very dignified, very lovely about the place, and the visitor's heart warmed to it. He wanted to ask if Kenly was like this, but incipient loyalty to the school of his choice restrained him. Then the carriage pulled up at a dormitory building and everyone piled out. There was a squabble between Joe and Martin over who was to pay, Martin harking back to a similar occasion last spring when he had paid the bill and Joe's memory failing him utterly. Harmon made a motion toward his pocket, but Bob edged him toward the steps.

"Leave it to them," he chuckled. "Mart always pays in the end."

This statement was speedily proved true and Joe and Bob conducted Harmon along the first floor corridor to the end of the building and there opened a door and ushered him into a cool, shadowy study. Martin had gone on to Haylow to

dispose of his bag, but, before Harmon had got well settled in a comfortable chair where the faint afternoon breeze reached him from one of the windows, he was back.

They sat there awhile and talked. Once Joe and Bob absented themselves on some casual excuse that took them out of the room, and once Martin and Joe were gone for several minutes, but always one of the number was left to entertain the visitor. Harmon liked the study and the small alcove-bedroom that led from it and was much interested in the pictures and trophies that adorned the walls and the tops of the chiffoniers. Joe explained that his roommate, Don Harris, had not arrived and would probably not get there until the next morning. Harris came from Ohio and faculty allowed those who lived at a distance a day's grace.

"I suppose you have to be at Kenly tonight, don't you, Harmon?" he asked.

"I believe so. I understand that school begins in the morning. What time is it getting to be? I don't want to miss that next train."

"Oh, there's an hour and twenty minutes yet," said Bob. "How'd you like to take a look around? It doesn't seem quite so warm now."

The visitor was agreeable to the suggestion and the quartette set forth. They went first to Lawrence Hall and saw the big dining-room that accommodated four hundred. The forty-odd tables were already draped in white and set for supper, and, with the afternoon sunlight slanting through the high windows, the silent hall looked very pleasant. They climbed the stairs to the visitors' gallery and then descended other stairs and looked into the big kitchen through the oval

windows in the swinging doors. Then came the athletic field, where several of the tennis courts were already in use, and Harmon heard tales of hard-fought battles on gridiron and diamond and track, battles that were invariably won by Alton. He wanted to ask if Kenly had never scored a victory there, but he refrained.

They poked their heads into Upton and Borden Halls, the latter dormitory reserved for the freshman students, and then crossed to the gymnasium. Harmon could honestly and unaffectedly praise that, for it was just about the last cry in buildings of its kind. He looked longingly at the big swimming pool with its clear green water showing the white tiled floor below, and Bob regretted that there wasn't time for a swim. Then came Memorial Hall, where the sunlight shone through the many-hued windows and cast wonderful designs of red and blue and gold and green on the marble tablets across the silent nave. The library was here, a book-lined, galleried hall whose arched ceiling was upheld by dark oak beams. Two great tables, each on a deep-crimson rug, stood at either end, and many comfortable chairs surrounded them. There was a stone fireplace with monstrous andirons, and the school seal above it. Facing the corridor door, a clock, set in the gallery railing, ticked loudly in the silence. Upstairs was the Auditorium on one side of the corridor, a large, many-windowed hall with a platform at one end, while, across from it, were four recitation rooms.

Outside again, they followed a path that took them under the shade of the elms back to Academy Hall. There was not much time left now, and after viewing the school offices from a respectful distance and peering into some of the classrooms on the first and second floors, Joe decided that their guest had

better be thinking of getting back to the station. “You mustn’t go, though, without seeing the view from the cupola,” he added. “There’s plenty of time for that.”

Harmon looked doubtfully at his watch, but Joe was already leading the way toward a narrow flight of stairs at the end of the second-floor corridor and Bob had an urging grip on his shoulder.

“That’s right,” agreed Martin. “Everyone ought to see the view from the cupola. It—it’s one of the sights!” Perhaps he meant to add further persuasion, but a fit of coughing overtook him. Bob, over Harmon’s head, scowled ferociously back at him.

The stairway ended at a closed door and the procession halted while Joe shot back a heavy iron bolt and drew the portal outward. Then he stepped politely aside and the visitor entered a small apartment some eight feet square. It was quite bare and lighted by four tiny panes set one in each wall and just under the ceiling. Harmon’s gaze went questing for the stairs or ladder by which he was to reach the cupola, but there was nothing of that sort in sight. Indeed, there was no egress save by the door through which he had entered! He was on the point of calling polite attention to the fact when a sound behind him brought him quickly about. The sound had been made by the door as it closed, and while he stared, open-mouthed, a second sound reached him, and this time it was made by the bolt sliding harshly into place!

# CHAPTER III
# HELD BY THE ENEMY

A long moment of deep silence followed.

Harmon stared bewilderedly at the closed door. Of course, it was some sort of a silly joke, but it seemed so peculiarly at variance with all that had gone before that he couldn't understand. Wondering, he waited for the door to reopen. Instead, however, came the voice of Joe Myers, subdued by the intervening portal but recognizable and distinct.

"Harmon, can you hear me?"

"Yes!"

"That's good. Now listen. It's too late to make that train, old man, and there isn't another until about nine o'clock. That would get you to Lakeville pretty late and faculty wouldn't like it, I guess. What's the use of starting the term with a black eye, eh? No sense in getting in wrong right at the start, is there? It's a sort of a handicap to a fellow—"

"There's plenty of time to get the train if you'll open that door," replied Harmon impatiently. "What's the big idea, anyway? If it's a joke it's a mighty poor one, Myers!"

"It isn't a joke," came the answer. "You see, it's like this. We hate to see a nice, decent chap like you spoiling his whole —er—his whole future career by making a mistake, Harmon. And you will make a mistake if you go to Kenly. Why, you say yourself that you're not certain of making the team over there! What sort of a school is it, I ask you, where a fellow of

your—your caliber has to get out and dig for a place on the eleven? Now, here you're sure of it. All you'll have to do will be just put your name down at the office. Of course we don't know what arrangement Kenly has agreed to make, and maybe we can't promise all they have. You see, faculty here's sort of—sort of strait-laced. But I'll promise you this much, anyhow, Harmon: Your first quarter won't cost you a cent. We'll see to that. All you need is to—"

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about!" protested the prisoner. "Open that door and let me out, or—or—"

"Now don't get peevish, *please*!" begged Joe. "Honest, we're doing this for your own good, Harmon. Just think a minute and you'll see it. We're offering you a quarter's tuition and the full-back position on the team. If Kenly can do any better, why, all I've got to say is that they're a lot of low-down cheats, after the way they talk over there!"

"But I'm not going to Kenly to play football!" exploded Harmon. "I don't care if I never play! I'm going to—to *learn*!"

"Sure! Well, that's another reason why you ought to stay here. Everyone knows that Alton's a better school for learning things than Kenly. You don't have to take my word for that, either. It's universally accepted. Why, gosh-ding-it, we've got a bigger faculty and a better one than Kenly ever thought of having! And we've got better buildings and a better plant generally! Why, say, you can learn more here in a month than you could learn at Kenly in a year!"

"Are you fellows crazy?" demanded Harmon. "Let me out or I'll kick the door down!"

"You can't do that," replied Joe equably. "It's two inches thick. And no one will hear you, no matter how much row you make, for there won't be anyone on the next floor until tomorrow morning. So you might just as well get rid of that idea, old man. We need you right here at Alton, and we mean to have you. And you'll be mighty glad some day that we did this. Of course, right now you're feeling a bit peeved with us, but you'll get over that when you calm down and think things over. Maybe you'd like to consider awhile. There's no hurry. How about it?"

There was no reply for a long moment. Then Harmon said in quite a placid voice: "Will you please tell me again what you're getting at? Maybe I'm kind of dense, but it's all hodgepodge to me!"

"Sure! Here it is in a nutshell. We need you on the team—"

"What team?" asked Harmon patiently.

"Why, the football team, man! We need you a heap more than Kenly does, and we're willing to do anything in reason to get you. Maybe you won't mind telling us what Kenly has offered you."

"For what?"

"Why, for—well, for going there."

"Kenly hasn't offered me anything. Why should she? I'm entering like anyone else."

There was a silence. Then Joe's voice came again, somewhat more chilly. "All right. It's your affair. If you don't want to tell, you needn't, but we wouldn't ever speak of it. I suppose you mean that we haven't offered enough. Well, I'll

have a talk with some of the fellows and see what they say. You understand, Harmon, that whatever we do we do without faculty getting wise. And, of course, whatever money we managed to raise would come out of a few pockets, because lots of fellows wouldn't approve, and lots of 'em haven't got the money. For that matter, I don't altogether approve myself! If it was almost anyone else I'd tell him to go to thunder! Still, if Kenly can do this sort of thing and get away with it __"

"Would you very much mind listening to me a minute?" begged the boy on the other side of the door. "Kenly isn't paying me money for going there. She hasn't offered to and I wouldn't take it in any case. Is that plain?"

"Y-yes," replied Joe, "but—"

"Then why not stay here instead?" asked Bob eagerly. "You're sure of making the team and it won't cost you a cent for tuition the first quarter! We've got everything Kenly has and a lot she hasn't. Besides, it's a heap nicer playing on a winning team than on a losing one, and we're going to lick Kenly this fall as sure as shooting!"

"That train's gone, hasn't it?" asked Harmon quietly.

"Just leaving the station," answered Joe in relieved tones.

"Then you might as well let me out of here."

"That means you've decided to stay?"

"No, it doesn't. I haven't any idea of staying. But—"

"You think it over," advised Joe. "We'll be back in half an hour or so. What have you got against Alton, anyway?"

“Nothing against the place,” answered Harmon, “but a lot against the crazy idiots in it! Open the door and stop acting the fool!”

There was a low-voiced conference outside and then Joe announced: “We’ll let you think it over awhile, old man. There’s no use getting mad about it. We’re doing this for your sake as much as for our own, and you’d ought to see that. That offer still holds good, remember. Maybe I’ll be able to better it when I come back. I’ll see—”

“Look here, you—you crazy loon! Do you mean that you’re going around telling the fellows that you’ve got me locked up here?”

“Well, I’ve got to tell them something, haven’t I? I can’t say—”

“Don’t say anything! I don’t want your money! I wouldn’t stay here if you paid me a thousand dollars a week!”

“You mean that?” asked Joe dubiously.

“Of course I mean it! Now let me out!”

“Well, leaving money out of it altogether, Harmon, and all on the level: What’s the matter with going to school here instead of over there?”

“Why should I?” asked Harmon exasperatedly. “I started for Kenly and that’s where I’m going. You can keep me here all night and all tomorrow and all—”

“But that’s not reasonable,” protested Joe mildly. “Here we’re giving you a chance to—”

“Reasonable! Ha! Do you call what you’re doing reasonable?”

“It may not look so, but it sure is! Hang it, man, we’re trying to save you from making a perfectly rotten mistake! Look here, have you paid your first quarter over there?”

“I have not, but that’s got nothing to do with it.”

“Of course it has!” returned Joe in triumph. “You aren’t a student there until you’ve registered and paid your first quarter bill! All right! Just pay your money here, old man: the tuition’s the same! What do you say?”

“*No!*”

“Well, I’ve said all I can think of,” replied Joe despondently. “You think it over awhile, Harmon. There’s no hurry: you can register any time this evening before nine and tomorrow morning before twelve. We’ll be back after a bit. You sort of think it over, eh?”

“I don’t need to think it over! I haven’t the least idea of doing anything so crazy! Come on and open the door now, and let’s have an end to this—this silly nonsense!”

But there was no reply. Instead, there came to the captive the faint sounds of retreating footsteps. He listened suspiciously. Perhaps it was only a hoax, perhaps Myers was still outside. After a minute he called.

“That doesn’t fool me!” he said. “I know you’re still there!”

But there was no answer, and when another minute had gone by he realized that they had actually gone and left him there alone!

# CHAPTER IV
# HARMON COMES TO TERMS

The prisoner thrust his hands in his pockets and made a frowning survey of his cell. From the point of view of his captors it appeared an ideal apartment. There was but one door and that was firmly locked and plainly invulnerable. The windows were beyond reach and, in any case, too small to crawl through, and what had once been an opening admitting to the belfry above had been long since boarded up. He kicked tentatively at the door and might just as well have kicked at any other place in the four surrounding walls so far as results were concerned. There was no furniture, not even a chair. Listening, he heard nothing save, once, the distant shriek of a locomotive.

After a few minutes of hopeless inspection of the place, Harmon shrugged his shoulders and seated himself on the floor with his back to the wall and acted on Joe Myers' advice to think it over. But thinking it over didn't enlighten him much. That his captors really meant business was evident, but why they had gone to so much trouble was a mystery. None of the reasons they had given seemed sufficient. That they had proceeded to such lengths merely to save him from the direful fate of becoming a Kenly fellow was too improbable. That they seriously wanted his services on the football team was just as unlikely: or, at least, it was unlikely that they would value those services highly enough to indulge in kidnapping as a means of securing them! No, there was something else, something that didn't appear. Perhaps Kenly

had once enticed an Alton boy away and Alton was trying to get even. Or perhaps—

There was a sound beyond the door and Harmon stopped conjecturing and listened. A voice came to him that was not Joe Myers'.

"I say, Harmon!"

"Hello!" The prisoner tried to keep his tone hostile, but he wasn't altogether successful, for he was becoming tired of isolation and silence.

"Joe sent me up to read something out of the school catalogue to you. Can you hear all right?"

"Yes, go ahead and read," answered Harmon scornfully.

And Martin Proctor, sitting on the top step outside, read. He read at some length, too. He started in with a list of Alton Academy graduates who had attained national prominence. The list included a Secretary of State, two Chief Justices, three United States Senators, numerous congressmen and a wealth of smaller fry. When he had finished Harmon inquired: "No Presidents or Vice-Presidents?"

"I haven't graduated yet," replied Martin cheerfully. "Now I'll read you something from the report of the Board of Overseers."

"What for? What do I care about the Board of Overseers?"

"Joe told me to."

When that was done Martin paused for comment, got none and began a flattering description of the Carey Gymnasium. Inside, Harmon leaned against the wall and grinned. A brief summary of scholarships and a statement to the effect that the

Academy roster of year before last represented thirty-nine states of the Union, two territories and three foreign countries completed the programme.

"Joe said I was to ask you if you'd made up your mind," announced Martin then.

"You tell him to give you an evening paper to read the next time," replied Harmon.

"Say, why don't you?" asked Martin persuasively. "Honest, Harmon, you'll like Alton a heap better than Kenly."

"You go back and ask Myers what he's going to say to the faculty when I get out of here and tell my story!"

"Oh, we've got that fixed all right," chuckled Martin. "Well, I've got to be getting down to supper."

"Hold on there! When do I eat?"

"I don't know. You see, if we opened the door to give you anything you might try to get out!"

"You think so, do you?" asked Harmon grimly. "Well, you've got more sense than I thought you had! How long does supper run?"

"Until seven. It's ten minutes past six now."

"Listen, Porter—"

"Proctor's my name, old chap."

"Proctor, then. Look here, now. If you'll open that door and let me out I'll keep quiet about this. You can tell the others that—that I asked to see that catalogue and that you went to hand it in and I knocked you down."

“Yes, and they’d believe it, wouldn’t they?” asked Martin scornfully. “Think of something better, please! Besides, I’m just as much interested in saving you from your career of crime as they are, Harmon. Why, I’d never forgive myself if I left one turn unstoned! We’re trying to save you from yourself, old chap!”

“You’d much better be thinking about saving yourselves,” answered Harmon, laughing.

“Did you laugh then?” called Martin eagerly.

“Sure. It struck me as funny. You’ll see the joke later.”

“I’ll send Joe up. He said if you sounded like you were in a good temper—”

The lessening sounds of footsteps hurrying down the stairs finished the sentence and Harmon chuckled. After all, it *was* funny, the whole thing; and he might as well laugh as frown. When it came right down to brass tacks there was no very good reason why he shouldn’t change his allegiance to Alton Academy. At the present moment it meant just as much to him as Kenly did: more in fact, for he had seen Alton and hadn’t seen Kenly. And he liked what he had seen. It might very well be that Kenly wasn’t nearly so good a school, even discounting the biased boastings of his captors. Of course his parents expected him to go to Kenly, and so did his brother, but the choice had been his and he saw no reason why he hadn’t a perfectly good right to choose over. It wasn’t too late, for he had not registered at Kenly and the first quarter’s tuition was still in his pocket. Possibly his brother would be slightly peeved—

He paused just there in his cogitating and comprehension slowly illumined his face. He jumped to his feet, thrust his hands into his pockets and grinned broadly at space. “That’s it!” he murmured blissfully. “I’ll bet that’s it!” He withdrew his hands, snapped his fingers and turned on a heel. After that he gave way to a spasm of laughter that left him, with streaming eyes, clinging weakly to the door frame. “Oh, gosh!” he gurgled. “It’s too good! Wait—wait till they find out—about it!” That thought sent him off again and he finally subsided on the floor, his laughter dying away in chuckles and his eyes fairly streaming.

Recovering from his levity, he reviewed the events of the afternoon from the time of his first meeting with the “Three Guardsmen.” He recalled Joe Myers’ surprising interest in his name and the fact that he had attended Schuyler High School, and how insistently the subject of football had held the conversation. Everything coincided with his theory. He understood now why the three boys had connived at getting off the train and keeping him off, why they had gone to so much trouble to show him about the school and, finally, why they had made him a prisoner. And he understood why he had been offered a quarter’s tuition and a place on the team! It was all very simple—and excruciatingly funny! And he was about to give way to laughter again when footsteps once more broke the silence. He pulled his face straight and waited. It was Joe this time.

“Hello, in there! Harmon!”

“Yes?”

“I’ve talked to four or five of the fellows and I guess it’s all right. We’ll manage to dig up enough so it won’t cost you

anything for tuition the first half of the year. How does that sound?"

"Rotten, Myers. I don't think I'd care to go to a school where they do that sort of thing."

"*What?* But you were going to Kenly!" sputtered Joe.

"I told you Kenly hadn't offered me money."

"Yes, but— Look here, Harmon, is that straight, man to man?"

"Absolutely."

"Gosh!" There was a long silence beyond the door. Then: "Well, I don't understand," said Joe helplessly. "How did you happen to decide on Kenly?"

"I told you once."

"Yes, that's so, but I thought you were just—just talking. Well, I don't see why you shouldn't be willing to stay here then, Harmon. If you aren't getting anything from them, what's the big idea? You're sure of a place on the team here and—and if you should change your mind you could have a half-term free of cost. Mind, I'd a heap rather you didn't change it, because I don't like that sort of thing any better than you say you do. We never have paid any fellow for playing on an Alton team and I don't want to begin now. Besides, if faculty ever found out about it—Zowie!"

"Well, I don't want any favors, thanks. But suppose I did decide to stay here, Myers—"

"Sure! That's the talk!"

"Wait a minute! First thing of all, do I get any supper?"

“You bet you do! Five minutes after you say the word I’ll have you hitched up to a swell meal!”

“Well, what about a room? I’d want to be decently fixed that way, you know. Entering late like this I suppose I’d have to take the leavings, eh?”

“Listen! We’ve got a swell room waiting for you. The fellow that was going in with Mart isn’t coming at all and I’ve asked the secretary to hold it open until tomorrow morning. It’s a corking room; nice big study with three windows and a fine view; on the front of Haylow; big alcove; furniture nearly new and everything!”

“Sounds pretty fair,” commented Harmon. “Maybe I wouldn’t like this fellow Proctor, though: or maybe he wouldn’t like me.”

“Rot! Everyone likes Mart, and he’s bound to like you. If he doesn’t I’ll knock him into the middle of next Sunday! You’ll get on together great!”

“We-ell,” said Harmon unenthusiastically, “maybe. And it’s certain that I’m to make the team?”

“You bet it is!” laughed Joe. “Just as long as you can stand on your feet and play football you’re sure of a job!”

“Suppose I’m not as good as you seem to think I am?”

“I’ll risk that,” chuckled Joe.

“How about the coach, though?”

“Johnny? Don’t worry about him. He will be just as tickled as I am to get you! What do you say, old man? It’s getting pretty close to seven o’clock.”

"All right, I'll agree! Open the door!"

"No tricks? You're not meaning to get out and then say I misunderstood you or something?"

"No tricks, Myers, I give you my word!"

The bolt shot back protestingly, the door swung open and Joe's delighted countenance was revealed. "Gee, I'm glad, Harmon!" he exclaimed. "Shake!" Harmon shook. He, too, was smiling, but his smile was not so guileless.

"You win, Myers," he said. "Now lead me to that supper!"

"Come on! We'll feed first and then you can register. I haven't had anything myself yet." They sped down the stairs and across empty, twilighted corridors and finally to the cool outdoors. "I didn't tell any of the fellows where you were," Joe explained as he guided Harmon around the building toward Lawrence Hall. "I just said that I was in touch with you. Here we are. It's sort of late, but I guess there's plenty left. I'll take you to my table tonight and tomorrow we'll see if there's a place there you can have regularly."

Both boys were much too hungry to waste breath on conversation, and the meal proceeded almost in silence. There was plenty to eat and Harmon did full justice to it. When they had finished Joe took him in tow again and they went back to Academy Hall and turned to the left on the first floor and passed through a door whose ground-glass pane bore the inscription: "Office—Walk In." What happened was very simple. At a desk Harmon was introduced to a tall, lean gentleman whose name was Mr. Wharton. The secretary shook hands politely and scrutinized the applicant through a pair of strong glasses. Then he gave him a card and a pen and

Harmon wrote on the dotted lines, going to some pains to conceal the writing from Joe. The latter, however, had no thought of looking. Then a sum of money changed hands, the secretary filled out a receipt for it, Harmon produced a certificate from the principal of the Schuyler High School and the interview ended with a long sigh of relief from Joe.

"That's done," he said as they reached the corridor again. "Now I'll take you up to your room."

Haylow Hall was the last building at the left of the Green. Joe pushed his way through a group of boys on the stone steps and Harmon followed, conscious that he was being viewed with a good deal of interest by the loungers. Joe, too, noticed the fact, for he chuckled, as they started up the stairs: "Guess some of those fellows recognized you, from the way they stared!" There, however, Joe was wrong. The interest had been only such as would have been accorded to any fellow under such circumstances. For Joe was unaware of the glow of triumph that shone from his countenance as he guided his companion into the dormitory!

In Number 16 Martin Proctor was unpacking a trunk when Joe and Harmon entered. Martin looked questioningly from the latter to Joe, a doubtful grin on his face.

"It's all right," announced Joe gayly. "He's registered, Mart! Where's Bob?"

"Over at the room, I guess. He brought the bag and lit out. Say, Harmon, I'm mighty glad about this. And—and I hope you don't hold it against us for what we did. It was sort of rough stuff, but—"

“Not at all,” answered Harmon calmly. “It’s quite all right. Guess I ought to feel flattered instead of sore, anyway. Myers says I’m to room here with you.”

“That’s right. It’s a pretty fair room, Harmon. Better than lots of ’em, anyway. You might take your pick of the beds in there. It doesn’t matter to me which I have.”

“Thanks.” Harmon gravely inspected the curtained alcove and decided on the left-hand bed. Perhaps the fact that Martin’s pajamas lay there had something to do with the decision. Martin blinked but stood the blow heroically and tried to forget that the right-hand bed had a weak spring. At that moment Harmon caught sight of his kit-bag on the floor and pointed at it in surprise.

“Isn’t that mine?” he asked. “How did get here?”

“Bob brought it up from the station a few minutes ago,” explained Martin.

“You fellows must have been pretty certain of having your way!” marveled the owner of the bag.

Joe nodded soberly. “We had to be,” he said grimly. “Once we had started, we had to go through with it, Harmon.”

“But suppose I hadn’t given in! Suppose I’d gone to the principal here and told him that you fellows had kidnapped me and locked me up in a room?”

Joe smiled gently. “No chance of that, old man. If you hadn’t decided to stay with us by midnight we’d have taken you back to the station and put you on the twelve-twenty train.”

“Hm! And I—er—I wouldn’t have had anything to say?”

“No.” Joe shook his head. “There’d have been three of us anyway; maybe four; and we’d have fixed you so you couldn’t talk much.”

Harmon smiled. “Still, afterwards I could have talked. I could have come back, or written a letter and spilled the beans.”

“Yes, you could have done that, but we argued that once away from here you’d get over your grouch and forget it. Besides, a chap doesn’t want to look foolish.”

“That’s so,” agreed Harmon, and he repeated it more emphatically in the next breath. “It is uncomfortable, isn’t it?” The arrival of Bob Newhall made a response by Joe unnecessary, although the latter wondered just a little over Harmon’s expression and the inflection of his voice. Bob gave a shout of triumph and joy when he saw Harmon.

“A brand from the burning!” he exclaimed. “This is great! I just knew you’d see reason, Harmon! Say, I’m tickled to death!”

“Well, don’t upset the table,” warned Martin. “Let’s sit down, fellows. This has been sort of a strenuous day. Try the big chair, Harmon. By the way, as we’re going to see a good deal of each other we might as well get used to real names. Mine’s Martin, but I’m generally called Mart.”

“But never Smart,” interpolated Bob.

Harmon smiled at the pleasantry. “And I’m usually called Will and never Way,” he said.

Martin looked puzzled. For that matter, so did the others.

“You mean folks call you Will?” asked Martin, doubtfully.

“Yes. Short for Willard.”

“Oh! Willard’s your middle name. I see. Well—”

“Hold on!” exclaimed Bob. “I thought your middle name was Edward!”

“No, my middle name is Kane. Willard is my first name.” Harmon explained politely and smilingly. Joe’s jaw began to drop slowly.

“*What!*” cried Bob. “Aren’t you Gordon Harmon, the fellow who played full-back last year for Schuyler High?”

Harmon shook his head gently. “Oh, no, that’s my brother,” he said.

A deep silence fell. Bob stared at Joe and Joe stared at Martin and all three stared at Harmon. And the latter met their looks with an amused smile. When the silence threatened to continue forever Bob gave an audible gulp and blurted wildly:

“But I saw the name on your bag! It’s there now! ‘Gordon Edward Harmon!’”

“Oh,” replied Harmon gently, “that isn’t my bag. I borrowed it from my brother.”

# CHAPTER V
# THE WRONG BOY

Another silence ensued, broken at last by a groan from Bob.

"Then you're not—you don't—"

"There's evidently been a mistake," said Willard regretfully. "Still, of course it doesn't much matter whether my name's Willard or Gordon, does it? As Shakespeare says, 'What's in a name?'"

"I never could stand that fellow Shakespeare," muttered Bob. Joe was still staring across the table at Willard in a strange fascination. Martin's countenance was gradually assuming a broad grin. Willard went on brightly and cheerfully.

"What I couldn't understand was why you chaps were so anxious to have me here. Just at first, naturally, I was a bit peevish at being locked up, but when I came to think it over, like you told me to, I realized that your wanting me to stay was a compliment. It wasn't as if I was of some consequence, as if I was a football player or an athlete or something like that. You fellows just took a liking to me and couldn't bear to see me go anywhere else. When I realized that I didn't feel as if I could disappoint you!"

"Oh, shut up," pleaded Joe miserably.

Willard evidently didn't hear him. "And then promising me a position on the football team and getting me a nice room

and arranging to pay my tuition—”

“No, by gosh!” exploded Joe. “You don’t come that, Harmon! That’s off! You hear me?”

**“You don’t come that, Harmon! That’s off! You hear me?”**

“What do you mean?” asked Willard aggrievedly. “Didn’t you say you’d fix it so I wouldn’t have to pay any tuition for the first half of the year?”

“No matter what I said,” retorted Joe wildly. “It’s off!”

“But—but you promised me a place on the team, Myers! You can’t go back on that!”

“Can’t I?” asked Joe grimly. “You told me you were Gordon Harmon—”

“I beg your pardon,” denied Willard firmly. “I didn’t tell you that. You—you must have seen that label on my bag!”

“Never mind! I thought you were Gordon Harmon. We all did. That’s why we wanted you here. That’s why we thought Kenly had made promises and why we offered to see you through the half-year. Now, by gosh, you aren’t Harmon at all!”

“But it wasn’t my fault you made the mistake! And awhile back when I said that maybe I wasn’t as much of a football player as you thought I was you said you’d risk it. Why, my main reason for agreeing to stay here was your promising me I could play football!”

“That’s right, Joe,” said Martin. “You did promise him that.”

Joe turned scowlingly and found Martin’s face red with repressed laughter. “What’s the matter with you?” he growled. “Hang it, it’s no laughing matter! If this chump thinks I’m going to stick him on the team—”

“Oh, take a tumble, Joe!” gurgled Martin. “Can’t you see Harmon’s stringing you? Oh, gee!” And Martin gave way to

uncontrolled laughter.

Joe looked at Willard searchingly, a somewhat forced smile on his face. “That’s right?” he asked doubtfully.

Willard nodded, his gray-blue eyes twinkling merrily.

“I hope you choke!” said Joe. But the wish was followed by a deep sigh of relief.

“Doesn’t it seem fair enough,” laughed Willard, “for me to have my joke after you’ve had yours?”

“Sure!” agreed Martin. “He who laughs last laughs best!”

“What I want to know,” declared Bob earnestly, “is where that brother of yours is! Has Kenly got him?”

“No, he’s entered the Navy. I told you, didn’t I? He has always wanted to, but dad wouldn’t stand for it. And a couple of months ago Gordon just lit out. He meant to go to Kenly, if he went anywhere, and that’s why I decided on Kenly. I thought one of us might as well go there!”

“Well,” said Joe, “I guess the laugh’s on us, all right! I—I suppose you mean to stay here?”

“Surely! I’m entered now, you know. Besides, I like the place very well, probably quite as well as I’d have liked Kenly. And then being sure of a place on the football team here—”

“Have a heart!” groaned Joe. “Look here, have you ever played football at all?”

“A little. I got into a couple of games last year.”

“Where did you play?” asked Joe.

"Left half."

Joe shook his head. "No good," he muttered. "We've got more half-backs than we can use. What we need is a corking good full-back; and a couple of linemen." He viewed Willard despondently. "I thought you looked pretty light for a full-back."

"Me, too," sighed Bob. "I couldn't quite picture you smashing through a line like Gordon Harmon did!"

"No, Gordon's four inches bigger all around than I am, and he weighs nearly thirty pounds more."

"Too bad for a fellow like that to waste himself in the Navy," mourned Joe. "Look here, Harmon, I'll tell you what I'll do. I can't promise you a place, old man: you must see that yourself: but I'll see that you get every chance to make good."

Willard laughed softly. "Well, I won't hold you to the agreement, Myers, under the circumstances. In fact, I'd rather you didn't show me any favor. I'll probably have a stab at the team, but I shan't be heartbroken if I don't make it. In any case, I'd rather stand on my own feet. Much obliged, just the same."

"Well, that's decent of you," muttered Joe relievedly. "But of course I want to do anything I can to help. Guess we got you here under false pretenses, sort of, and it's up to us to—to—"

"Oh, no, you didn't," Willard assured him. "I saw what was up before I consented. At first I thought you were all just crazy. Then I remembered how you had asked my name and if I'd come from Schuyler High and understood. You chaps

pulled a neat trick down there at the station. I'll say that. I didn't even suspect that you meant me to lose that train."

Joe nodded joylessly. "That was Bob's idea. The poor simp saw the name on your bag and fell for it!"

"So did you when I told you," retorted Bob resentfully. "Any fellow would have been fooled!"

"Seems to me," said Martin, "it's up to us to apologize to Harmon. If anyone has a right to be peeved it's he."

"Guess that's right, too," replied Joe. "I'm sorry, Harmon. Hope you'll—er—overlook the way we treated you and—and everything."

"Same here," said Bob. "Of course, we didn't know—"

"I'll apologize, too, for my part in the affair," said Martin, "but I'm not going to pretend that I'm sorry, for I'm not. It was a lot of fun while it lasted, and even if we didn't capture a football star we did Kenly out of a mighty decent sort of a chap!"

"Hear! Hear!" laughed Joe. "Mart's right. Harmon, we welcome you to our midst, and we trust that you will never regret your decision to—er—to—"

"Join the gang," ended Martin, jumping up. "Fellows, the occasion demands a celebration!" He went to his partly unpacked trunk and dug out a tin cracker box which he placed triumphantly on the table. "And here's the wherewithal!" A generous section of a chocolate layer-cake and many doughnuts came to light and were hailed with acclaim.

"Wait a sec!" said Bob. "We've got some ginger-ale. I'll fetch it. Keep 'em off the cake till I get back, Mart!"

“I’ll do my best,” Martin assured him, “but you’d better hurry. I know that gleam in Joe’s eye of old!”

Bob made what was probably a record trip to Lykes Hall and return, arriving anxious and breathless and laden with four bottles of ginger-ale. Then Martin cut the cake in four equal wedges, doled out the doughnuts and bade them “Go to it!” For a minute or two conversation was taboo, and then Bob held his bottle aloft and, speaking somewhat thickly, offered a toast.

“Gentlemen, I give you Mr. Willard Harmon, the brand plucked from the burning, the lamb saved from the slaughter, the—the—”

“The innocent victim of a deep-dyed plot!” supplied Martin.

“The full-back who was only a half!” cried Joe.

“The gold brick!” laughed Willard.

“Charge your glasses, gentlemen! To the—the Brand!” And Bob drank deeply, with mellow gurgles.

“The Brand!” chanted Joe and Martin, and followed the example.

Afterwards they reviewed the afternoon’s events in the utmost good humor and with frequent laughter. Martin’s account of sitting on the step outside the door and reading choice bits of the school catalogue to the prisoner was especially amusing, and Willard revived the laughter when he supplemented gravely: “It was that bit about the open plumbing in the gymnasium that decided me! I couldn’t resist that!”

When, finally, Bob and Joe had taken themselves off and the roommates were preparing for bed, Martin said: “Look here, what about your trunk?”

Willard shook his head ruefully. “It’s at Lakeville by now, I suppose, and I’m likely to run short of shirts before I get it. I’ve got only one in my bag.”

“You can wear mine, I guess,” answered Martin. “Better telephone to the station the first thing in the morning and get the agent to have them send it back.”

“Maybe the quickest way would be to go over and get it myself,” suggested the other.

“No you don’t! You stay right here! We went to too much trouble to get you to let you go over there and forget to come back!”

“No fear,” laughed Willard. “I’ve paid my money here and I’ll have to stick now! Honest, Proctor, is Alton a better school than Kenly?”

Martin paused in the act of disrobing and looked gravely judicial. “Well, we like to say it is,” he answered cautiously.

“Is it bigger?”

“Not much. They usually have a few less students.”

“But the faculty here is better?”

“Hm: well, I wouldn’t go so far as to claim that. Maybe it used to be, but Kenly enlarged hers a couple of years ago.”

“I see. How about athletics: football and baseball and so on? Do we usually beat Kenly?”

"Oh, I reckon it's about a stand-off. One year we win at football and she wins at baseball. Or we win at both and she gets the track championship and the hockey series. Call it fifty-fifty."

"Well, then, what about the—the buildings and location and all that?"

"No comparison as to location."

"Oh, Alton's got the best of it there, eh?"

"Alton?" said Martin contemptuously. "I should say not! Why, this place is stuck right down in the village, you might say. Kenly's got about thirty acres of land on the side of a hill: trees and brooks and fields—why, say, she's got four gridirons and four diamonds and a quarter-mile running track and a regular flock of tennis courts!"

"Sounds good," commented Willard. "What about the buildings over there?"

"They're all right, too. Guess they're as good as ours, anyway. There are more of them. She's got a corking gymnasium. It would make two of ours!"

Willard sighed discouragedly. "But you fellows kept telling me how much better Alton was than Kenly!"

Martin grinned slowly. "Sure! Why not? That's patriotism. Every fellow's got to think his school better than the other school!"

"Oh! Then Alton isn't *really* any better than Kenly?"

"Of course it is!"

"In what way?" urged Willard hopefully.

“Well,” began the other reflectively, holding his pajama jacket together with one hand and rubbing a touseled head with the other. “Well—”

“Better class of fellows?” suggested Willard.

“N-no, they’re about the same. Some pretty decent chaps go to Kenly. It isn’t that. It—it—well, Alton’s just *better*, if you see what I mean!”

“I’m afraid I don’t,” laughed Willard.

Martin grinned. “You will when you’ve been here awhile,” he said encouragingly. “The switch is at the left of the door when you’re ready.”

“All right. I say, though, I’ve changed my mind about the beds. I’d rather have the other.”

“Honest? Well—” Martin hesitated. “You’d better stick to the one you picked out, old man. That one’s got curvature of the spine. The spring lets you down in the middle.”

“I don’t mind,” laughed Willard. “I only chose the other because I saw it was yours.”

“Oh, that was it! Well, say, if you make a kick at the Office they’ll put a new spring on for you. Logan was always threatening to do it, but he never did. He was in here with me last year.”

Willard turned the switch and felt his way to the bed. “I don’t call this very bad,” he declared when he had experimented. “Anyway, it won’t keep me awake tonight!”

“That’s good. I hope it won’t. Good night—Brand!”

“Good night, Mart!”

# CHAPTER VI
# FIRST DAYS AT ALTON

Willard's trunk arrived two days later, as though, by its delay, protesting against the change of plan, and by that time its owner was going about in one of Martin's shirts. Those two days witnessed the shaking down of Willard into the manners and customs of Alton Academy. It wasn't hard, for Martin was there to serve as a very willing counselor and guide. Willard became a member of the Junior Class on the strength of his high school certificate, and, since that was also Martin's class, the latter was able to render assistance during the first difficult days. Fortunately the two boys took to each other at once and life in Number 16 Haylow promised to move pleasantly.

The term began on Thursday, and on Friday the football candidates gathered for the first practice. Alton Academy's registration was well over four hundred, as the catalogue later announced, and of that number nearly one-fourth reported on the gridiron as candidates for the school team. Willard, viewing the throng, thought little of his chances of securing a place.

Coach Cade made much the same sort of a speech as coaches generally make on such occasions, and promised a successful season in return for cheerful obedience and hard work; and looked unutterably relieved when the more or less attentive audience dispersed. Mr. Cade was a short, thick-set man of twenty-seven or twenty-eight years, with black hair

that stood up on his head much like the bristles of a blacking brush, a square face that looked at least one size too large for the rest of him, small features which included two very piercing dark eyes, a button nose and a broad mouth and, to cap the climax, a very gentle voice. Not a handsome chap, Willard thought, but certainly a very capable looking one. Later, he learned from Martin that John Cade had played with Alton Academy for three years and then for as many more on the Lafayette teams, making a remarkable reputation, first as a school quarter-back and then as a college guard. Willard found it difficult to imagine Coach Cade as a quarter. Probably, he concluded, in those days the coach lacked the breadth and heaviness he showed now, a conclusion proved to be correct when Willard came across an old photograph of an Alton eleven in the gymnasium some weeks later. In the picture John Cade was a short, not over-heavy and very alert boy of seventeen, his dark eyes darting defiance and his black hair bristling a challenge. He was familiarly known among the fellows of present-day Alton as Johnny, but none had ever been heard to address him so!

Practice this first afternoon wasn't a serious ordeal, for much time was given to verbal instruction, and at half-past four the squads were dismissed. Willard, walking back to the gymnasium with Martin and Bob, said that it ought to be easy to get a good team with such a raft of candidates to choose from, and Bob snorted derisively.

"You're wrong, Brand," he said. "If we had half as many we'd get on better. It takes three weeks, nearly, to find out who's good and to weed out the others, and that's just so much time lost. Johnny's dippy on the subject of having every fellow who ever heard of football come out, and it's a sad

mess for the first fortnight. Of course it sometimes happens that he finds a player that way who mightn't show up if he wasn't urged to, but, gee, I think it's piffle! Give me last year's first and second teams, or what's left of 'em, and a dozen chaps who have made names where they come from and I'll turn out as good a team as any. Must have been a hundred fellows out there this afternoon, and I'll bet you fifty of them never played a game of football in their lives!"

"Sure," agreed Martin, "but some of them are capable of playing, you poor fish, and it's just those that Johnny wants to find. If they don't make good this year, he's got them started for next. Your plan might work all right this year, Bob, but you'd run short of material next year. You've got to plan ahead, old son, and that's what Johnny does."

"Are there many of last season's fellows left?" asked Willard.

"Six first-string chaps," answered Bob. "Joe, Stacey Ross, Jack Macon, Gil Tarver, Arn Lake and myself. There is quite a bunch of good last year subs and second team fellows, though. And then there's Mart!"

"Yes, and Mart's going to try for something besides guard position this year," remarked that youth. "With you and Joe holding down each side of center there's no hope for me. Last season I lived in hope that Joe would get killed or that you'd be fired, but nothing happened. This thing of waiting around for dead men's shoes is dull work!"

"What are you going after?" laughed Bob.

"I don't know," replied Martin discouragedly. "How'd I do as a full-back?"

“Great! Say, Mart, do something for me, will you? Go and tell Johnny to let you play full-back!”

“Oh, dry up, you big ape! I could play full-back as well as Steve Browne can.”

“Steve hasn’t a chance!”

“Who, then?”

“Search me! We’ve got to find someone. Steve’s a good chap, but he hasn’t the weight, speed, or fight for full-back. If we could buy Brand’s brother out of the Navy, now—”

“Well, you did your best,” laughed Martin. “You got the right bag, but the wrong boy! Look here, Brand—”

“I refuse to answer to that name,” said Willard haughtily.

“What’s the matter with it? It’s a perfectly good name. What I was about to say when so rudely interrupted—”

“What I was about to say,” interjected Bob, “is that it would be a good plan to hurry up a bit and get ahead of some of this mob. If we don’t we’ll be waiting around until supper time for a shower!”

“Come on, then: stir your stumps, slow poke! I was going to say, Brand, that it’s your duty to either fill the full-back position yourself or find someone to fill it. You were—admitted to Alton on your representation that you were a full-back—”

“‘Admitted’ is good!” jeered Willard.

“And you aren’t,” Martin proceeded, unheeding the interruption. “Fellows are asking Joe where Gordon Harmon is and Joe’s having an awful time explaining how the deal fell

through. He's told four quite different stories so far and is working on a fifth! You could save Joe a lot of mental worry, Brand, if you turned yourself into a star full-back."

"I'm afraid I'm a bit light," laughed Willard. "Maybe I could find a full-back for you, though, if the reward was big enough."

"You'll receive the undying gratitude of Joe and the key of the city."

"Huh, I've seen the city!" said Willard.

The "city," though, in spite of Willard's sarcasm, was really a very nice one. Not, of course, that it was more than a town, and a small one at that, but it was clean and well laid out, with plenty of trees, lots of modestly attractive residences and a sufficiency of wide-awake stores. When Willard said he had seen it he was enlarging on the truth, for it was not until the day succeeding the remark that he really had a thorough look at it. Then Martin took him in tow and, since there were few recitations on Saturdays, they spent an hour or more roaming about it. There were two distinct shopping centers in Alton. One lay along Main Street a good half-mile from the Academy, and on the side streets adjacent, and one occupied two blocks on West Street, scarcely more than a long stone-throw from the school. The latter catered almost exclusively to the students, and the latter found few excuses for going further afield to make their purchases. Martin told Willard which of the nearby ice cream parlors had the best soda fountain, showed him which of the stationery stores was most popular, where he could buy haberdashery at fair prices, where to get his shoes shined if such an extravagant proceeding appealed to him, where the best barber shop was

—even cautioning him against “the wop at the third chair who would shave your neck if you didn’t watch him”—and, in short, thoroughly initiated him into the mysteries of West Street buying. In school parlance, the locality was “Bagdad,” although the shops were never referred to as “bazaars.”

“You can get tick at any of them,” Martin explained, “but they’ll make it mighty uncomfortable for you if you don’t pay up every half-year, and faculty sort of frowns on running up bills. It’s better to pay cash if you can, Brand. Besides, you can usually jew ’em down if you have the money in your hand. Last spring Stacey Ross bought a suit over there at Girtle’s and they charged it to him at sixty dollars, and a fellow called ‘Poke’ Little went and paid cash for one just like it and got off for forty-seven-fifty. Stacey had a fit and went back and read the riot act. But the old geezer told him that ‘time was money’!” Martin chuckled. “In his case two months’ time was twelve dollars and a half! Stacey got even, though.”

“How?” asked Willard.

“Got a thin fellow named Patterson, a sophomore, to put the suit on and walk up and down the block for an hour one Saturday afternoon. The clothes hung all over Patterson and he looked like a scarecrow, and he carried a placard around his neck that said: ‘This suit was bought at Girtle’s.’ Old Girtle was furious and tried to get Patterson to go away. Offered him ten dollars, Patterson said, but it didn’t sound like Girtle! Anyhow, Patterson kept on walking up and down and about two dozen kids went with him and a lot of the fellows stood around and cheered and we had quite a fine moment! ‘Mac’ had Stacey on the carpet about it, but when Stacey explained Mac only smiled and let him go.”

"Is 'Mac' what you call the Principal?" asked Willard.

"Yes, it's short for 'Doctor Maitland McPherson.' Have you met him yet? He's a good sort, Mac is. There's a story that some years back there was a wild westerner here from Wyoming or Arkansas or some of those places and he was talking one day in the corridor in Academy and Mac was in one of the classrooms right near, and this fellow—I forget his name; Smith, maybe—called him 'the old Prince,' and Mac overheard him and came out. 'Were you referring to me, Smith?' he asked. 'Yes, sir.' 'And what was the name you gave me?' 'Prince, sir; that's short for Principal.' 'Ah,' said Mac. 'Most ingenious! You may go on Hall Restriction one week for "int."' 'Int' is short for interest."

Football affairs got straightened out that afternoon and Willard found himself in C Squad with some twenty or so other candidates whose knowledge of football ranged from fair to middling. Only the simpler exercises were indulged in and the hour-and-a-half period stretched out interminably. The day was unseasonably warm and the bored youth who had C Squad in charge was unable to work up much enthusiasm. Willard was heartily glad when the session was over. He presumed that a certain amount of catching and passing was beneficial to him, but he mildly resented spending an hour and a half at it. Joe Myers showed every indication of acceding to Willard's request that he be allowed to stand on his own feet, for so far Joe had paid no attention to the newcomer during practice. There were times this afternoon when Willard rather wished that he hadn't been so independent. He would not have resented it a bit had Joe yanked him out of that beginner's squad and put him where he could have worked with something besides his hands! By

five o'clock, when the end came, Willard was sick of the sight and the feel of a football!

That evening, however, when he accompanied Joe and Martin and Bob to the Broadway Theater, the moving picture house patronized by the school, Joe inquired most solicitously about Willard's progress in practice. He did not, though, seem much concerned when Willard hinted that he was wasting his time learning how to pass a football. "It is dreary work, isn't it?" said Joe cheerfully. "Well, there won't be much more of it, Brand. You'll get into formations next week. By the way, you want to try for half-back, don't you? Hm. That's so. Hm. Too bad you're so light. Ever try playing end?"

Willard answered that he never had, whereupon Joe remarked: "'S 'at so?" in an absent way and said he hoped there'd be a good comedy at the theater!

# CHAPTER VII
# IN THE COACH'S ROOM

Whether the comedy was good or not, it at least evoked much laughter, and was followed by a thrilling "big picture" that worked Willard to a pitch of excitement that lasted until he was out on State Street again. They ran into Mr. Cade in front of the theater and he fell into step with them as they walked back toward the Green. He and Joe and Bob talked about the show, while Martin and Willard followed behind and listened. At West Street Bob proposed drinks, and they crossed to The Mirror and sat about a tiny table and drank colorful concoctions through paper straws. The coach rather surprised Willard by displaying positive enthusiasm for his tipple, which, as near as Willard could determine, contained a little of everything that could come out of the glistening taps! Willard was a little bit too much in awe of the coach to feel quite at ease, and his contributions to the conversation were few and brief. Not that the talk was very erudite, however, for Bob talked a good deal of nonsense and Mr. Cade certainly didn't oppress them with a flow of wisdom. On the contrary, he laughed at Bob a good deal and said one or two funny things himself, things at which Willard laughed a bit constrainedly, not being certain that it was right to greet anything a head football coach said with levity. At Schuyler High School the coach had been a most dignified and unapproachable martinet of whom everyone stood in admiring awe!

When they went out Bob leaned carelessly across the counter and instructed the young lady with the enormous puffs over her ears to “put that down to me, please.” Willard, following the others out, reflected that, while trading on a cash basis might be wiser, one missed many fine moments by not having a charge account! (This, perhaps, is a good place to explain that the expression “fine moments” was widely current at Alton that term. Like many other expressions, its origin was a mystery, and, like them, its vogue grew by leaps and bounds until even the freshmen were having their “fine moments” and Mr. Fowler, in English 7, prohibited its use in themes.)

Near the end of State Street, with the lights on the Green gleaming through the trees ahead, Mr. Cade proposed that the boys pay him a visit, and Willard found himself turning in at a little white gate. The old green-shuttered Colonial mansion on the corner was one of several houses standing across from the Green that had at one time or another, sometimes as a gift, sometimes by purchase, become Academy property. This particular mansion was occupied by three of the married faculty members and, in turn, by the football and baseball coaches. Mr. Cade’s apartment was on the lower floor, at the right, two huge, high-ceilinged rooms separated by what had once been a pantry but was now a dressing and bathroom. The furnishings were comfortable but plain, and in the front room a generous grate eked out the efforts of a discouraged furnace. Tonight, however, the sight of the fireplace brought no pleasurable thrill. Instead, it was the four big, wide-open windows that attracted the visitors. Those in front opened on a narrow veranda set with tall white pillars, those on the side shed the light of the room onto a maze of shrubbery and trees

beyond which the illumined windows of the dormitories twinkled. There was a big table in the center of the living-room littered with books and writing materials, smoking paraphernalia, gloves, a riding crop, a camera, a blue sweater and many other things, a fine and interesting hodgepodge that Willard, pausing beside it, viewed curiously. The object that engaged his closest attention, though, was a board about thirty inches square. It was covered with green felt on which at intervals of an inch white lines crossed. On the margins were figures: "5," "10," "15," and so on up to "50." Stuck at random into the board were queer little colored thumb-tacks, twenty-two in all. Half of them were gray and half of them were red, and each held letters: "L. H.," "R. G.," "L. E.," and so on. Willard was still studying the board, its purpose slowly dawning on him, when Mr. Cade spoke.

"Looking at my 'parlor gridiron,' Harmon?" he asked. "Nice little plaything, isn't it?" He came to Willard's side and lifted the board from the table. "I made it myself, and I'm sort of proud of it, for I'm all thumbs when it comes to doing anything with my hands. Each of the inch lines represents five yards, do you see? And I use these thumb-tacks for the players. It's rather a help when it comes to studying out a play; although I acknowledge that I can get on faster with the back of an envelope and a pencil stub!"

"I think it's awfully clever," said Willard admiringly. "It's just half a field, though, isn't it, sir?"

"That's all; from the goal-line to the fifty-yard-line. That's all that's needed, you see. Want to play with it?" The coach laughed and wheeled a deep-seated rep-covered armchair to the table. "Sit down and be comfortable," he added. Willard subsided embarrassedly into the chair, still holding the

miniature gridiron. Joe and Bob were seated by one of the side windows—what breeze there was came from the west this evening—and Martin and the coach shared an old-fashioned sofa nearby. Willard, listening to the talk, began to set the thumb-tacks in place along the thirty-yard-line. Presently he had become so interested in arranging a forward-pass defense for the gray tacks that he had forgotten all about the others. He wasn't quite certain that the Gray's ends should play all the way up into the line, and he set them back half the distance to the next white mark. Then he concluded that the pass would be made by that suspicious-looking red tack labeled "L. H." and that it would go to one of the red ends. Consequently, he advanced the gray ends up to the line once more, but a trifle further out, so that they might cut in quickly and spoil the throw. After that he pulled the Gray's quarter-back in another yard or two, chancing that the ball would not go more than fifteen yards. Then there was nothing to do but wait for the play, and, since it didn't materialize, he set the board back on the table and gave his attention again to the others.

"Two years ago," Mr. Cade was saying, "there were five of us in here for almost a week: Levington and Sproule and Jack Tanner— Who was the chap helped coach the tackles that year, Myers? Do you remember? Tall fellow who wore spectacles and—"

"Clarke, sir? No, I know! Salters!"

"That's right! Salters! He was a good hand and I'd like to get him back again this fall. Well, there were five of us, I remember, and we were bunked all over the place; three of us in the bedroom and two of us in here. We had rather a good time, but no one got much sleep. I remember the night before

the Kenly game we sat up until nearly three o'clock. Our left tackle, Gadsden, had sprained his ankle that day; someone pushed him coming out of Academy; and we had to make over the whole plan of battle. Gadsden, you'll remember, was our long punter and we'd mapped out a kicking game. To make things worse, it began to rain and sleet that evening, and we'd looked for a dry field. We certainly had our hands full that night. It was Levington who suggested pulling the guards out and using them on end runs, and we won on those plays. You see our backfield was pretty light and the wet field slowed them up. You played awhile in that game, didn't you, Myers, toward the end?"

"Yes, for three or four minutes. I was in when we made our second score. We dumped their end and Morgan shot around for four yards and the touchdown."

"That's right. It looked like a tie game until near the end. Kenly had a man who could boot a wet ball forty yards every time and we had no one to meet him with. But we certainly wore her ends to a frazzle. She used three pairs before she got through! It was nothing but fight and determination that won that game, fellows. On paper we figured about seventy per cent to their one hundred before the start. They had us licked, but they didn't know it, and we never told them!"

"What about this year, sir?" asked Martin.

"How many snowstorms are we going to have in January?" asked the coach laughingly. "It's rather too early for predictions, Proctor. But for all I can see now we've got a better show than we had two years ago, and we licked her then. We're certainly going to be in better shape than last year."

"We've got to find a full-back," said Joe dubiously.

"Yes, and a new tackle and maybe an end. But we'll do it. There's a lot of good material to pick from this year."

"I suppose you've heard, sir, that Kenly's got that fellow Timmons who played left end on Millwood High last season," said Bob.

"No, is that so? Is he good?"

"They say so. Funny thing we don't seem to catch any of the stars, Mr. Cade."

"We don't want them, Newhall. Stars are uncertain things. They have a mean way of going out unexpectedly! I'd rather have a bunch of satellites to work with and turn out my own stars!"

The others laughed, but Bob shook his head, not altogether convinced. "That's all right, sir, but you'd think we'd get more good players here. It isn't as if Alton was a small school or a punk one. Of course those fellows with big reputations don't always pan out when you get them, but, just the same, I'd like to see some of them head this way now and then!"

"I dare say it wouldn't hurt," agreed the coach. "But, fellows, the longer I stick at this coaching game the more convinced I am that when it comes to the last analysis it isn't plays or players that win games; it's *spirit*! Take eleven corking men, each one a master of his position, and get them so that they play together like a well-oiled machine, and then run them up against a team of ordinary players without much team-work or anything else except a great, big, overwhelming desire to win, and what happens three times out of four? Why, that inferior team wins! She may make mistakes, she may

play ragged ball, but grim determination and fight and *spirit* get her there! You see it happen all the time. I can tell you of twenty games where the best team was beaten just because, while she wanted to win, she didn't want to win *hard* enough!"

"Yes, sir, I guess that's so," agreed Joe. "And I guess it's a lot easier to teach a team to play good football than it is to put the right spirit in them."

"Of course it is! You've got to begin with the School, Myers, and work down to the team. If the School hasn't got the right spirit, the team won't have it. And that's why I try to get as many fellows out for football at the beginning of the year as I can. Or, at least, it's one reason. Interest a fellow, no matter how little, in the team, and he'll believe in it and work for it. Even if a fellow comes out only to be dropped three or four days later, he's 'smelled leather' and he never quite forgets it. He thinks well of his more successful companion who has made good, even though he may be secretly envious of him, and the team and its success means a lot more to him than it does to the chap who has never had anything to do with it. The team that feels the School behind it works hard and loyally and, when the big test comes, fights like the very dickens! And it's fight that wins football games, just as it's fight that wins battles. And that's that!"

Mr. Cade ended with a little laugh that seemed to apologize for his vehemence, but none of his listeners joined in it. After a moment Martin said: "There's a little school they call Upton Academy near my home, Mr. Cade. It has only about a hundred and twenty students, I suppose, and more than half of 'em are girls. But they meet teams from bigger schools and beat them right along. One of the teachers coaches them and

the girls go with them and cheer like mad and they wipe up the whole county!"

"I guess it's spirit in that case," said the coach. "And maybe the girls have a lot to do with it. Ever notice what a deal of fighting spirit girls show? First thing we know—or our children know—the girls will be playing real football. And when they do, fellows, look out!" Mr. Cade chuckled at his direful prediction.

A little later the boys arose to go and Mr. Cade, moving to the table, took up the felt-covered board and looked at it curiously. "Defense for forward-pass, eh, Harmon?" he said. "Which of these red fellows is making the toss?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Willard. "I was playing the Gray's end of it. But I figured that left half-back was throwing to an end."

The others gathered around to see and Mr. Cade looked speculatively at Willard for a moment before he smiled and laid the board back on the table. "I'd pull my ends in further in that case," he said, "and bring them nearer the play. What position are you after?"

"Half-back, sir."

"I see. Well, it's an interesting job, half-back's. Lots of chance for initiative there. Quick thinking, too. Well, good night, fellows. Drop in again some evening. I'm generally home."

# CHAPTER VIII
# THE BOY IN THE GREEN SWEATER

The following Wednesday, Willard received promotion of a sort. By that time the number of candidates at practice had noticeably lessened and the four squads had become three. Last year's first team survivors and a goodly number of the second team players formed Squad A, while some twenty youths who showed particular promise made up Squad B. Into the latter company Willard went. A third squad whose personnel changed from day to day as new candidates appeared or old ones fell out, was known officially as C, but popularly as "The Goats."

Formation drill had begun and Willard ran through signals at the left half-back position, alternating with another youth named Kruger. Only the simplest formations were used and the pace never exceeded a trot. Preliminary to this, there was tackling practice at the dummy each day, and more or less passing and starting. After formation drill Willard joined nearly a dozen other backfield candidates and put in a half-hour of punting and catching and running. Willard's kicking education had been rather neglected, for at high school, during the two years he had played, the full-back and quarter had shared the kicking duties. Here, however, it was held that a back should be proficient in every department of the game, and Willard showed up rather poorly beside many of his rivals.

The second eleven came into existence the last of that week and the first real scrimmage of the season took place on Friday between it and the first in preparation for the initial contest the next day. Willard was glad he had not been picked for the second, for he had not yet given up hope of better things, and knew from experience how difficult it is to make one's way from the second team to the first. Several fellows from Squad C were selected, however, and among them Kruger, which left Willard for awhile in undisputed possession of the left half-back job. It wasn't long, though, before a weedy, temperamental boy named Longstreth took Kruger's place. Longstreth had been promoted from the Goats and seemed to have an idea that his mission in life was to inject what he called "tabasco" into Squad B. One way of doing it was to aid in the coaching, and he simply oozed advice to both Coach Cade and Richards, the quarter-back. The coach stood it patiently, but Ned Richards ultimately turned upon him and wounded his sensibilities horribly, so horribly that Longstreth became a changed boy and deliberately let the squad worry along without "tabasco." But most of this was later on and subsequent to the Alton High School game, which started the season for the Academy.

Willard watched that contest from the bench: or, rather, from a seat on the ground near the bench, since the capacity of the bench was limited. It wasn't much of a game, even for a first one, and there was nothing approaching excitement in it until, near the end of the third ten-minute period, High School threw a scare into her opponent by scoring a touchdown when Cochran, at right half, dropped the ball and the High School left end scooted away with it for sixty-odd yards and brought joy to the visitors. Academy's quarter-back

ought to have stopped him, but Tarver made a miserable tackle and the runner wrenched himself loose and went over the line without further challenge.

High School missed an easy goal and the score was tied at 6—6, for the Academy had been able to put over but one touchdown against a weaker but plucky enemy and Cochran had missed the goal as badly as the opponent had later. The Academy rooters woke up from their lethargy then, and there was some cheering during the remainder of the period and throughout the last quarter. It was not until the latter was well along, however, that Academy pulled the game out of the fire. Then, working to striking distance by means of two forward-passes that took the ball from midfield to High School's thirty-yard-line, the Gray-and-Gold hammered the opposing left side until it gave way and Macon, on an end-around play, landed the pigskin over the goal-line. This time, Cochran having given way to a substitute, Tarver tried for a goal and made it, and the game ended a few minutes later with the Academy on the long end of a 13—6 score.

Coach Cade used many substitutes during the final quarter, and Martin Proctor was one of them, and Willard was delighted to see his chum put up a fine game at right guard when Bob went out. At left half, the position that Willard was especially interested in, Arnold Lake played to the end of the third period and then gave place to Mawson. Both played well and Willard was more certain than before that if he was to make the first team this year it would have to be in some other capacity than that of left half!

When the game was done the Squad A players who had not participated were lined up against a Squad B eleven and there followed a short scrimmage in which Willard played left half

for B and had a lot of fun. Squad A wasn't formidable and it was no great stunt to gain outside her tackles, and once Willard got nicely away and would have made the only score of the scrimmage if an obnoxious youth named Hutchins, and better known as "Hutch," hadn't pulled him down on the six yards. From there, in spite of all her efforts, B couldn't make much gain and the fourth down found the ball a yard short of the line. The scrimmage ended with a score and the empty stand attested the amount of interest the game provided the onlookers who had remained after the big contest. But Willard had enjoyed it and won a set of bruised fingers when one of the enemy had set an ungentle foot thereon, and he was quite contented the rest of the evening. But he did a lot of thinking and consulted Martin on the advisability of trying for an end position, and showed no gratitude when he was advised to fatten himself up and try for center!

"You seem to be willing to stick on the bench all season," he said aggrievedly, "but I don't see any fun in that. If I—"

"How do you mean, stick on the bench?" demanded Martin. "I'm not going to stick on any bench. Haven't you noticed how pale and wan Bob is getting to look? He won't last much longer. I think it's sleeping sickness or something else slow and certain. He won't acknowledge he's sick, but I can tell! There's a worried look about his eyes and Cal Grainger says he sleeps more than he used to."

"Oh, shut up!" said Willard, grinning.

"Fact, though! You look at Bob some time when he doesn't know he's—ah—under observation and you'll see what I mean. Sleeping sickness is very insidious, Brand, but always

fatal. I'm sorry for Bob, of course, but I'm not hypocritical about it!"

"Bob will be playing guard and you'll be lugging the water pail when we meet Kenly," retorted Willard. "I'm in earnest, though. Why shouldn't I try for end instead?"

"Because you're a half-back, sonny. Playing end is something else again, and you'd have to learn a lot of new tricks, and the season might be over before you'd learn 'em."

"Well, I'd be ready for next year," murmured Willard.

"If that's all you're looking for, stay where you are. They'll be using half-backs as well as ends next year, unless the Rules Committee gets gay again!"

"Well, of course I do want to make the team this fall," acknowledged the other.

"Naturally. So do I. I wanted to last fall, too, but a cruel fate willed otherwise."

"Oh, you don't care," scoffed Willard. "You haven't any—any—ambition."

"Ambition? Get out! I'm full of ambish! But I don't propose to be unhappy because I can't have the whole pie. I like the fun of playing, Brand, and I don't worry much because I don't always get into the game. After all, I'm doing my bit, you know. Someone's got to be second-choice. Besides, think what a comfort it is to Joe and Bob to know that if they have to leave the game there I am ready to take their places and carry on the good work! Don't you suppose that thought helps 'em to weather many a—many a dark hour?"

"No, I don't," answered Willard disgustedly. "But I guess it helps them to go on playing sometimes when they're all in! The idea of letting you in—"

"Don't say it!" warned Martin, laying a hand significantly on a book. "Them's hard words! Listen, Brand: are we going to the lecture or aren't we not?"

"What's it all about?"

"The Cliff Dwellers of—of Montana, or some place."

"Arizona?"

"Maybe," replied Martin cautiously. "Anyway, the fellow's good. He was here last year. Let's go. I've always wished I'd been born a cliff-dweller. There's something awfully fascinating in the idea of shinning up a tree-trunk and climbing through a window when you're ready for bed! Think what fun there must have been at a prep school in those days. When the fellow who lived above you was climbing up all you had to do was reach out and push the tree-trunk away. Gee, you miss a lot of innocent amusement by being born too late!"

Sunday dawned cloudy and dismal, with occasional sprinkles of rain. Breakfast was a half-hour later, and when that was over there was nothing much to do but furbish up for church. But shining one's shoes and brushing one's Sunday suit doesn't consume much time, no matter how thorough and deliberate one may be, and after Willard was ready there still remained the best of an hour. The steam heat had not yet been turned on and the dormitory was chill and unsympathetic. He tried to write a letter to the folks at home, but only got as far as: "Dear Father and Mother." Martin's usually placid humor

was perceptibly rumpled this morning, and efforts to engage him in conversation resulted in grunts and growls. Willard was heartily glad when it came time to start off for church, even though he felt uncomfortable in a derby and detested carrying an umbrella.

Dinner was at one, a heavy repast topped off with ice cream and cake that left the diner feeling like an anaconda who had just swallowed a goat. Willard, who had failed to get placed at Joe's table and was with an unusually uninteresting group at the far end of the hall, arose from the board wishing he had not accepted young Stanley's offer of his ice cream. Or perhaps it was the cake that was to blame. In any case, he felt horribly full and sluggish, and when, at the door, Bob brightly suggested a nice long tramp over to Banning to see the new railway bridge that was under construction he shook his head and pleaded letters to write. Banning was three miles away, and Willard wasn't sure he could even get back to his room before going to sleep!

"Well, if you change your mind, come on over to the room," said Bob. "We won't be starting for half an hour, I guess."

Willard said he would, being quite certain that his mind was incapable of any change. When he reached Number 16, Martin, too, was disgustingly active. "Come on, Brand," he cried. "We're going over to see the new bridge at Banning. Get an old pair of shoes on."

"I don't want to see any bridges," replied Willard morosely. "I—I saw one once."

"What if you did, you chump! You never saw this one. Don't be a piker. Look, it's going to clear up!"

Willard gazed through the window with lackluster eyes and shook his head feebly. “I’ve got to write home,” he murmured, subsiding into a chair.

“You look more as if you were going to sleep,” said Martin in disgust. “All right, sonny, see you later.”

Martin went out, slamming the door behind him and whistling gayly down the corridor. Willard shook his head again. He had never noticed before how objectionably noisy Martin was! Several rooms away a graphophone was playing loudly and boys were singing. Everyone, reflected Willard, seemed to be unnaturally animated today. He guessed they hadn’t eaten two plates of ice cream! After a long time, during which he stared somnolently at his shoes, he pulled himself out of the chair with a groan and reseated himself at the table. Half an hour later he signed the fourth page of his letter “Your aff. son, Willard” and folded it quickly lest he yield to the temptation to read it over. He knew that if he did that he would never send it!

When it was ready for mailing he walked to the window and looked out. It really was clearing! Even as he looked, the sun broke through for a moment and shone weakly on the damp field and the running track beyond. He felt a good deal better now and he wished he had gone to Banning with the others. Well, he hadn’t, and rather than moon around in that chilly room he would slip on an old suit and take a walk. Possibly he would meet the crowd coming back later. He changed from his Sunday attire to an old pair of knickerbockers, a sweater, golf stockings, old shoes and a cap and set forth, proceeding first to the mail box in front of Academy Hall and getting rid of his letter. Stacey Ross hailed him from a third-story window of Lykes as he made his way

past toward the athletic field, and he stopped and exchanged badinage for a moment, declining Stacey's invitations, the first of which was to "Come on up," and the second to "Go to the dickens!"

He knew that the river lay somewhere to the west and not more than a mile distant, and he set out to find it. His way led him across the athletic field and over the stone wall that bounded it and so into a meadow that descended gradually to a winding fringe of woods a quarter of a mile away. Whether the woods hid the river he didn't know. It didn't seem likely, however, for he had a notion that the stream was quite a considerable one: in fact, it must be if the railroad was building a large and expensive bridge across it some two miles further inland!

Before he reached the woods he had thrice been ankle-deep in water, but it was only marsh water and the trees, he found, hid only a narrow and shallow brook. By this time the sun was really out, although not very brightly, and the woods and the stream, with its mossy stones and bordering ferns, looked very pretty. He wondered if there were any trout there, and pursued it for some little distance looking for likely holes. When he had satisfied himself that no respectable trout would deign to live in such a brook he made his way across it by jumping from stone to stone, only once missing, and went on through an alder growth on the other side. When he emerged he was at the foot of a second meadow interspersed with outcropping ledges and clumps of white birches and maples and wild cherry trees. Afar at the left, near where the road presumably wound, was a farm with a white dwelling and a red barn and many comical haycocks that looked golden in the sunlight. Ahead of him a stone wall crossed the summit of

the field, pricked out at intervals with spindling cedars whose somber foliage stood darkly against the clearing sky. The September sun, freeing itself from the clouds, shone warmly in Willard's face as he went on up the rise. When he reached the wall he saw the river below him, a broad, curving ribbon of blue. But it was a good half-mile away yet, and he sat himself on the wall to rest before going on.

The sun felt pleasant to him and, after he had sat there a few minutes, he began to lose interest in a nearer acquaintance with the river. Instead of going on in that direction, he decided, he would turn to the left and try to reach the road. Doubtless Bob and Martin and the others would be returning before very long. Turning his gaze southward, he became aware of the fact that he was not alone. Some two hundred yards away a figure was approaching, a figure which appeared at first glance to be that of a man wearing a dark green sweater and advancing up the slope at a strangely deliberate pace. A second look, however, showed that the person was a boy of perhaps eighteen years and that as he walked he held the end of a forked stick in each hand and was oblivious to all else. He was a tall and rather heavy youth with extremely long legs that moved with machine-like precision and regularity over the grass. His slightly bent head prevented a clear sight of his face, but Willard thought he recognized the boy as one he had glimpsed once or twice about school. Why he should be pacing along here a mile from home, however, a Y-shaped branch in his hand, was a mystery, and Willard watched curiously as he came nearer and nearer.

# CHAPTER IX
# M'NATT ON SCIENCE

The boy in the green sweater, if left to his own devices, would have passed Willard some fifteen feet away, but curiosity got the better of the latter and when the other was opposite to him he spoke.

"Hello," he said.

The fellow stopped, turned his head and viewed the boy on the stone wall, quite without surprise, for a long moment. Then he shifted his gaze to the forked stick that he still held extended before him and shook his head slowly.

"I suppose I haven't got the power," he remarked thoughtfully.

"What power?" asked Willard.

"Why, the power, or whatever you like to call it, to make this thing work. Have you ever tried it?"

"I don't know what you're doing," answered Willard, getting down from the wall. "What's the branch for?"

"Haven't you ever seen a water-finder?" Willard shook his head, puzzled. "Well, you take a piece of witch-hazel or willow—some say alder or ash will do—and hold it like this by the top branches and walk over the ground. When you come to a place where there's water below, the lower end there will tilt downwards. I've seen it done twice."

“Oh, I’ve heard of that, but I never saw it tried,” answered Willard interestedly. “I supposed it was just nonsense. Did you ever see it succeed?”

The other nodded soberly. “Both times. Old Man Hildreth, back home, did it twice one time for my father, and when we dug where he told us to we came to water. One time it was a regular spring that we found and the other time it was more like a well. I mean we had to dig pretty far down before we came to the water. Old Man Hildreth used witch-hazel, and that’s what I’ve got here. I had to hunt nearly an hour before I found any.”

“Let’s see.” Willard took the Y-shaped piece and looked at it curiously. There was, however, nothing about its appearance to indicate the power attributed to it by the boy in the green sweater. Willard shrugged. “I guess you’ve got to go where you know there’s water,” he said. “It doesn’t look to me as if there’d be much water on top of this hill.”

“You mostly find springs on hillsides,” replied the other mildly, “and that’s why I’ve been looking around here. Maybe I’m too high up now, though.”

Willard seized the branches as he had seen the other hold them and experimentally walked a few steps forward. Nothing happened. For that matter, he hadn’t expected anything would happen.

“You must hold them tight,” advised the other, “so you’ll feel the influence.”

Willard gripped harder and circled about the green sweater. Once, possibly because his muscles were so tense, he thought he felt a tremor, but, when he turned and went back over the

spot, the phenomenon was not repeated. “Look here,” he asked, “what do you want to find water for, anyway? There’s a whole river just full of it down there.”

“I wanted to see if I could do it,” answered the other.

“Oh!” Willard looked at the witch-hazel wand in his hands and down the gently sloping meadow. “Let’s go down there and try it,” he suggested finally.

“Very well.” Side by side, Willard still holding the water-finder, the two went down the hill. Willard’s countenance, although he didn’t know it, wore an expression of concentration and expectancy. At the foot of the hill his companion seated himself on a rock and Willard began a systematic exploration of the surrounding territory. When ten minutes or so had passed it dawned on him that he was extremely warm and that, while there was bound to be water underground, since the river was not far distant and very little lower, the forked stick had absolutely failed to register even a tremor of interest! He joined the youth in the green sweater and handed the stick to him in disgust.

“That’s no good,” he said. “Why, I could find water two feet from here if I had a shovel! That’s just bunk!”

“I suppose you and I haven’t the right powers of divination,” replied the other composedly. “I’ll try again some day with a piece of willow.”

Willard said “Humph!” as he seated himself on the rock, and a minute’s silence ensued. Then: “I’ve seen you at school, haven’t I?” Willard asked.

“I presume so. My name is McNatt, and I’m in Upton. What is your class?”

“Junior,” replied Willard. “This is my first year. I suppose you are in the senior class.”

McNatt nodded. “I’ve been here four years. This is my fifth. I was sick my sophomore year and had to go home twice. Once I was away two months and another time I was gone five weeks. That put me behind and I had to take the year over. I guess I could have made it up, but the doctor wouldn’t allow it. I don’t mind at all, though. I like it here. The only thing is that the fellows I came along with have gone and I don’t know many now. But then I never was much for making acquaintances.”

Willard viewed him curiously. McNatt was perhaps nearly nineteen, he thought. His head was large and his features prominent: a very beak-like nose extended well over a wide mouth, his rather pale eyes, which might have been either green or blue for all Willard could determine, were deepset under heavy brows and his chin jutted out almost aggressively. But in spite of his features McNatt did not impress Willard as being a forceful youth, nor did his expression, voice or manners suggest it. He had a pleasant, deep voice and spoke slowly, almost hesitantly, and, while he didn’t smile frequently, his countenance bespoke good humor. He had very dark-brown hair, and there was a good deal of it, and it was perceptibly wavy under the rim of his straw hat. The straw hat, like the rest of his attire, had seen better days. In fact, McNatt’s trousers, of blue serge that had changed to plum-color on the knees, would not have greatly interested an old clothes man! The garment that clothed the upper part of his body was equally disreputable, a dark-green coat-sweater with many darns and one pocket that was trying hard to get away. The shoes alone appeared to be of recent origin, but as

they were caked with mud along the soles the fact would have escaped casual observation.

"What made you think of this stunt?" asked Willard, nodding at the witch-hazel stick.

McNatt's countenance expressed faint surprise. "Why, I've always been very interested in scientific matters," he replied gravely.

"Oh," said Willard, "do you call that science?"

"I'm not sure," answered the other slowly. "The diving-rod, as it is sometimes called, has been in use a great many years both for the discovery of water and metals. Taking science in its broader sense of truth ascertained and systematized, almost anything not capable of classification as an art may well be termed a science. While the affinity existing between the diving-rod and water or metals underground may be viewed as a phenomenon, yet when we make use of that affinity to produce systematic results we enter the realm of science."

Willard blinked. "I—I suppose so," he agreed vaguely. "Can you find gold that way, too?"

"It has been done, I think," said McNatt. "I haven't been able to find much data on that subject, though."

Willard looked more respectfully at the witch-hazel switch. "I guess it wouldn't be much use looking for gold around here, though," he said. "How would you know whether you had found gold or water if the thing dipped?"

McNatt considered in silence a moment. Then he shook his head. "I can't say," he replied. "Perhaps you couldn't tell.

Though, as gold is generally located away from water you would hardly expect that the diving-rod was indicating anything but gold."

"Isn't gold sometimes found in the beds of rivers and streams?" asked Willard. "Seems to me your diving-rod would get sort of mixed, wouldn't it? And how about silver? Can you find silver that way, too?"

McNatt looked almost distressed. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I haven't devoted any study to the use of the diving-rod in the location of metals. Your questions open up an interesting field, though, and some time I'll go into the subject thoroughly. And still, as I haven't yet demonstrated the—ah—power of the instrument in the finding of water, possibly it would be idle to extend the experiments. There's one possible explanation of failure that just occurs to me. Old Man Hildreth said he used a hazel stick. He didn't say whether it was the hazel of the nut tribe—"

"I think it must have been," said Willard emphatically.

"Or the witch-hazel. The ordinary hazel is a member of the oak family, but does the witch-hazel belong to the same family? There are certain similarities between the two, and yet they may not be botanically related." McNatt presented a puzzled countenance to Willard. "What would be your opinion?"

"Search me," said Willard cheerfully. "I thought a hazel was a hazel."

"I'm afraid not. That may account for my lack of success. You see, I jumped to the conclusion that the witch-hazel was the proper one, probably because the word 'witch' suggested

—ah—divination. So I may have been wrong." McNatt's face cleared and he looked quite cheerful again. "I'll have to try again. Only—" He paused and pursed his lips dubiously. "Do you happen to know if the hazel grows about here?"

"Haven't the slightest idea," said Willard.

"Nor I. I'll have to look that up when I get back. It's strange that the encyclopedias give so little information on the subject of the diving-rod. I wonder—" McNatt fell silent, and after a minute Willard arose.

"Well, I guess I'll be getting back," he announced. It was, he concluded, too late to meet Martin and the others now.

"Back?" repeated McNatt, coming out of his trance. "Yes, that's so. It must be—" He searched under the edge of his sweater for something evidently not there. "Have you a watch? I seem to have forgotten mine."

"Twenty to five," said Willard.

"Then we'd better start." McNatt gazed thoughtfully, almost sorrowfully at his witch-hazel stick and laid it gently on the rock. "I may try that again some time, but I rather think I was mistaken; I rather think it should have been the corylus americana."

"Something nutty sounds more likely," said Willard gravely. To his surprise, the other chuckled.

"That hadn't occurred to me," he replied. "You see, some of the fellows call me McNutt. By the way, what's your name?"

Willard told him and McNatt nodded. "Harmon: the name's familiar. I remember now. There is a fellow of that name who

plays football. Quite a remarkable full-back, I think."

"Gordon Harmon? Did you know him?"

"I read about him. He played on one of the high school teams in New York City, I believe. Is he a relation of yours?"

"Brother."

"Really?" McNatt turned and viewed Willard with real interest. "Well! Think of that! I dare say you're sort of proud of him."

"I suppose so," replied Willard doubtfully. "I don't think I ever thought whether I am or not," he added, laughing.

"You should be if what they say of him is true," said McNatt earnestly. "I followed his work last season with much interest. A natural-born full-back, I'd call him. By the way, do you play, too?"

"A little. I'm out for the team."

"Full-back? But no, you'd be too light. End, maybe?"

"Half," said Willard. "I've played there some."

"Hm." McNatt looked him over critically. "Yes, you might do well there. You look fast. Ten pounds more wouldn't hurt you, though."

"You talk like a football chap yourself," said Willard. "Do you play?"

McNatt shook his head. "I used to, but I got—ah—out of sympathy with it. You see, Harmon, football is capable of being reduced to an exact science, but played in the haphazard manner that they play it here it lacks interest. I haven't played recently."

“Well, I don’t see how you can reduce it to any exact science,” Willard objected. “Of course, if you knew beforehand what the other fellow was going to do—”

“You miss my meaning,” interrupted the older boy. “See here, Harmon. You start with a playing space so many yards in length and so many yards in width. You oppose a team of eleven players with a team of a like number. You may do a certain number of things legitimately. Each situation developed in the course of a football game calls for a certain move. But that’s what coaches and quarter-backs don’t realize. They think that a situation is unprecedented and, instead of making the move that is called for, they confusedly try something they shouldn’t, a play never intended for the situation.”

“But how the dickens are you going to know what play the situation does call for?” demanded Willard. “The situations make themselves, and they’re all different!”

“Not at all. There are only a certain number of situations that can eventuate and they are quite capable of tabulation. For the purpose of argument, suppose we set the number at three hundred. Very well, there are consequently three hundred correct moves. Suppose it is A’s ball on B’s twenty-yard-line on third down with five to go, B has demonstrated that gains between her tackles are practically impossible. A is weak at kicking field-goals, but has proved capable of gaining on runs outside B’s right tackle. B has a good defense against forward-passes and has defeated A’s attempts to gain that way. Now, then, what is A’s correct play?”

“Why, a skin-tackle play, of course, at the weak end,” replied Willard. “At least, theoretically. But suppose the back

who carries the ball slips or turns in too soon or—"

"No science, no matter how exact, is proof against the fallibility of those engaged in its demonstration," said McNatt gravely. "The point I am trying to prove is that here is a situation that is neither unprecedented nor novel and that, capable of being recognized, has its proper solution which may be scientifically applied."

"Maybe," said Willard, "but, gee, how many situations would there be to recognize? About a thousand, I'd say!"

"Many less, I think. I've never attempted to tabulate them, but it would not be a difficult task. Science has performed far more difficult feats."

"I dare say, but—but—look here, McNatt, if each team played football like that, I mean if each team had the right answer to every situation that might happen, why, gee, neither one would win!"

"You're wrong, Harmon. You're forgetting the element of human fallibility. Put two chess players at the board, give them each a similar knowledge of the game, and what happens? Do they play to a tie? Very seldom. One wins and the other loses. So it would be in football with each team applying science. One team would excel because she applied it more exactly, perhaps more instantly."

Willard shook his head. "It sounds crazy to me," he said. "And I don't think I'd want to play if everything was cut-and-dried like that. Hang it, McNatt, it's accident and chance that makes the game interesting."

"I don't agree with you. I think those things retard the development of it, Harmon. As it is now, individual skill

rules. Why, look here. Suppose armies fought that way. Suppose a field general said to his subordinates: 'I don't know how to meet this situation. You fellows see what you can do. Maybe we can push back his left wing or maybe we can punch a hole in his center, do something, but don't bother me!'"

Willard laughed. "That's not a fair comparison, though, McNatt," he answered. "At least, in football, the coach or the quarter-back has a plan and carries it out, even if it isn't the right one!"

"A wrong plan is no better than no plan. Haphazard football is just as silly as haphazard war would be, Harmon. Fellows who teach football talk about the science of it, but they don't study it. Their science begins and ends with finding out the other fellow's weak spot and attacking it."

"Sounds like pretty good science to me," said Willard.

"It is good as far as it goes, but it's only the beginning. Well, here's my way. I'm glad to have met you, Harmon. I'd be glad to continue the subject sometime if you care to visit me. I'm in Number 49. I've got some things that might interest you, too; rather a good collection of minerals gathered around here, for one thing: nearly two hundred specimens."

"Thanks, I'll look you up some time," said Willard, "but I guess I've had enough of that argument. It's too deep for me, McNatt! So long."

Willard turned toward Haylow and, when he had gone a little way, looked back. McNatt had stopped near Lawrence Hall and was staring up into the sky. All Willard could see

there was a streaky white cloud. He shook his head as he went on again. “‘McNutt’ is right, I guess,” he muttered.

# CHAPTER X
# ALTON SQUEEZES THROUGH

Instead of going on to Haylow, Willard entered Lykes and knocked at the door of Number 2. As he had suspected, Martin was there. So were Bob and Joe and Don Harris, Joe's roommate. Don was only seventeen, although his size made him look older, and, like Joe, was a senior. His full name was Donald, but no one ever called him that. He played first base on the school nine and played it well.

Willard had to hear about the expedition to the new railway bridge and how Stacey and Bob had walked out to the end of the highest girder and then had had to sit down before they dared turn around!

"That's all right," Don expostulated in reply to the laughter. "That girder was only a foot wide when I started out on it and by the time I was at the end it had shrunk to about half an inch! And when I looked down the river was so far away I could just see it! Gosh, I thought for a minute I'd have to stay there until they'd finished the bridge so I could keep on across it!"

"I wanted to come back on my hands and knees," confessed Bob, "and I'd have done it if I'd been alone! No more circus stunts for little Robert!"

"What were you doing all the afternoon?" asked Martin presently of Willard, and Willard told of his meeting with

McNatt. The incident of the diving-rod amused them all hugely.

"That's McNutt all over," laughed Joe. "A couple of years ago someone found him over on that hill beyond Badger's farm digging a hole. He said he was looking for fossil remains. Said the hill looked to him like a glacial—glacial whatyoucallit—"

"Moraine," supplied Bob.

"Yes, moraine. He dug a place big enough for a cellar, I heard, but he never found anything but rocks. He's a wonder, is Felix McNatt!"

"Is his name really Felix?" asked Martin.

"Sure! And he's got a middle name that's worse, only I've forgotten it."

"Felix Adelbert," said Don: "Felix Adelbert McNutt—I mean McNatt!"

"McNutt's better," laughed Bob. "It suits him perfectly. Remember the time—last spring, wasn't it?—when he was raising toads and one of them got into bed with the chap who rooms with him—"

"Rooms with the toad?" asked Martin incredulously.

"No, with McNutt, you jay! What's his name, Joe?"

"McNutt's?" asked Joe, with a wink at Martin.

"Oh, you make me tired! Fuller, that's the chap! Fuller crawled into bed one night and found a toad there ahead of him and told the hall master the next day. He said he didn't mind having toads hopping around the room, but that having

to share his bed with them was almost too much. And faculty agreed with him and McNutt had to get rid of his toads."

"What the dickens did he want with the things, anyway?" asked Don in disgust. "I wouldn't touch one for anything!"

"Oh, toads are all right," answered Joe. "Quite harmless and friendly. McNutt was raising them, it seemed. He'd read somewhere that an able-bodied toad would eat seven million, three hundred and eighty thousand, nine hundred and thirty-three bugs a year. I'm not absolutely certain of the exact number, but it was something like that. Anyway, McNutt figured that if he could raise a few hundred toads he could sell them to farmers and get rich. He said he was trying to develop an improved strain of toads that would be particularly—er—insectivorous: I believe that's the word."

"In justice to the gentleman," said Bob, "it should be stated that it was the—the scientific interest of the thing rather than the pecuniary reward that attracted him. Science is McNutt's long suit!"

"I think Fuller, or whatever his name is, was most unreasonable," laughed Don. "Why, the world might be rid of insects by this time if he hadn't been so cranky! Do toads eat mosquitoes, Joe?"

"I guess so. I know they eat flies, anyway. I saw one do it once. He stopped about a yard away and the fly didn't even know he was about. Then—*zip*—out went Mr. Toad's tongue, like you uncoiled the mainspring of a watch, and the fly was gone!"

"Flew away, probably," suggested Martin.

"He did not, son! He was in Mr. Toad's tummy."

"You say the toad was a yard distant from the fly when the —when the shot was fired?" asked Don.

"Well, maybe a couple of feet," Joe compromised. "It was a long way."

"Take off another eighteen inches," begged Bob earnestly. "I want to believe you, Joseph but two feet—" He shook his head sadly.

"Go to the dickens! It was two feet if it was an inch. Anyone will tell you that a toad's tongue is remarkably long."

"Nobody has to tell me, after that yarn," replied Bob gravely. "All I'm wondering now is where the toad keeps his tongue when he's not using it!"

"I told you he coils it up," laughed Joe, "like a watch spring."

"It's a mighty good thing toads can't talk," observed Willard. "With a tongue like that, they'd never stop! McNatt asked me to come and see him. He said he had a fine collection of minerals in his room."

"Minerals? Boy, he's got enough rocks there to build a house! And bird nests and butterflies and beetles and—and things in jars that make you shudder to look at 'em!" Joe shuddered merely at the memory. "He's always trying to hatch out moths and things in cigar boxes. Once he had some silk-worms, I remember. Mr. Screven got him to bring them to class one day. Funny things, they were. They didn't live very long, because McNutt couldn't get the right sort of leaves for them to eat. They should have had mulberry leaves, I think, and he thought some other sort ought to do just as well, and the worms got mad and went on a hunger strike!

Fuller told me once that the room is so full of rubbish that he can't turn around. Said he was forever finding a family of white mice or striped lizards tucked away in one of his bureau drawers and that he always had to look before he sat down for fear of sitting on something he shouldn't!"

When the laughter had subsided Willard told of McNatt's theory regarding scientific football. He found that, as he told it, it didn't sound as plausible as it had when McNatt explained it, but it certainly aroused amusement. Joe drew a picture of Gil Tarver pulling out a memorandum book and looking up the right play. "Because, you see, not even Gil could ever remember two hundred—was it two hundred, Brand?—three hundred plays. Probably they'd make a rule that a quarter-back must find his plays unassisted and must not consume more than three minutes looking them up! Gil would have a pocket built on his jacket to keep the book in, I suppose."

"Gosh, suppose it dropped out!" exclaimed Don. "Would he be allowed time-out to look for it?"

"Probably a center would be picked for his light-finger ability," suggested Bob. "It would be part of his stunt to reach through or around the opposing center and steal the quarter-back's memorandum book, thus placing the enemy *hors de combat*!"

"Come on, Brand," begged Martin. "This is getting wild."

"Did McNatt ever play football?" asked Don.

"I think so," Joe answered. "Yes, I know he did. He was out for the team the first year I was here. You remember him, Bob?"

Bob shook his head. “No, but I’ve heard that he did play.”

“Yes, and I think he played the year before that. Something happened to him, though, my freshman year. I guess he had an accident or got sick. I know he wasn’t around long. Seems to me he was trying for half-back. He’s not a bad old scout, Felix Adelbert. Only trouble is, I guess, his brains are sort of scrambled.”

“Addled, maybe,” suggested Martin. “Addle-bert McNutt. Come on, Brand, I’m getting it too!”

“I think I’ll accept his invitation some day,” said Willard, as they crossed to Haylow. “I’d like to see that room of his!”

The occasion didn’t present itself that week, however, for Willard found that life on the football gridiron had suddenly become both real and earnest. Although Coach Cade had four good half-backs at his command, Willard was not overlooked. But Friday he was on an equal footing with Mawson and Moncks, to all appearances, and was certainly in line for first substitute. He didn’t want anything serious or painful to happen to either of those excellent chaps, but he couldn’t help reflecting sometimes that if one or the other was to develop something mild, like whooping cough or German measles, he could bear it with equanimity! Failing the likelihood of anything of the kind happening, however, he set himself earnestly to outdo those rivals in practice. After all, while Mawson was rather a better punter and Moncks was shiftier in a broken field, neither was unbeatable, and Willard kept that fact resolutely in mind and worked hard.

Banning High School came on Saturday and put up a very pretty game against the Gray-and-Gold. In fact, Banning sprang several surprises on the home team, and for a time,

during the first of the contest, it looked as though Alton was in for a defeat. Banning was light but fast, and instead of relying on a forward-passing game as she was expected to rely, she met Alton's own tactics and, from a close, three-abreast formation, shot her backs through the opposing line with discouraging ease. Any place outside guards pleased her, and Alton saw her tackles and ends completely outplayed during the first two periods. Banning's speed was the secret of her success, and the Gray-and-Gold, heavier and slower, seldom stopped the plays until they were well through her line.

Banning scored first when, near the end of the second quarter, she recovered a short kick on Alton's forty-six and plunged and knifed her way down to the thirty-one. Fast, snappy playing took the ball there in just seven downs. Mr. Cade ran in a substitute left end and a substitute left tackle then, and Banning slowed up. But she reached the twenty-five-yard line before she was halted. There, it being fourth down, with four to go, she made elaborate preparations for a placement kick. Naturally enough, while guarding against a fake, Alton expected a kick, and team and spectators were alike surprised when, the ball having flown back to quarter and the kicker having swung his long leg, there followed a long side-pass from the quarter to an end, just as Alton charged! It looked to those on the sidelines as if the pigskin went between the legs of the Alton end and tackle as they swept around, but probably it didn't. In any event, the waiting Banning end caught it neatly and had covered ten yards of the intervening thirty before he was challenged. He shot around the Alton left half and was only brought down when Gil Tarver tackled on the eight yards.

The line-up was squarely on the five, and although the Gray-and-Gold fought desperately there, it took the enemy just three plays to put the ball over. A plunge at the center, with the whole Banning backfield behind the quarter, who carried, yielded most of two yards. Then the full-back ripped around left tackle for as much more, and, on third down, with the other backs running to the right, that troublesome Banning quarter shot through between guard and tackle on the left and put the pigskin just over the last white streak!

The half ended with the score 6—0 in the visitor's favor, and the home team came in for a "panning" from the stands that, deserved or not, was decidedly enthusiastic. However, the team was not suffering for lack of criticism just then, even if it couldn't hear what the spectators were saying. Coach Cade, although mild-mannered, had a fair command of language and could use it when needs be, and the players listened to some home truths during the half-time.

When the team came back to the field it was noted that Moncks had replaced Cochran at right half, Hutchins had taken Tarver's place at quarter and a third-string fellow was playing left tackle. Perhaps, though, it was the talk they had listened to rather than the change in the line-up that produced results, for certainly "Hutch" played no better game behind center than Gil had, and the new tackle was far too green to be of much use. That as may be, Alton showed speed from the start and Banning's backs were stopped at the line instead of beyond it. Also, the Gray-and-Gold took the offensive when the third quarter was a few minutes along and kept it throughout the rest of the game, with the result that the score was tied in the third period, when Moncks got away for a thirty-yard run and a touchdown, and untied at the beginning

of the last quarter, when Alton hammered her way from well within her own territory to Banning's eight yards and then tossed the ball over to Macon between the goal posts. Oddly enough, when Lake kicked an easy goal after the second touchdown, the score became 13—6, which was the score of last week's contest, and 13—6 it remained. Martin said he guessed thirteen-six was a habit, but when Mt. Millard School got through with Alton, seven days later, he changed his mind!

# CHAPTER XI
# THE FIRST DEFEAT

When October was a week old Willard had become as much a part and parcel of Alton Academy as if he had spent a year there instead of a scant three weeks. For a time he had wondered whether he had made a mistake in substituting it for Kenly Hall, but as he became more and more at home that speculation ceased to trouble him. Even if he had made a mistake, and had known it, the bewildered letter he had received from his mother would have reconciled him to the fact. That letter had amused him for days. For the joke of it, he had carefully abstained from explanations and had merely written: "Here I am at Alton Academy, everything unpacked and quite settled. I think I am going to like it immensely." Of course there had been much more, but he had described the school in such a matter-of-fact way that his mother and father, on reading the letter, had almost doubted their memories.

"Your father," wrote Mrs. Harmon, "says that we may have misunderstood, but I am very, *very* certain you meant to go to Kenly School. You talked about it so frequently that I'm sure I couldn't be mistaken. Kenly School is at Lakeville, for I've looked it up in a magazine, and your letter was posted at Alton, and your father says the two places are fully ten miles apart. I do hope everything is all right, but I simply can't understand why you didn't explain more fully in your letter. Do let me hear from you right away, dear, and tell me just what happened."

Of course Willard had answered the appeal promptly and explained fully, emphasizing the real or imaginary advantages of Alton over Kenly, and had received a second letter from home that was not nearly so sympathetic as it might have been. It was his father who wrote this time, and Mr. Harmon dwelt, at what Willard thought was undue length, on the latter's Lamentable Lack of Serious Purpose, pointing out that attaining an education was not a pursuit to be governed by levity. That epistle had the effect of making Willard rather more devoted to his studies for awhile at least and so was not written in vain.

His studies, though, promised to cause him scant worry, for he had come well prepared for the Alton junior year. Greek, which he had elected to make up the required number of hours, was new to him and so presented some difficulties, but he was consoled with the knowledge that by taking the course this year he could, if he wished, drop it the last half of his senior year. Martin, who had left Greek severely alone, his motto being "Don't Look for Trouble," told Willard that he was a chump and dwelt at length on the merits of Science 4 as a "snap course." To which Willard virtuously replied that he was attending the Academy to acquire an education and not to spend his time in slothfulness. Whereupon Martin upset him onto the bed, placed a pillow over his head and sat on it.

About this time Martin was making Bob Newhall's life a burden to him by solicitous inquiries regarding his health. Martin had a way of observing Bob anxiously and attempting to feel his pulse that the latter found very trying. Of course Bob could refuse to have his heart action investigated, and could—and did—decline to put out his tongue for Martin to inspect, but he couldn't prevent Martin from eyeing him

narrowly on all occasions and shaking his head sorrowfully over what he pretended to believe were the ravages of disease. “I don’t like those deep circles under your eyes, Bob,” Martin would say gravely. “Sleep pretty well, do you?”

“About nine hours, thanks,” Bob would reply shortly.

“I was afraid of that! That’s one of the unmistakable symptoms. Feel tired in the morning? Sort of worried and oppressed without knowing why?”

“Not until I run across you! And then I know why blamed well!”

“Irritable, too! Dear, dear! Bob, why don’t you drop in at the doctor’s some day and just let him look you over? Of course there may be nothing serious, nothing that can’t be remedied if taken in time, but I’d feel a lot easier about you if you saw someone, honest I would!”

“You’ll feel easier if I hand you a wallop,” growled Bob. “Say, if you played guard half as hard as you work that silly tongue of yours you might amount to something!”

Martin spent a whole hour in the library one morning and emerged with a fine fund of information regarding the sleeping sickness and the ravages of the tse-tse fly, and after that he became doubly obnoxious to Bob. Martin may or may not have been correct in connecting the bite of the tse-tse with the sleeping sickness, but the way in which he drove the flies away from Bob’s vicinity proved that he meant to take no chances. Strangely, the object of his solicitous care resented this manifestation of it more than any other, and Martin had only to fix a piercing gaze on the tip of Bob’s nose and begin a cautious approach with uplifted hand to throw Bob into a

paroxysm of lamentable anger. Martin, repulsed, would explain in hurt tones that never having seen the tse-tse fly he couldn't be supposed to know it from the common or house-fly, and that he consequently was using only excusable caution. Naturally enough, Willard and Joe enjoyed the nonsense and egged Martin on, but when the latter began flooding Bob's mail with patent medicine circulars and stories of miraculous cures clipped from the newspapers, Bob's patience became exhausted and he vowed revenge.

"I'm going to get good and even with you, Mart," he declared one afternoon when Martin had drawn his attention to an advertisement extolling the merits of a net to be worn over the head to the utter confusion of mosquitoes and flies. "When I get through with you, my humorous young friend, you won't know there's such a word as 'fly' in the English language. And you'll be good and sick yourself, believe me!"

Martin, however, professed to believe the threat only the empty ravings of a mind affected by disease, and was quite interested by what he declared was an unusual manifestation of the malady. But Bob looked unusually grim and exhibited such unaccustomed patience that Martin confided to Willard later that he "guessed he had got old Bob's goat at last."

"You'd better watch out that he doesn't get yours," laughed Willard. "I believe he means to try it."

"It's the last stage before the final breakdown," replied Martin gravely. "He won't last much longer, I'm afraid!"

That pessimistic prophecy was made on Friday night, and the next afternoon Alton traveled to Warren and played Mt. Millard School. Some eighty or ninety fellows accompanied the team and were present at the Waterloo. Willard watched

the game from the bench, dressed for play, and saw his chance of getting into it dwindle into nothingness as Mt. Millard piled up her score. It is the historian's privilege to avoid such events as he may consider unworthy of inclusion in his narrative, and the present historian gladly avails himself of that privilege. Suffice it to say that Mt. Millard out-rushed, out-punted and out-generaled Alton and won a lopsided contest by a score of 19—0. Joe Myers summed it all up on the way home when he said briefly: "Funeral from the late residence. No flowers."

Later that game was looked on as extremely good medicine, for it proved one or two things most conclusively; as, for instance, that a backfield wanting the services of a good plunging full-back was a far from complete institution, and that the forward line of a football team, like a chain, was as strong as its weakest unit, and no stronger. At full-back in that Mt. Millard game, Steve Browne had proved himself a failure. Nor had Linthicum, who had taken his place at the beginning of the third period, done any better. The following week saw the search for a likely successor to Browne take on new ardor. The substitute bench was combed carefully without satisfactory results and Greenwood was brought over from the second team and given a try-out. Greenwood did his level best to please, but that he failed was apparent from the fact that he was back on the second three days later. Of course Coach Cade tried the old game of switching, but Bob Newhall, Leroy, who played left tackle none too well, Lake and Mawson all fell down. Even Martin was considered and passed over, and on Thursday the full-back problem was no nearer a solution than at any time that fall.

The left end of the line was causing trouble, too. Leroy, at tackle, appeared to be miscast badly, and Sanford, at end, was no match for his opponents at any time. Putney and Rhame, the most promising tackle and end substitutes, were far from satisfactory. That week was a week of experiments and confusion, and Coach Cade had a worried look quite foreign to his countenance. Three days of wretched weather added to the difficulties, for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday were each cold and rainy, and by the last day the gridiron was not much better than a bog. Under these circumstances the team would scarcely be expected to make much progress, nor did it. Joe Myers was extremely peevish most of the week and Don Harris, visiting Number 16 Haylow one evening, remarked feelingly that he would be mighty glad when football was over for the season.

It was the miserable weather on Thursday that sent Willard over to Upton Hall. There had been an hour of indoor practice in the gymnasium, but the slippery ground and relentless downpour of rain had prohibited any use of the field, and at half-past four Willard found himself at a loose end. Martin had gone up to one of the society rooms in Academy Hall to play pool, and, although he had asked Willard to go with him, the latter, not being a member, had thought it best to decline. On the porch of the gymnasium he watched the swishing rain and the inundated paths and wondered what to do with himself. The answer came when his disconsolate gaze, roaming the cheerless world, lighted on Upton Hall. Recollection of Felix McNatt and his invitation came to him and, turning up his collar, he plunged into the deluge. He didn't remember the number of McNatt's room, but he could find it, he supposed. On the second floor, he knocked on a

nearby door and obtained the information from a surprised occupant. Number 49 proved to be on the third floor, and Willard's knock elicited a muffled "Come in!" As the door was locked, however, Willard did not immediately accept the invitation. "Wait a moment, please," came McNatt's voice from within. Then a chair was overturned, footsteps approached and the door was thrown open.

"Oh, hello!" greeted McNatt cordially. "Come in. Sorry to keep you waiting, but this thing's out of order somewhere." He leaned down to examine a bolt on the door frame, and then followed with his eyes a wire that proceeded from the bolt to the ceiling and across the latter, through a number of screw-eyes, to a point above the study table in the middle of the room. From there it descended to within convenient reach of a person seated at the table, terminating in a wooden knob. Willard viewed it with amused interest.

"Quite a scheme," he said. "Your invention, McNatt?"

"Yes, it saves time, you see. Trouble is, though, it will get out of order. Ought to have small wheels for it to run on instead of those eyes. Let's see now." He pulled the knob down and the bolt slipped obediently from its socket with a business-like *click*. McNatt shrugged expressively. "All right now, you see. It binds somewhere, I guess. Sit down, Harmon." He indicated a Morris chair in need of repair and Willard seated himself and looked around. The rooms in Upton were slightly larger, it seemed, than those in the newer dormitories, and Willard considered it a most fortunate circumstance, since a smaller room would never have accommodated all the articles that met his gaze. Besides the ordinary furnishings, there were two bookcases, a set of book shelves that hung on a wall and several boxes up-ended to

serve as auxiliary tables. McNatt was telling Willard of his failure to find information regarding the use of the diving-rod in the location of metals and saying some bitter things about the reference department of the Academy library, but Willard was too much interested in the room to pay much heed.

The place looked like a compromise between a museum and a laboratory. Stuffed birds and small animals peered down with glassy eyes from all sides, a badly mounted pickerel on a board presented a hungry mouth, a snake skin depended from the corner of a framed picture that showed, in colors, what was probably a quiet Sunday afternoon in the Garden of Eden. It was an engaging picture, and Willard studied it curiously before his gaze went past. All the animals of which he had ever heard were depicted in it, and all were grouped about in peace and friendliness, even the lions in the foreground smiling on the beholder with truly benevolent countenances.

Methods of saving time or labor were apparent on every hand in the shape of mechanical appliances. A complicated arrangement of cords allowed of the lowering or raising of the window shades without approaching the windows; although Willard could not see that it was any farther from the table to the windows than it was to the side of the room where the cords hung! On the chair in which he sat a home-made bookholder was attached to one arm, while, by reaching underneath, one could pull forth an extension that accommodated one’s legs and feet, though probably not very comfortably. Later he discovered that a switch attached to the wall beside the head of McNatt’s bed in the alcove allowed that ingenious youth to put on or off the electric light without arising.

The bookcases held all sorts of things except books, although there were plenty of the latter distributed about in such unusual places as the window-seat and the tops of the two chiffoniers. Indeed, a set of encyclopedias of ancient vintage found lodgment along the baseboard on the floor. The bookcases had been consecrated to Science, it appeared, for in the nearer one dozens and dozens of birds' eggs peered forth from cotton-batting nests and in the other McNatt's collection of minerals was installed. The study table overflowed with a motley débris of books, papers, a microscope, pieces of wire, bits of wood, a blowpipe, a specimen-jar half filled with a dark-brown liquid that from its appearance and odor was plainly "working," a mouse-trap—empty, as Willard was relieved to discover—and so many other things that it would be useless to attempt an enumeration of them. Willard was still looking about when McNatt interrupted his inspection.

"Would you like to see my minerals?" he asked.

Willard politely replied that he would and McNatt opened the doors of the case and thereupon held forth for some ten minutes, during which time Willard pretended interest in various specimens and said "Really?", "Is that so?" and "Indeed!" dozens of times. When it came to the birds' eggs he had the courage to say that he wasn't very much interested, and McNatt passed them by. "I'm thinking of getting rid of them," he announced. "I need the space for other things. If you hear of anyone who'd like a nice collection I wish you'd let me know." Willard agreed and was shown some choice things in cocoons, an extensive collection of butterflies and moths which occupied the two lower drawers of McNatt's chiffonier, several specimens of tree-fungus, a cigar-box full

of shells gathered along the river, a pair of chameleons in a shoe-box, a number of small phials filled with liquids of various hues which McNatt assured him were vegetable dyes, another phial of whitish powder that its exhibitor called kaolin, and numerous other wonders. McNatt was quite impressive about the kaolin.

"I guess I'm the only one who knows about it," he said, lowering his voice and looking guardedly toward the door. "It's immensely valuable, you know."

"Is it?" asked Willard.

"Oh, yes. It's what they make porcelain from. China clay they call it sometimes. There's a big deposit of it where I found this, and maybe some day I'll buy the land and develop it. Meanwhile, of course, I'm keeping very quiet about it."

"Of course," murmured Willard.

"And here's another thing," continued McNatt. "Take these vegetable dyes. There isn't one of those you couldn't make just as well as I did, Harmon!"

"You don't say?"

"Yes, sir! And every one is made of something that grows right beside your door, as you might say. Now take this." He shook a phial until the sediment at the bottom turned the liquid to a muddy purple as seen against the light. "Nothing but poke-berry! I don't mind letting you in on that because lots of people know about getting color from poke-berry. But here's one, by ginger, you won't often see!" He held up a second bottle and Willard gazed on a quite gorgeous crimson. "How's that for color?" asked McNatt. "You don't find anything finer than that, I'll bet!"

“Mighty pretty,” responded Willard. “What’s that made from?”

McNatt chuckled, winked portentously and shook his head. “That’s a secret. I’d tell you only I might want to go into the business some day, Harmon. Not as a life-work, you understand, but— Know anything about mycology?”

“No, what is it?”

“The study of mushrooms and fungi. Awfully interesting. I’m just taking it up. Some of them make wonderful dyes, and that’s what started me. I’ve found thirteen varieties of mushrooms already, and I’ve been out only four times.” He looked approvingly out at the rain. “There’ll be lots of them tomorrow, I guess. I found a giant puff-ball over near where I met you that day, only it was rotten. They’re delicious eating. Some day when I find one that’s in good condition I’ll let you know and we’ll have a feast. I’ve got a little alcohol stove in there that you can cook almost anything on. I had a few the other night and they were mighty good. Winfred—Winfred Fuller, you know; he rooms here with me—Winfred said they made him feel sort of sick, but I guess it was more likely something he had for dinner.”

“Still, some mushrooms are poisonous, aren’t they?” inquired Willard doubtfully.

“Lots of them, but it isn’t difficult to tell them from the others, you know. I’ve got a book that tells all about it. Where is it?” McNatt looked rather hopelessly about him. “I don’t see it just now. Winfred’s mixed my things up again, I dare say. He’s a very decent fellow, but he hasn’t any idea of orderliness. Next time you come it will probably be around.”

Their travels had brought them back to the corridor end of the room and Willard's attention was attracted by a small bottle hanging by a string from a thumb-tack beneath the electric light switch. "What's that for?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh, that?" McNatt removed it as he spoke. "That's no good any more. I had a glow-worm and a firefly in there, but the firefly ate the glow-worm, or maybe it was the other way around: I forget now; and then the one who'd eaten the other one died, too." He took the stopper from the bottle and inverted it, allowing the dried remains of some small occupant to fall out. "Besides," he added, "you can buy little dinkuses made of radium that'll do the same thing now."

"Well, but—but what was it they did?" asked Willard.

"Oh, they glowed, you know, in the dark, and showed where the switch was." McNatt tossed the empty bottle to the table. "Trouble was they didn't always glow when you wanted them to and sometimes you had to stand around and wait quite a while."

Seated again, McNatt tilted back in his chair and observed Willard thoughtfully for a moment. Then: "Returning to the subject we were discussing the other day, Harmon," he announced, "I've been sort of outlining a system along the lines we spoke of. I haven't gone into it thoroughly, of course, but I've estimated that the number of possible situations in a football game approximate one hundred and sixty. I may be slightly in error, of course, for I haven't played recently and there have been several alterations in the rules, but I'm not far out of the way. That number includes situations occurring both in attack and defense. I've got a rough summary here somewhere." He began to rummage over the table. "It's a

piece of yellow paper. Is it on your side anywhere? Now I wonder what I did with it. Well, never mind, it'll show up again some day. Anyway, my idea would be to—ah—catalogue them, as one might say, according to their locations on the field of play. I'd divide the gridiron into, say, ten zones longitudinally and three zones laterally, giving thirty areas in all. Numbering—perhaps lettering would be better, though: lettering such area— Have you got to go?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so," replied Willard. "I—it's getting along toward six o'clock. I'd like to hear about it some other time, though, McNatt. I say, why don't you come over to my room some evening and let Mart Proctor hear it? He'd be awfully interested, I'm sure. Mart's on the team, too, you know; plays guard. I wish you would."

"Why, I don't visit around much," answered the other hesitantly, as he reached for the knob that unbolted the door. "I don't have time, you see, and just now I'm most interested in mycology, Harmon. By the way, don't forget about that mushroom supper we're going to have!"

# CHAPTER XII
# “DO YOUR BEST”

Friday dawned fair and warm, and Willard, looking forth from a window while dressing, smilingly pictured McNatt, far afield, gathering mushrooms from the sunlit meadows. One thing, however, was certain, Willard reflected, and that was that the enthusiastic McNatt would never induce him to partake of that mushroom supper! Yesterday he might perhaps have taken a chance, but today life was too well worth living.

In the afternoon, contrary to custom, there was a hard and prolonged scrimmage between the first and second teams. Ordinarily the day before a contest was given over to formation drill, with only a brief line-up, but today, with Lorimer Academy looming dangerously ahead, Coach Cade couldn’t afford to be lenient. One radical change in the first team line-up was apparent when the two teams faced each other. Arnold Lake, the regular left half-back, was at left end in place of Sanford, and Mawson was at left half. Doubtless it was only an experiment and might not prove satisfactory, but Willard saw, with a quickening of his pulse, that if the change became permanent he would be one notch nearer the realization of his hopes. With only Mawson and, perhaps, Moncks ahead of him, the position of first substitute was just over the horizon. And events that day certainly fostered optimism, for before the practice game was over Mawson was relegated to the bench and Willard took his place. For something like ten minutes life was very strenuous for him.

The first was thrice given the ball on the second's twenty-yard-line and thrice failed to take it over, although Coach Cade stormed and Gil Tarver commanded and Captain Bob Myers implored. The second fought desperately and would not yield the final few feet. In those assaults Willard played his part well, making up in speed and aggressiveness what he lacked in weight. If he didn't perform any outstanding feat, at least he gained as certainly as Cochran, beside him, and more surely than Steve Browne, again restored to full-back position for lack of a better man. The nearest thing to a mishap befalling Willard was his failure to hold a short forward-pass over the left of the line that might possibly have produced the desired score. But he was sorely beset and, jostled and badgered by the second team backs, he could not make the ball secure after it reached him. That came in the last attack, and afterwards, when Cochran's desperate attempt at the left of center had failed to carry him over by two feet, the ball was given to the second and Greenwood, standing behind his goal, kicked to safety. It is quite possible that Willard looked for some slight expression of commendation from captain or coach when the whistle blew, for he was under the impression that he had done none so badly for a first appearance on the big team, but the only mention of his part in the fracas that he heard was made by the quarter-back. Probably Tarver had no intention of being unkind, but his regrets haunted Willard for the rest of the day.

"Too bad you couldn't hold that forward, Harmon," Tarver said on the way back to the gymnasium. "Gee, we'd have had a score sure if you had!"

Seeking sympathy, Willard repeated the remark to Martin that evening, expecting Martin to tell him that it wasn't his

fault and that Gil Tarver was unreasonable. But Martin only shook his head as he replied cheerfully: “Yes, it was a shame, Brand. Still, I don’t believe first would have scored. Gil threw too short and you were five yards from the line.”

“We-ell,” said Willard, “you think I ought to have caught it?”

“What? Oh, I don’t know about that. You’ve got to be mighty quick to get your hands around a forward or else you’ll miss it. And it’s a heap easier than it looks, usually.”

Willard went to sleep that night somewhat disheartened by the conclusion that Fortune had given him an opportunity to prove his ability and he had failed. Doubtless, he thought, another such opportunity would be long in coming. He lived over that disastrous attempt to catch the forward-pass and wondered whether, had he leaped an instant sooner, he would have held it; whether, in short, anything he could have done and didn’t would have insured success. He tried to comfort himself with the reiterated assertion that no one, not even Captain Myers, whose work on the receiving end of forward-passes was phenomenal, could have done any better, but he fell asleep before reiteration produced conviction and passed through a number of unpleasant dreams before he awoke again to a bright and brisk October morning.

Lorimer was always an uncertain quantity when it came to the yearly gridiron contests with Alton, and, since the red-legged invaders had nosed out a victory over the Gray-and-Gold last fall, it was held to be highly desirable that a conclusive defeat be handed them on the present occasion. And there appeared to be no good reason why Alton shouldn’t win, for, while Lorimer was well coached and knew

plenty of football, she had sustained two defeats so far this season and had but one victory to her credit.

To Willard, observing proceedings from the bench, sandwiched between Martin and Ned Richards, the playing of Lake at left end again brought renewed encouragement. At least it was evident that Mr. Cade believed well enough of the experiment to give it a thorough trial, and all during the game Willard rooted hard, if silently, for the ex-half-back and prayed that he would make good as an end! Lorimer took the kick-off and at once showed her running ability when a tow-headed right half reeled off nearly thirty yards before Cochran brought him down. The enemy showed several novel variations of old plays and twice made first down before she was finally forced to kick on Alton's forty-two yards. She was master of the shift and sent her plays at the long or short side of the line with beautiful and confusing impartiality. Also, her backfield was composed of slim, fast and elusive youths who had a remarkable faculty of slipping out of the opponents' clutches. In brief, it became apparent during the first few minutes of play that the home team was destined to have her hands full that afternoon and would be supremely fortunate if she kept her goal-line inviolate. The first quarter, however, passed without either team reaching scoring distance. There was much punting, at which Alton was slightly superior, and many attempts at end running by Lorimer, some of which succeeded. Only one forward-pass was tried, and that, by the enemy, went wrong and landed the ball in Alton's hands. The latter made her distance five times and Lorimer four, and at the end of the first twelve minutes an unbiased critic would have said that on performance the opponents were about equal. He might have added, however,

that the Red somehow gave the impression of having more in reserve than the Gray-and-Gold, and if he had said so he would have been proved correct by future events.

Alton started a brave advance in the second period and, with Cochran and Mawson alternating on attacks between tackles and Gil Tarver scampering around the ends, thrice made it first down in enemy territory. But on Lorimer's twenty-seven yards, Lake became too eager and Alton was set back for off-side, and after a futile attempt to make up the lost ground, Tarver fell back and kicked to the three yards. Lorimer punted on second down and the pigskin fell into Tarver's hands in midfield and that hustled back seven yards before he consented to stop. Alton took up the journey again, while some three hundred brazen-throated adherents cheered encouragingly from the stand. Halted on the thirty-six, Browne threw overhead to Joe Myers and Joe caught brilliantly and was toppled for an eight-yard gain. Lake, skirting around, took the ball from Tarver and tried hard to make good on the farther side, but was run back for a two-yard loss. Another forward grounded, and Tarver, with twelve to go on third down, faked a kick and carried outside right tackle to Lorimer's sixteen for the distance. The Gray-and-Gold shouted jubilantly and chanted her desire for a touchdown. But, although Mawson got three through Lorimer's left and followed it with two more off tackle on the other side, again Fortune turned her thumb down. Stacey Ross was caught holding and a stern referee paced the pigskin back an interminable fifteen yards. Tarver's run from kick formation failed to fool the enemy and he regained but twelve of the fifteen. Perhaps a forward-pass would have gained the distance, but Tarver chose to try for a field-goal, and,

standing near Lorimer's twenty-five-yard line, he held out his hands while the stands grew still. The angle was not severe and if Leroy, at left tackle, had held firm, the quarter would probably have scored three points that later in the day would have loomed large. But Leroy gave before the desperate onslaught of the foe and Tarver was hurried. The ball had height and distance, but not direction, and passed a foot to the right of the nearest upright.

The half ended a minute later with the pigskin in Lorimer's possession near her forty.

Willard trotted back to the gymnasium with the rest and hugged the knowledge that Arnold Lake had shown himself a valuable man at the end of the line. Willard could have told you almost every move that Lake had made during those twenty-four minutes of playing time! Coach Cade was sparing of criticism today, for no glaring faults had been apparent and the fighting spirit had been evident. He did warn against infractions of the rules, however, pointing out that had it not been for Ross's holding Alton would now be at least six points to the good. "We lost thirty yards by penalties, and Lorimer lost only ten. The twenty yards' difference may mean the loss of the game. Guard against being off-side, fellows, and against holding. Don't let's make the opponent any gifts! You've got to fight harder this half and run your plays off quicker. You're up against a heady bunch of fellows and you've got to outwit them as well as outplay them if you're going to win. I want to see the backs start a little quicker and hit the line with more steam. That applies to you especially, Browne. You have a rotten tendency to slow up at the line, just when you should be going the hardest. You miss

two and three yards regularly on every play by that sort of thing. See if you can't put more slam into it!"

Five minutes later they were back again, greeted by the longdrawn "A—l—t—o—n! *A—L—T—O—N!!* A—L—T—O—N!!!" from hundreds of throats. And, when the Gray-and-Gold-striped players had spread down the field for the kick-off, there came the sharp, rifle-shot cheer of

A-L-T-O-N! A-L-T-O-N!! A-L-T-O-N!!!
Win! Win! Win! Win! Win! Win! Win! Win!

It was nip-and-tuck for the first half of that third period, with neither team making headway and the ball in air half the time. Alton's forward-passes failed whenever tried, for Lorimer had a really brilliant defense against that play. From one thirty-yard line to another the battle raged, Lorimer making up for Alton's slight superiority at punting by a better end attack. Gains through the line were not forthcoming to either team. Lorimer began to use her substitutes and Coach Cade followed her example by sending in Martin Proctor for Ross. Just before the period ended Gil Tarver gave way to Hutchins at quarter-back. There was no scoring and the whistle piped with the ball in Alton's hands on her opponent's thirty-eight.

While the referee carried the ball across the center and the players gathered about the water pails Willard heard his name called and looked down the bench to see Mr. Cade beckoning. His heart turned a complete somersault—or seemed to—while he traversed the eight yards and halted before the coach!

"Harmon, you've showed a pretty fair knack of getting away outside tackles," said Mr. Cade. "Do you think you

could manage to do it if you went in there now?”

Willard was conscious of the players on either side of the coach, could feel their slightly amused glances on him and knew they were waiting intently for his answer. He felt supremely awkward and embarrassed at that moment. But he had to say something, for Mr. Cade, although he was watching the players assembling again, was awaiting a reply.

“I’ll try, sir,” he managed.

Mr. Cade nodded. “Won’t promise, eh?” He looked up then into Willard’s face, and the boy was vastly relieved to see that his eyes were twinkling. “All right, go ahead,” said the coach. “Your right end looms the easiest, Harmon. If you can get that left end of theirs to play wide for a forward-pass you ought to be able to get started. Do your best, boy,” Mr. Cade nodded again, smilingly.

“Left half, sir?” asked Willard, through the folds of his sweater, which simply wouldn’t come off.

“Left half,” responded the coach.

# CHAPTER XIII
# A FORTY-YARD RUN

Mawson yielded position and head-guard unwillingly. He even sneered a little, but Willard was far too excited to see it. He took his position two yards away from Cochran, eyeing that youth's dirt-streaked countenance with speculative interest as he did so, and awaited Hutch's signals. Slightly behind him, Browne was breathing stertorously, a cut at one corner of his mouth lending him a particularly ferocious look.

"Third down!" chanted the referee. "About six to gain!"

Then Willard was squirming in between Leroy and Myers, while Browne, hugging the ball, smashed past center on the other side. The play went for three yards. Then Hutch punted miserably, barely over the heads of the forwards, and the ball plumped into the Lorimer quarter-back's arms and that youth came dodging, dashing back up the field to the thirty-one yards. On the first play Macon was off-side and Alton lost five yards. A complicated criss-cross sent a back plunging between Newhall and Proctor, and Browne's tackle missed and it was Hutch who laid him low twelve yards behind the line. The visitor's cohorts cheered madly. Lorimer tried a forward to an end far to the right, but Lake and Willard each had the man marked and the pass grounded. A skin-tackle play off Proctor netted four yards, and, on third down, faking a kick, the Lorimer full-back plunged straight through Nichols, at center, for four more. Willard emerged from that pile-up with a ringing head and was glad when time was

called, even though, as it proved, the interlude was necessitated by an injury to Browne. Willard sat down on the ground and tried to look happy, but he was horribly dizzy and the group around the recumbent full-back wavered before his eyes. Eventually they took Browne off and replaced him with Linthicum, and the game went on.

Lorimer was on her mettle now and she made it first down on Alton's forty-one with a smashing attack at left tackle. Finding that spot weak, she tried it again and, although Captain Myers worked like a Trojan to stop up the gap, an enemy back charged through for nearly five yards. Leroy was pretty well played out after that, and Putney took his place. Lorimer made her distance in two more downs, using a shift to the left followed by a quarter-back plunge through the opponent's short side that netted the needed five yards and placed the pigskin almost on the home team's thirty. There, however, Alton stiffened and, after two attempts at the line, Lorimer faked a forward and sent a half straight through between Nichols and Newhall for seven yards. With three to go on fourth down, and the ball on the twenty-two, Lorimer walked back and talked it over. Then the stage was set for a placement kick and the cheering and shouting ceased.

Followed a still, tense moment, broken only by Hutch's imploring "*Break through, Alton! Block it!*" and the quarter's precise, slow signals. Back went the ball, too high but straight enough, and the quarter, kneeling on the turf behind the Lorimer line, caught it deftly, lowered it quickly to earth and pointed it. Cries, warnings, the rasping of canvas against canvas, smothered gasps, and the scene, so orderly an instant before, broke into confusion. Alton tore through desperately, shouldering, plunging, reaching into the path of the ball. But

the Lorimer full-back, deliberate to the point of danger, swung his foot and the ball sailed off, barely above the charging foe, rising slowly and turning lazily over and over on in its flight. There was a moment of suspense and then a white-sweatered timekeeper swung his hands above his head and Lorimer cheered wildly, triumphantly! On the score-board an important young Alton sophomore placed a glaring white 3.

Willard followed his teammates back to midfield in silence. There wasn't much chatting just then, although Hutch called cheerfully enough for a score. There was less than six minutes remaining, but that, Willard assured himself, was enough time to win in. On the stand Alton was cheering heartily, undismayed. Coach Cade was sending in three new men: Johnston for Proctor at right tackle, McLeod for Macon and Moncks for Cochran. For a moment, seeing Moncks trotting on, Willard's heart sank, but it was Cochran's head-guard that the newcomer donned. Martin had done none so badly at tackle, but the position was a strange one to him and he had had his bad moments.

Lorimer kicked off and the battle began again. The ball went to Moncks and Willard swung in ahead and was joined by Hutchins and the three went sweeping diagonally across the field. Then Willard met an enemy and both sprawled, and Linthicum darted away from the interference and ran straight into the arms of a big Lorimer guard. The teams lined up in the twenty-four yards close to the side-line. Hutch's heave to Joe Myers went short, was tipped by a Lorimer end and fell to the ground. On the next play, Willard, ball hugged tight, swept around his own end behind Hutch and Myers, dodged the opposing end, turned in and dodged and twisted for eight

yards before he was dragged, still fighting hard, to earth. Linthicum tried the right of the line and lost a yard and Moncks made it first down past tackle. A short forward over the line landed safely in Joe Myers' hands for nine yards and Willard added two through left guard.

Just short of the middle of the field, with the minutes running fast, Hutch called for Formation C and the Alton line spread widely. Lorimer edged out in answer. Willard, crouched behind his left guard, looked straight ahead. Hutch called his signals. Linthicum swung and ran across the field to the left. Back shot the ball to Hutch, five yards behind center. Lorimer charged, coming through the wide gaps in the Alton line. Hutch stepped back while Willard crossed in front of him. Then came a short pass and the left half, the ball snuggled in his right elbow, shot straight into the line. Linthicum's diversion had drawn the Lorimer backfield from position, and Willard, having dodged one slow-moving Lorimer forward, found an open field for several yards. Then, however, the enemy closed about him and his race seemed run. There was no interference to aid him, for Hutch was down, and Moncks, having run the end out, was far behind. McLeod made a desperate effort to get into the running, but Willard was fleeter. He side-stepped a Lorimer half and was momentarily free, and swung toward the middle of the field as he crossed the enemy's forty. Behind him raced friend and foe. He had slipped through the worst of the opposition, but ahead of him a determined quarter awaited and from the left speeded a half. The latter Willard scarcely feared, for he had a fair lead, but the quarter spelled disaster. Nearer and nearer he came to the latter, a smallish, hard-fighting youth who held his distance grimly, only moving slightly to the right as

though anticipating Willard's intention. The Alton stand was shouting wildly, confusedly, but Willard had no knowledge of it. The thumping of his heart and the rasping of his breath seemed to be the only sounds in the world!

Then the supreme instant came. Close to the thirty-yard line the enemies met. Something had told Willard that the opponent was too knowing, too quick and agile to be fooled by side-stepping, and so, a few yards away, Willard shifted the ball to his stomach, clasped both hands over it and put his head down. Straight into the quarter he charged, with every ounce of strength thrusting his body forward. And as he charged he twisted and spun.

Arms encompassed, his thighs and hands clutched desperately, yet he found his stride again and went forward. Something clung for a moment to one leg and he staggered, fell to a knee and threw his body forward. The weight was gone and he was on his feet again! He set his straining eyes on the goal posts and struggled forward. But now it seemed that his feet were huge pieces of lead and his head swam dizzily. Four strides, five, six, and again he felt the touch of fingers that groped for a hold. Summoning his remaining strength, he moved free, head back and lungs bursting. He was past the fifteen-yard line and the gray, padded posts wavered in the sunlight, close at hand. But he was not to reach them.

If Willard had run a good race, so, too, had the Lorimer right half-back, and the latter had been but a scant five yards away when Willard had shaken himself free of the quarter's tackle. And so, just short of the ten yards, the struggle ended. A last supreme effort and the pursuer's arms wrapped themselves around the quarry's legs. One short stride

followed and then pursued and pursuer lay prone and unmoving across the lime mark!

That ended Willard's usefulness for that day, just as it ended the usefulness of his captor, for both boys were fairly run out. But the ball lay well inside the ten yards, and Alton's cheers were exultant and unceasing while the half-fainting youths were administered to, Longstreth raced out to replace Willard and Lorimer sent in a substitute right half. Willard saw the last three minutes of the game from a pile of blankets at the end of the bench, saw his teammates make three gallant attempts to conquer those last stubborn nine yards, saw, with a sinking heart, Moncks stopped two yards from the line and hurled back, saw Captain Myers walk determinedly back up the field to kicking position.

Hopeless gloom shrouded the bench. Myers was no goal kicker, and all knew it. Had there been a single, solitary player out there who knew the least thing about that art he would never have attempted it. But substitution had deprived the team of Cochran and Tarver and Macon, and none of those who remained on the bench could be depended on. When all was said and done, perhaps Hutch might have chosen more wisely had he risked a forward-pass on that final down. Yet Hutch knew that Lorimer would be looking for that play and knew that if it failed Alton's last opportunity to score would be lost. And he didn't make the choice unaided, for Joe Myers counseled it. Joe said afterwards that he had no more idea of booting the ball over than he had of flying. Yet a more effortless, more perfect drop-kick than he made would have been hard to imagine! Straight between the uprights and well over the cross-bar it sailed, and no one needed the

corroboration of the official's upthrown hands to tell him that Alton had tied the score!

And a tied score it remained when the final whistle blew.

Alton showed as much delight over the drawn battle as though she had won overwhelmingly, and Lorimer, trying hard to smile, took what comfort she could. But if the School felt jubilant and triumphant, it was plainly to be seen that Coach Cade did not share its emotions. That game had clearly demonstrated the fact, long suspected, that the Gray-and-Gold backfield was far from the scoring combination it should be. With Lake playing left end, a position he had proved his fitness for that afternoon, the left half-back position was left to Mawson or Harmon. Each, while he showed much promise, was inexperienced. Cochran, on the other side, was steady but far from brilliant. The full-back position was the weakest spot of all. Neither Browne nor Linthicum had the hard-fighting spirit needed. That Alton had not met defeat was due to a flash of cleverness on the part of Harmon and not to any dependable team-work by the backs. The coach, while he appeared to be listening attentively enough to Joe Myers' short-breathed remarks as they walked together to the gymnasium, was in reality grimly determining on a backfield shake up when Monday arrived.

"If there'd been anyone around him to put that Lorimer half-back out," said Joe, "he'd have made it easily."

"Who?" Mr. Cade asked blankly.

"Why, Brand Harmon! He made a corking try, anyway!"

"Harmon? Yes, that's so," agreed the coach thoughtfully. "Think it was an accident? Suppose he could do it again?"

“He’s got it in him,” answered Joe convincedly. “Give him a try, sir. I would.”

“I think I shall,” mused the other. “He certainly deserves it.”

# CHAPTER XIV
# ONIONS!

They went to the movies that evening, a jovial, noisy "gang" of nearly a dozen that included the "Three Guardsmen," Willard, Don Harris, Stacey Ross, Cal Grainger and several more. Unfortunately, the picture lacked action to a lamentable degree, being largely concerned with the doings of a few ladies and gentlemen who when at home, which was infrequent, lived in large white marble palaces in Westchester County, New York. At least, the titles placed the scene of the story in Westchester County, but Martin expressed incredulity, asserting that he had never seen palmettoes and cocoanut palms growing in that locality in such profusion. Jack Macon, however, was of the opinion that "anyone as rich as those guys could have their lawns trimmed with palms even if they lived at the North Pole!" The hero was a strapping gentleman with a broad, flat face, large, limpid eyes and a very brief mustache. He dressed immaculately on all occasions, which, since he, like everyone else, was forever "weekending" somewhere, must have caused him a great deal of thought and care. Of course, he had a Japanese valet at his beck and call, and that probably helped. Don Harris declared that when he became wealthy he would have a valet just like the one in the picture. "Why," he marveled, "that fellow doesn't even have to go to the telephone. The valet pulls the thing out by the roots and brings it to him wherever he is! That's what I call service!"

Paul Nichols, who had played center all through the afternoon's game and who, consequently, was rather tired, went sound asleep somewhere about the third reel and snored loudly until the final "fade-out," to the amusement of his companions and the audience in general. Martin expressed the fear, loudly enough to be heard by Bob, several seats distant, that Nichols had contracted the sleeping sickness from "one of our number." The comedy that followed the big picture provided a few "fine moments," but, on the whole, the party considered that they had wasted the evening. Nichols was aroused with difficulty and led, in a comatose condition, up the aisle and into the street where the brisk October breeze that was hurrying and scurrying through the little town awakened him more thoroughly. Having missed most of the entertainment, Nichols insisted on partaking of food and drink and, being in funds this evening, invited the party to visit the lunch-cart. This vividly painted institution stood at night in the square at the other side of town, a matter of twelve blocks in distance, but, as Nichols pointed out, the night was still young. So they set out, decorously joyous, along West Street, "window shopping" as they went, and turned down Meadow Street and finally reached the Square and hailed the crimson and blue windows of the "Owl Night Lunch" with shouts of approval that won them the fleeting interest of the single blue-coated guardian of the law on duty there. Fortunately, since their numbers were many, the lunch-cart held but a solitary patron, a car conductor indulging in the delicacy referred to on the wall as "Tonight's Special: Pork Chop and Fried Onions, 30c." The viands had diffused a perceptible fragrance through the establishment, but no one voiced criticism save Martin. Martin halted at the doorway and registered suspicion followed by disgust.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob, behind him. "Go on in!"

"Onions!" said Martin in pained tones.

"What of it?"

"I can't stand 'em. Gee, the place is full of 'em!"

"Well, you don't have to eat them," replied Bob comfortingly, while those behind him earnestly requested "gangway!" Martin allowed himself to be shoved inside, but during the subsequent proceedings he wore his nose in an elevated position and looked most unhappy, a circumstance that interested Bob greatly for a reason not then apparent. Sandwiches and coffee constituted the menu served. Bob generously offered to buy Martin a chopped onion sandwich if he would eat it, which offer was thanklessly, almost rudely, declined. That banquet cost Paul Nichols most of his cash in hand, but he settled the bill in an almost regal manner; quite, as Martin commented, as though he lived amongst the palms of Westchester!

Going back, Willard walked with Joe and Jack Macon, and the talk was mostly of the day's game. Joe was rather cynical and predicted disaster in the Kenly contest unless things got better soon. "We need beef on the team," said Joe bitterly. "We've got plenty of fellows who know football, but they're too lady-like, Jack. It doesn't do to stop and apologize before you hit the line or keel a chap over! Kenly will bring a lot of hard-hitting 'rough-necks' that'll make us look like a parcel of 'co-eds'!"

"Oh, we aren't that bad," said Jack soothingly. "It's early yet—"

“Early nothing! The season’s half over! Gee, we’ve got to learn to fight, Jack, or we’ll get literally walked on!”

“Seems to me the backfield’s a bit light, Joe.”

“Of course it is, and it’s lighter than ever since Lake’s gone to left end. We’ve got to find a full-back, and find him mighty quick, and that’s no dream!”

“Too bad you couldn’t land that fellow Harmon you were talking about,” said Jack. Then he turned in a puzzled way to Willard. “Say, your name’s Harmon, too, isn’t it?” he exclaimed. “That’s odd!”

“Not very,” said Joe hurriedly. “The Harmon I was after was Brand’s brother. If we’d got him we’d been fixed.”

“What happened?” asked Jack. “I understood it was all fixed up.”

“Oh, he changed his mind,” replied Joe carelessly. “Went into the Navy, didn’t he, Brand?”

“Yes,” corroborated Willard gravely.

“Too bad,” murmured Jack. “Too bad you aren’t your brother, Harmon!”

“Well, Brand’s doing pretty well where we had him today,” said Joe.

“Rather!” agreed the other. “He surely had one fine moment this afternoon. If it hadn’t been for that Lorimer end or half—which was he? Half?—well, if it hadn’t been for him Harmon would have scored in a romp!”

“That’s the trouble with C Formation,” replied Joe. “If the runner does get away he has no interference half the time.

The end's supposed to get free and go ahead, but he can't do it very often. The more I think about today's game, fellows, the more certain I am that we were mighty lucky to break even! Lorimer ought to have won on the showing she made."

"Well, she didn't," answered Jack cheerfully. "And results count."

Up ahead, Bob was questioning Martin regarding the latter's lack of enthusiasm for onions. "What is it you don't like about them, Mart? The taste or the smell or what?"

"I don't like either," said Martin. "Folks who eat onions belong to a low order of humanity. Criminals and idiots and such folks are always fond of them, I've read."

"Where do you get that stuff?" asked Stacey Ross. "Look at Garibaldi."

"Where?" asked Martin flippantly.

"Wasn't he a patriot and a man of brains and—and blameless life?" pursued Stacey.

"I guess so," assented Martin doubtfully.

"All right! Garibaldi invented onions, didn't he?"

Martin viewed him suspiciously. "Well, maybe he did, but I'll bet he didn't eat them! Carbol invented carbolic acid, but he didn't drink it, did he?"

"Garibaldi," remarked Bob gravely, "made onions his principal diet: ate them three times a day and fed his army on them!"

"Oh, well, he was an Italian," said Martin. "I'm talking about folks in this country."

“George Washington invariably began the day with a raw sliced onion,” said Bob. “History tells you that.”

“Sure,” asserted Stacey. “Wasn’t it Washington who said ‘In onion there is strength’?”

“You fellows make me weary,” retorted Martin. “I’ll bet you eat them yourselves! As I remarked hitherto, the onion is the favorite fruit of the mentally deficient! And you fellows talk like you never ate anything else!”

Stacey continued to expatiate on the merits of the onion, but Bob relapsed into silence. He had been visited by an idea and he was busy developing it all the rest of the way back to school. When he said good night to Martin later in front of Lykes there was an expression on his face that might have caused the other some uneasiness had he noticed it.

“It’s awfully funny,” remarked Martin after dinner the next day, “but I can still taste those onions, Brand.”

“What onions?” asked Willard.

“In that lunch-cart last night. Taste the smell of them, I mean. It’s just as though I’d eaten them myself. Gosh, I didn’t enjoy my dinner a bit, either. Everything seemed to smell of the beastly things!”

“We didn’t have onions at our table,” said Willard.

“Neither did we, but I’ll swear I could almost smell them! It’s queer, but I simply can’t stand the smell of onions. It almost makes me sick. I can go a little of it, of course, and I manage to eat soups and things like that that are flavored with onions, but I don’t like them.”

“Maybe there was onion in the gravy or something,” Willard suggested. But Martin shook his head.

“It isn’t that. I guess I got my lungs full of the smell last night. Funny thing is, though, that it seems almost as if I could *taste* them!”

“You’ll get over it,” Willard consoled. “Let’s go for a walk. Maybe the air will do you good.”

Later Martin confessed that the imaginary onions bothered him less, but after supper the trouble recurred, and he was fairly miserable and wore a pained look all the evening. “I guess it’s dyspepsia,” he confided to them in Bob’s room. “No matter what I eat, seems as if it was flavored with onion. I ought never to go near the beastly things.”

“You must have a very delicate stomach,” observed Bob sympathetically. “I knew a fellow once who was like you. He couldn’t stand the sight of garlic. He’d go a mile out of his way so as not to have to pass by a garlic—er—grove. Used to get sick at the mere mention of the word!”

“Is that so?” asked Martin with almost a sneer. “What was his name?”

“His name? Why—er—Smith, Jack Smith. Did you know him?”

“No, but I knew an awful liar once,” answered Martin stiffly. “His name wasn’t Jack, though, it was Robert.”

Afterwards, back in the room and preparing for bed, Martin spoke earnestly of seeing a doctor on the morrow if he didn’t stop smelling onions and even tasting them, and Willard said he thought it would be a very sensible thing to do, and was

careful to hide his smile behind the jacket of his pajamas. In the morning, though, Martin was quite himself again and told Willard he guessed he'd imagined those onions.

But two hours later, returning to Number 16 for a book, Willard discovered a very pale and unhappy Martin stretched out on the window-seat with his head on the ledge and a chilling October wind ruffling his locks. "Onions," groaned Martin in response to Willard's concerned inquiry. "I—I've got them again, something fierce!" He closed his eyes and shuddered. "Do you smell them, Brand?" he asked weakly.

Willard sniffed the air and truthfully replied that he didn't. Martin sighed dolorously. "I can't make it out," he said. "I was all right this morning until breakfast. Then, just as soon as I got to the table it came back. Everything seemed to smell of onions, and taste of 'em, too. Why, even the coffee did!"

"I suppose you imagined it," murmured Willard.

"I suppose so. No one else noticed it. I guess I'll have to cut French. Tell Metcalfe I'm sick, will you, Brand?"

"Yes, but why don't you take something?"

"What'll I take?" groaned Martin.

"Soda-mint tablets are good, I think. Hot water, too. Want me to get you some hot water?"

Martin nodded weakly but gratefully, and Willard went off to the lavatory and presently returned with a tooth-mug filled with scalding-hot water. As it was then time for a nine o'clock recitation, he had to leave Martin sipping and shuddering. When he next saw him, shortly before dinner, he was much better physically but in poor mental condition. His

disposition was utterly vile. He put his tongue out and wagged it accusingly at Willard.

"I burned my tongue," he said. "That water was too blamed hot!"

"Too bad," replied Willard soothingly. "It made you feel better, though, didn't it?"

"What if it did? What's the good of feeling better if your tongue is all scalded?" Martin demanded huffily. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?" asked Willard indignantly. "Not to burn your tongue, you simp?"

"Tell me it was so hot! How'd I know?"

"I thought maybe you could tell by the feel of it," answered Willard dryly. "Most folks can!"

"Funny, aren't you?" Martin turned disgruntedly to the window, and after a moment Willard asked:

"Did you get to any classes?"

"Math," grunted the other. "I was too sick for the rest of them. What time is it?"

"Nearly half-past. Coming along?"

"I don't believe I want any dinner. What's the use? It'll just taste of—of those things!"

"Onions?" asked Willard innocently.

"Shut up! Don't speak of 'em!" yelled Martin. "Now you've made me all squirmy again!" He sank to the window-

seat, placed anxious hands on his waistcoat and glared at Willard accusingly. “I was feeling all right, too!”

“Well, how did I know you didn’t want me to say—”

“Cut it out, I tell you!”

“I wasn’t going to say on—”

“You’re saying it!” shrieked Martin. “I hope you get it, too! When you do, I’ll say ‘onions’ to you! You see if I don’t!”

“You just said it yourself,” said Willard, grinning.

“That’s different.” Martin glared ferociously. “You’re just trying to make me sick again!”

“Oh, be good,” answered the other humoringly. “Tell you what I’ll do, Mart. I’ll go over to the drug store and get you some soda-mints right after dinner.”

Martin looked slightly mollified for an instant. Then he asked suspiciously: “Do they taste awful?”

“N—no, not very. Come along to dinner. You’d better try to eat something, even if you don’t feel hungry.”

“Well, all right, but I know I can’t eat.”

# CHAPTER XV
# MARTIN CALLS QUITS

From his own table, by craning his neck, Willard could see Martin's, and it was apparent that the latter was not making much of a meal. Bob, who sat at his left, was plainly sympathetic and solicitous: Willard could see Bob passing the spinach and urging his neighbor to eat, and could see Martin's dismal refusal. Perhaps it was because Martin partook only of a little soup and a dish of rice pudding that the malady returned to him less severely after the noon meal. Willard kept his promise and procured a small bottle of soda-mint tablets, and all the rest of the day Martin's expression was one of supreme disgust as he continuously dissolved the tablets in his mouth. The remedy at least allowed him to take an active part in practice, which was fortunate since he was given a try-out at left tackle. He was a bit slow at first, but, with Mr. Cade constantly urging, he showed quite a lot of speed toward the end of the practice. He confessed to Willard later that he might have done better if the onion smell hadn't bothered him. "It came on in the locker room," he said. "I didn't notice it until I was changing. Then I got it strong and it stayed with me all the time. I—I get it yet, but it's not so bad."

"It must be your imagination," said Willard. "Ever troubled like this before? I say, Mart, there isn't—isn't any—"

"Any what?"

"Well, any—er—insanity in your family, is there?"

“Don’t be a silly fool!” begged Martin.

“I just thought that maybe—”

“Listen here, Brand! There’s no imagination about it. I’ve been poisoned.”

“Poisoned!” gasped Willard. Martin nodded gravely.

“Yes, I’ve got it all doped out. I’ve been onion poisoned.”

“But onions aren’t—aren’t poisonous,” expostulated Willard.

“Maybe not to some folks, but they are to me,” Martin spoke with conviction. “What happened is just this. That night we went to the lunch-cart the place was full of onion odor. Remember? Well, I breathed a lot of it into my system and it poisoned me. It’s in my blood probably. If I’m not all right tomorrow I’m going to see a doctor.”

Willard considered the theory for a moment and then gravely acknowledged that there might be something in it.

“You bet there is,” Martin assured him. “Why, it stands to reason. Look what chloroform does. It gets into your blood when you inhale it, doesn’t it? Well, it’s the same way with onions. Some folks aren’t affected by it, but I’m different. I guess a doctor would be mighty interested in my case.” Martin paused to consider the idea and then went on proudly. “Yes, sir, I’ll bet he would! I’ll bet he’d write about me to the —the medical association!”

“I dare say,” assented Willard. “Maybe it would get in the New York papers, too. ‘Poisoned by Onions! Strange Case of Young Preparatory School Student Puzzles the Medical Fraternity!’ Maybe they’d print your picture, Mart.”

“You can make a silly joke of it if you like,” said Martin, “but I’ll bet I’m right!”

Joe and Bob came up to the room that night and Martin explained his theory again for their benefit. He was undergoing another visitation of the onion malady, but interest in his case and in his solution of it gave him strength to bear up better than usual. Joe and Bob—Bob especially—were tremendously impressed with the theory and Bob recalled having read of a similar case. “Only,” he said, “in that case the man had been poisoned by eating watercress.”

“Eating what?” asked Martin incredulously.

“Watercress,” repeated Bob. “It doesn’t affect most people, but some fellows can’t eat it at all. You’ve heard that, haven’t you, Joe?”

“Yes,” Joe assented soberly. “I had a cousin like that. Watercress and strawberries were like poison to him.”

Martin looked from Joe to Bob suspiciously, but they were so evidently in earnest that he asked: “What happened to this fellow?”

“Why, he ate watercress and was poisoned. It got into his blood, you know, and the only way they could save his life was by transfusion.”

“What’s that? You mean pumping someone else’s blood into him?”

“Sure! That’s the only thing possible in extreme cases.”

Martin hurriedly produced his bottle and popped a soda-mint into his mouth. “Well, I guess onions wouldn’t do that to

a fellow," he said with a confidence that didn't quite ring true. "Would you think so, Joe?"

"Search me," replied Joe comfortingly. "I never heard of onion poisoning before."

"Nor I," said Bob troubledly. "I guess it's a pretty rare disease, and maybe the doctors don't understand it yet. Guess it's sort of like sleeping sickness," he added blandly.

Martin shot a hostile and wary look at him, but Bob only smiled sympathetically and reached out his hand. "Let's see one of those tablets, Mart," he requested. "I've got a sort of a heavy feeling myself tonight."

"You don't notice the taste of onions, do you?" asked Martin hopefully as he tossed the bottle across the table.

"N—no, not exactly. More a sort of gone sensation. I guess it was the baked potato I ate." He took some time to get a tablet out, under cover of the table; so long that Martin said impatiently: "Shake the bottle. They're probably stuck."

"I've got it, thanks." Bob popped a tablet into his mouth, made a wry face, screwed the cover on the bottle again and tossed it back. "Nasty tasting things, aren't they?" he asked.

"You get used to them after awhile," replied Martin consolingly. "I guess I've eaten twenty of them today. When you have blood trans—whatever it is, Bob, how do you do it? I mean, where do you get the blood?"

"Advertise, I think. It isn't easy, of course, because the other fellow, the one who gives the new blood, has to be pretty healthy. Lots of times you can't find anyone and it's no use."

“What happens then?” inquired Martin uneasily.

Bob shrugged. “The patient dies, of course. You hear of it very often.”

Martin gulped and almost swallowed his tablet. “Gee! I guess I’d find someone if I had to,” he said. “Maybe, though, it’s more imagination than anything with me. You know you can imagine all sorts of things, and I guess onions wouldn’t be very hard, eh?”

“N—no,” said Joe, “but I have a hunch that your theory is about right, Mart. It certainly sounds mighty reasonable to me.”

“I don’t see how you make that out,” replied Martin shortly. “If it was really a case of—of being poisoned I guess I’d be a lot worse now than I am. It’s been going on two days, and anyone knows that poison acts pretty quick.”

“Some poisons,” answered Bob significantly. “But there are others that act—er—very slowly. There’s hemp, for instance.”

“That’s a rope,” said Martin derisively.

“It’s a very deadly poison,” said Bob sternly, “and it’s very—very—what’s the word, Joe?”

“Lingering?” asked Joe.

“Insidious,” suggested Willard.

“Insidious, that’s it! Sometimes the patient suffers for weeks.”

“Well, I haven’t eaten any hemp,” said Martin crossly. “I haven’t eaten anything, confound it! I’m mighty near starved!

Maybe that's what the trouble is. If it wasn't so late I'd go out and get a sandwich or a piece of pie or something."

"What you need is hearty food," said Bob. "A nice steak and onions, for instance."

"Shut up! I hope you choke!" Martin fairly gibbered. "I wish you had it! I wish you all had it, you gang of grinning apes! You make me sick!" In proof of the latter assertion he shuddered violently, hurriedly produced his bottle of soda-mint tablets and, keeping his lips very tightly closed, agitatedly unscrewed the top. The others watched with almost painful intensity. Martin inverted the bottle, seized a tablet and popped it into his mouth. Instantly a strange, haunted look came over his face. He swallowed once, his eyes round and alarmed, and then the tablet came out of his mouth even quicker than it had gone in and he laid hands on his stomach and closed his eyes.

"What is it?" asked Bob anxiously. "Feeling sick, Mart?"

"Sick! I—I'm dying! They—they're full of it!"

"What are? Full of what?" asked Joe.

"The tablets." Martin opened his eyes slowly, and gazed in horror at the questioner. "They're full of—of onion! Oh, gee!"

"Nonsense," said Bob cheerfully. "How could they be? Let's see them." Martin weakly brought them forth from his pocket and held them out with averted head. Bob removed the lid and held the bottle to his nose. "I don't smell anything," he said. "Do you, Brand?"

"Not a thing," replied Willard gravely. "You try, Joe."

“Well, there’s a faint—ah—medicinal odor apparent,” said Joe judicially, “but as for onions—”

“Let me smell,” demanded Martin. He took the bottle and put it to his nostrils. Then it went flying across the room and its contents rolled merrily about the floor. “It is!” he yelled. “They are! Can’t you fellows smell it?”

“Look here, Martin,” responded Joe sternly. “You’d better pull yourself together, old man. It won’t do to let this—this hallucination go too far. Better get into bed and try to forget about onions. Maybe a good night’s rest is what you need. In the morning I’d have a talk with the doctor. Of course your trouble may not be serious, Mart. I dare say if you take it in time you can be cured. But I’d feel a whole lot easier if you saw a doctor, old man.”

Martin’s expression of glowering distaste changed slightly. He stared in growing fascination at Bob.

“It might be,” continued the latter kindly, “that you’ve been bitten by the Diptera onionensis, otherwise known as the onion-fly. Of course, it isn’t probable, but you never can tell, Mart. There’s the tse-tse fly, now. You wouldn’t expect to find that around here, but I’ve been told that it is quite common. Then why not the onion-fly?”

Martin’s gaze was fixed on Bob and Martin’s mouth was slowly dropping open. He was like one who is seeing a Great Light and who is still too dazed by its refulgence for speech. Bob smiled gently and continued, keeping, however, perhaps unintentionally, the table between him and Martin.

“You’ve been so awfully sympathetic about my sleeping sickness, Mart, that I just can’t bear to see you troubled like

this. It would certainly be a load off my mind if you'd just talk things over with the doctor—"

"You did it!" hissed Martin. "You—you played a trick on me!"

"Why, Mart," protested Bob in hurt tones. "How can you sit there and say them cruel words?"

Martin glared wildly about him. Joe was so entirely overcome by some emotion that he had his head in his hands and Willard was gasping, perhaps with pain, his countenance hidden behind a propped-up book. Martin swallowed hard once, drew his feet beneath him and then was out of his chair with a roar.

"I'll onion you!" he shouted. "I'll—I'll—"

Around the table they plunged, hurdling Joe's legs, since that youth was too helpless to draw them back, twirling Willard around in his chair like a chip in a maelstrom as they passed, Bob a half circuit to the good at the end of each lap. Noise and confusion reigned supreme, but through it came Bob's voice, made faint by laughter:

"For the love of Mike, Mart, use discretion!"

Martin's invariable reply was a savage howl of wrath.

On the tenth circuit—or perhaps it was the eleventh!—disaster overtook the pursued. Bob slipped coming into the backstretch and went down, and Martin hurled himself on him. Over and over they went, grunting, gasping, gurgling. Willard rescued the lamp just before the table went over on top of the battlers, showering them with books and papers. Had Bob been in his best form that contest would have been

brief, for he was bigger and stronger than his antagonist, but laughter drugged him and before he could cry for mercy Martin had thumped his head many times on the rug and jounced merrily up and down on his ribs. When, at last, Martin drew off and Bob climbed weakly to his feet the room was a wreck and over the scene hung, like a horrible miasma, the sickening concentrated odor of onions!

Martin sniffed and would have flung himself on Bob again if the latter had not pointed beseechingly to the floor. Martin looked and picked up the stoppered remains of a broken bottle. To it clung a paper label. “Onion Extract,” he read.

When peace, if not complete order, had been restored Bob confessed. “I gave you fair warning, Mart,” he said. “I told you I’d get even. Trouble with you is you think you invented joking and that no one else can get away with it. I got the idea that night when you turned up your nose at the onions in the lunch-cart. I paid the cook a quarter for that bottle of onion extract and the rest was easy. All I had to do was get to table long enough ahead of you to drop a little of the stuff around: on your napkin, in your porridge, in your salt-cellar and so on. I was clever enough not to be too generous with it, you know. Once, when you were looking the other way, I got some on your meat, and another time in your coffee. Yesterday I sprinkled a good big lot on your football togs. Maybe you noticed it?”

Martin said: “Hm!” grimly.

“I tried to get Brand to put some on your toothbrush and your pillow, but he was too tender-hearted,” added Bob. Martin turned a sorrowfully accusing look on Willard. “And that’s that,” Bob ended, smilingly.

“Huh,” said Martin this time, scornfully. “I knew all along it was just some silly joke!”

“Oh, no, you didn’t, pettie! Anyhow, we’ll call it quits now if you like. I’m satisfied if you are. Only, Mart, no more ‘tse-tse flies’ and ‘sleeping sickness’ stuff. My health is very good, thank you, and if you want a place on the team, son, you get out and earn it!”

“Oh, that’s all right, Bob,” answered Martin, grinning. “Johnny told me today I was to play left tackle after this. So I don’t care whether you have sleeping sickness or not!” Then, after a perceptible pause, he added: “Much!”

# CHAPTER XVI
# DIPLOMACY

Martin's statement that he had been assigned to left tackle position was not believed very implicitly that night, although, in the press of other matters demanding discussion, none expressed doubt. But the next day proved that Martin had spoken no more than the truth, for when the scrimmage commenced he was in Leroy's place, and there he stayed not only for the rest of the day but for the rest of the season. At left half, Willard and Mawson each served, the latter yielding to Willard near the end of the practice. The second team managed a field-goal that afternoon, but the first scored three touchdowns and for once showed plenty of punch.

With Lake at left end and Martin Proctor at left tackle, that side of the line improved remarkably. For a few days Martin fitted none too perfectly into the new position, but he had had much experience, wanted badly to be something better than a second-choice player and worked hard, with the result that long before the Kenly game he was looked on as a remarkably good tackle. The weak spot in the team continued, however, for no satisfactory alternative to Steve Browne had been found. Browne tried pitifully hard to fill the difficult requirements of the full-back position, but he failed utterly and palpably. Linthicum was tried, and so was Austen, a half-back from the second, but none suited. Kenly was developing a stiff line this year, as proved by the last two games she had played, and more weight and aggressiveness in the backfield was sorely needed at Alton. Discounting his

possible ultimate failure to find a satisfactory full-back, Coach Cade experimented with plays built on the substituting of Bob Newhall or Stacey Ross for a half or the full-back. The difficulty, however, lay in the fact that the backfield man who played up in the line found it hard to perform his temporary duties satisfactorily. Placing Bob at full-back for straight plunges between tackles worked fairly well and was accountable for some good gains against the second team, but Browne in Bob's place was as ill-fitting as a square peg in a round hole and would doubtless prove in Captain Joe Myers' words, "easy meat" for Kenly. Coach Cade had a strongly-imbedded dislike for unbalanced formations, anyhow, and, although he used shifts sparingly and was responsible for the play that put Captain Myers behind the line so that he might receive a forward-pass, he wanted no more "freaks" and frowned on these new inventions even while he used them. And so matters stood on that Wednesday morning preceding the Hillsport game when Willard, having a whole fifty minutes between recitations, took a Latin book over to the first base bleachers and draped himself over three seats in the sunlight. It was a genuine Indian summer day, with no breeze, or only just enough to disturb the straight column of smoke that came from the big chimney behind Lawrence Hall, a very blue sky that melted to a hazy, purplish gray toward the horizon and a flood of mellow sunlight over all. By occasionally changing his position when the edges of the planks pressed too fervently against him, Willard managed a whole page of his book, making many marginal notes in his very small and extremely neat writing. He was, though, getting somewhat drowsy when the sound of footsteps came to him and he looked up to find Felix McNatt approaching. McNatt had soiled hands and wore a triumphant expression,

and both were explained when, having climbed to Willard's side and seated himself there, he lifted the wooden lid of the grape basket he carried.

"Agaricus pratensis," he announced impressively.

"The same to you," answered Willard, "and many, many of them."

McNatt smiled humoringly. "I found them over near the farm. They are rather scarce about here."

Willard eyed the contents of the basket unenthusiastically. The five mushrooms made very little appeal to him and he hoped McNatt wasn't going to ask him to help eat them. "Are they edible?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes, although my book says they're not so tasty as many other sorts."

"They don't look awfully appetizing," murmured Willard. "Do you cook them or what?"

"They're excellent fried," replied McNatt, gazing almost affectionately into the basket. "Or you can stew them in milk."

"No, thanks." Willard shook his head. "I don't like the smell of them. They—they smell as if they were dead!"

"Of course they're dead," said McNatt a trifle impatiently. "Or I suppose they are. Possibly they continue to live for a certain time after they are picked: I must find out about that: it would be interesting to know."

"Very," agreed Willard politely. "Are you going to eat them?"

To his great relief, McNatt shook his head. “No, there aren’t enough to make a mess.”

“Aren’t there? I should think those would make a mess all right, a beastly mess!”

McNatt smiled, even chuckled. “I fancy you aren’t a mushroom lover,” he said. “You wait, though. Some time I’ll get a fine lot of puff-balls and we’ll have a feast. You’ll change your mind then.”

“Maybe I’ll change more than that,” said Willard sadly. “Maybe I’ll change my habitation. Lots of folks have gone to heaven after eating mushrooms, haven’t they?”

“No, not mushrooms,” said McNatt, “toadstools. There’s a difference.” He covered the basket again, set it carefully between his feet and gazed in silence for a moment across the field. Presently: “You are on the football team, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” said Willard, “sort of. I’m a substitute half.”

“What sort of a team have we got this year?”

“Pretty fair, I think. Haven’t you seen them play?”

“I saw part of the first game, but you can’t tell much about a team so early. I haven’t followed it very closely since then.”

“Well, we’re sort of getting together, I guess,” said Willard. “There have been a good many changes made and so the team isn’t playing together awfully smoothly yet. Mr. Cade’s having a lot of trouble finding a full-back.”

“A full-back? Is that so?” McNatt seemed rather more interested than previously. “What’s wrong there, Harmon?”

Willard explained as best he could and McNatt nodded assent. “He’s right,” he declared. “To my way of thinking the full-back is the most important man on the team. He’s got to be strong and clever and have enough weight to carry him through the first defense. I don’t bank much on the very heavy sort, though. They generally lack the proper mental attributes. Do you know, Harmon, it’s strange to me that scientists have never made a thorough study of the relation of mind quality to body formation. Now take a type of fellow who is big of torso and neck; large above the waist, you understand; probably he will have a large head, too; most of them do. That fellow will be a persistent, hard fighter when he’s started and he will have good sound judgment. But he won’t be resourceful and he won’t be capable of quick decision. See what I mean? I believe that a thorough study of the subject would enable anyone to tell a man’s mental character off-hand by observing his physical construction.”

“You’d better come out this afternoon and look over the substitutes,” laughed Willard. “Maybe you could pick out a full-back for Mr. Cade.”

“Full-backs,” answered McNatt solemnly, “are very scarce. Good ones, I mean. I remember that when I played here two or three years ago it was difficult to find a satisfactory substitute.”

“It isn’t a substitute that’s bothering this year,” said Willard ruefully, “it’s the real thing. Where did you play, McNatt? I mean what position.”

“Full-back,” answered the other gravely.

“Full-back!”

“Yes, I played there my first year off and on, although I was only fifteen. I was large for my age, though. The next year I played the position until I was taken sick. After that I sort of fell out of the game. Well, I must get back.” He picked up his basket, nodded and went striding off toward Upton.

Willard watched him go thoughtfully. After a minute, though, he tucked his pencil into a pocket, seized his book and hurried across to Lykes. Luck was with him when he knocked at Number 2 and entered. Joe was propped up on the window-seat, half hidden by a newspaper.

“Hello, Brand,” he said. “What’s on your mind?”

“More than is on yours, I guess,” answered Willard meaningly.

Joe laughed. “Think so? Well, that’s the first paper I’ve seen in a week. I was looking over the Saturday games. Yale’s coming back all right, isn’t she? That fellow Loughlin who played left tackle for awhile is an Alton fellow. Wasn’t considered much good here, though, as I remember.”

“Say, Joe, suppose a fellow played football this year and then didn’t play for two years more. Would he be any good?”

“Good for what?”

“Football. I mean, could he—could he come back?”

“Oh! I don’t know, Brand. I guess it would depend on the fellow. Aren’t thinking of giving up the game, are you?”

“No. Look here, Joe, suppose a fellow was a corking good full-back three years ago and then didn’t play any more. Suppose he was to go back to the game tomorrow. How long

would it take him to—to remember what he'd forgotten and —and find himself again?"

"Brand, it's too early in the day for hypothetical questions," replied Joe, stretching and yawning. "It would depend on so many things, boy: on how well the chap had kept himself in condition, principally. Got any fellow in mind, or are you just doing this for exercise?"

"I've got someone in mind," answered Willard earnestly. "There's a chap here who used to play football three years ago, and from what he says he must have been pretty good. Anyway, he was regular full-back on the team. Then he was taken sick and had to quit, and he never went back."

"Who's that?" demanded Joe, sitting up.

"McNatt," answered Willard.

"McNatt! Oh, I thought you'd discovered someone, Brand. I guess McNatt's a joke."

"He did play, though, didn't he?" Willard persisted.

Joe nodded. "Yes, he did, and that's a fact." He paused and kicked thoughtfully at the paper on the floor. "He played all one year, I think, either on the second or on the first as substitute. The first year I was here he played for awhile. That was his second year. Seems to me he stopped about the middle of the season. I don't remember much about him, though. But, great gosh, the fellow's no football man! Just—just look at him!"

"He's out of training, of course," agreed Willard, "but seems to me if he was good enough to be regular full-back three years ago he might be worth trying now."

"That's so, Brand! Look here, you tell him to come on out and we'll give him a fair show, as late as it is. It would be worth a dollar of any fellow's money to see McNutt playing football!"

Willard shook his head. "I'm not sure he'd do it, Joe."

"Why not? What's the idea?"

"Well, I don't believe he cares for it any more. He's a funny duck, McNatt. I guess it would take a lot of persuasion to get him back."

"But I thought from what you said that he wanted to try it," said Joe, puzzled. "What *does* he want?"

"To be let alone, I think," answered Willard, smiling. "No, the idea was mine, Joe. McNatt hasn't any more ambition to play football than I have to—to collect mushrooms! But when he told me about having played full-back I remembered that we are hard up for a fellow for that position, and so I came over here to speak to you about it."

"Well, dog my cats," exploded Joe, "if the fellow can play football it's his duty to do it! Doesn't he know that? Where is he? I'll have a talk with him. I don't suppose he's worth bothering with, but there's always a chance! And we can't afford to miss it!"

"What are you going to say to him?" asked Willard.

"Say to him? Why, that we need his services, of course. I'll tell him that if he shows up decently he will stand a good chance of playing against Kenly. I guess that ought to fetch him."

“That might fetch some fellows, Joe, but I’m afraid it wouldn’t fetch McNatt.” Willard shook his head gently. “I may be wrong, but I guess he’s about as stubborn as they make them. You know you can tell a lot about a fellow’s—er—character by his physical formation, Joe, and McNatt’s got long legs and—and everything.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” answered the other impatiently, “but, stubborn or not, he will play football if I get after him!”

“All right.” Willard shrugged his shoulders. “If I were you, though, I’d go at him sort of easy.”

“Oh, I’ll be easy enough,” said Joe untroubledly. “He’s in Upton, isn’t he? What’s the number? Forty-nine?” Joe looked at his watch and got to his feet. “I’ve got twenty minutes before French. I’ll run over and see him. Of course nothing will come of it, though. A fellow who’s been out of training as long as he has can’t come back in three or four weeks. Besides, I dare say he’s forgotten all the football he ever knew.”

Willard parted with Joe at the entrance. “Good luck,” he called as Joe went off. “Try diplomacy first, Joe!”

Joe smiled back confidently and waved a careless hand.

It was not until he reached the gymnasium in the afternoon that Willard learned the result of Joe’s visit to Number 49 Upton. Joe was still angry. “The fellow’s a perfect fool,” he snapped in reply to Willard’s polite inquiry. “And he’s as stubborn as a mule! Sat there and talked for ten minutes about how the full-back position ought to be played and then calmly told me he wouldn’t try for the team for a thousand dollars!”

"And then you bullied him," laughed Willard.

"I told him what I thought of him," answered Joe grimly. "He made me so blamed mad I could have punched his head. Just sat there and blinked and shook his silly bean! And when I'd flayed him alive he wanted to know if I wouldn't like to see his mineral collection. Oh, the chap's plain nutty!"

"He is sort of peculiar," agreed Willard soberly.

"Peculiar!" Joe laughed mirthlessly. "He's crazy in the head. Know what I think? Well, he showed me a lot of mushrooms he had there; nasty, smelly things they were, too; and I'll bet he eats 'em and they've affected his mind. I don't know what to do with him!"

"Guess you'll have to forget it and just let him alone," said Willard soothingly.

"I can't afford to let him alone," protested Joe impatiently. "Why, gosh, if that fellow can play full-back the way he can talk it he'd be a wonder! Look here, Brand, you see what you can do. I talked my head off and it didn't have any effect on the poor fish. You—you have a go at him, will you? And do it today. Honest, that fellow ought to show whether he's any good or not. It's his duty! Of course we can't *make* him play, but you'd think he'd *want* to!"

"All right," agreed Willard, "I'll see what I can do, Joe, but I haven't much hope. If your diplomacy failed, why, I'm not likely to succeed."

Joe looked at Willard suspiciously. "Hang it, I was diplomatic," he protested. "I was as sweet as sugar to him until he shut his mouth tight and said he wouldn't do it."

"If he had his mouth shut," said Willard, "I don't see how he could say anything, Joe. Maybe he hummed it, though?"

"Oh, go to the dickens!" growled the other.

There was an unusually hard and protracted practice game that afternoon, and Willard played at left half through fifteen strenuous minutes during which the second, given the ball over and over to test the first team's defense, hammered and banged until she finally got across the line for a score. Willard, like most of the others, got some hard knocks and when he was released he felt very little ambition for the task that Joe had set him. But supper helped a lot, and at half-past seven he set out for McNatt's room. Even when he knocked at the door of Number 49 he hadn't decided what he was to say.

Not only McNatt was in this evening, but his roommate, Winfred Fuller. Fuller was a sophomore, a smallish, anemic-appearing youth who, or so Willard fancied, wore a harried, apprehensive look, as though life with McNatt's toads and beetles and strange messes was gradually affecting his mind. Fuller sat, straightly uncompromising, on the edge of a chair and gazed at Willard with owlish fixity during the first ten minutes of the latter's visit, and Willard was heartily glad when, muttering some excuse, the boy took himself off. McNatt was most hospitable and offered to cook a few choice mushrooms that he had picked that afternoon under someone's stable if Willard fancied them. But Willard explained that, being on a diet, mushrooms were a forbidden luxury, and McNatt was not offended. After that the talk turned to the subject of football "situations" and McNatt was reminded that he had found the memorandum of which he had spoken on the occasion of Willard's last visit, and stretched a hand toward the littered table. But unfortunately

the paper had again disappeared, and although McNatt searched long and determinedly, making the confusion more confused, it refused to be discovered. Finally, giving up the quest, McNatt sat down again, stretching his long legs across the floor and thrusting a pair of large, very chapped hands into his pockets.

"Myers came to see me this morning," he remarked placidly. "He's captain of the football team this year. But you know him, of course. I forgot you were on the team, Harmon. Queer fellow, Myers: awfully obstinate and opinionated, don't you think?"

"Well, he's likely to have rather pronounced views on any subject that he's very much interested in," replied Willard cautiously. "Football for instance."

McNatt chuckled. "It was football he came to see me about. He wanted me to play full-back. It seems the fellow they've got isn't very satisfactory. You told me that, too, I think."

"Yes, I did," said Willard, "and I'm mighty glad you're going to help us out, McNatt!"

McNatt frowned and shook his head. "Oh, but I'm not. I told Myers I couldn't, you know. He—I don't think he liked it."

"You're not!" exclaimed Willard incredulously. "But—but why?"

McNatt stared a moment as though a trifle surprised. "Why, I'm out of football, Harmon! I thought I told you that. I haven't played since my second year here. I've given it up completely. You see, I hadn't any patience with the fuddling

way they taught it. Everything's so hit-or-miss. No science at all. You acknowledged that yourself, Harmon."

Willard nodded. "Yes, that's true. But, look here, McNatt, it seems to me the game of football needs fellows like you; fellows, I mean, who—er—who realize what's wrong with it and have the—the courage and brains to remedy it."

McNatt tilted back and shook his head slowly. "They won't listen, Harmon," he said. "I tried Myers today. He couldn't see what I meant at all. Just got very impatient and told me I was a slacker. I'm afraid Myers has a one-track mind, Harmon."

"Joe is awfully anxious to beat Kenly," replied Willard, "and he takes it for granted that every other fellow is just like he is. He loses sight of the fact that there are fellows here in school like you, McNatt, who don't give a whoop whether Alton wins or doesn't."

McNatt shook his head almost violently. "You mustn't say that," he protested. "Although not actively participating in football any longer, Harmon, I am still vastly interested in it and follow it very carefully. And, naturally, I want Alton to defeat Kenly. Yes, indeed, decidedly! You mustn't—ah—consider me unpatriotic."

"Oh," murmured Willard. "I didn't understand. I thought __"

"Yes?" encouraged McNatt.

"Why, only that, not being willing to help the School out by going back to the team, you didn't—didn't care very much!"

McNatt smiled gently. “I’m afraid you’re rather like Myers,” he chided. “You can only see what’s directly in front of your eyes. Myers couldn’t understand that I might find other things more important than football. I explained that my scientific pursuits meant more to me than playing full-back on the eleven.”

“Then I’m not like Joe,” responded Willard, smiling, “for I can understand it. I suppose what does puzzle me, McNatt, is your not being willing to apply your science to the bettering of the game and the defeat of the enemy. Seems to me you’ve got a big chance to demonstrate your theories and to help the School at the same time.”

McNatt looked surprised. “But I’ve explained that they won’t listen!” he said.

“Don’t ask them to listen,” replied Willard smilingly, yet very earnestly. “*Show them!*”

“Show them? You mean—”

“Exactly! Go out and play full-back as it should be played. Scientifically. According to your ideas. Prove there’s something in it, McNatt. Afterwards you can talk and they’ll listen.”

McNatt drew his hands from his trousers pockets and rubbed them thoughtfully together. “I wonder if it could be done,” he muttered. “You see, Harmon, it isn’t the playing of one position that counts, but the conduct of the whole game, the—the *modus operandi*. And yet—” He relapsed into silence again.

“Being there, though, right on hand, would help, wouldn’t it?” Willard asked. “I mean, you’d be in a better position to

offer your advice and aid. And maybe you might play full-back so well that they'd realize that—that science has its place in football."

"Do you know," exclaimed McNatt quite excitedly, "you almost persuade me to try it, Harmon! By golly, you do! This man that is coaching this year—I forget his name—; is he the sort you can talk to? You know some of these coaches are so—so *set*! You can't get them to listen to anything at all!"

"I don't think Mr. Cade is that sort," replied Willard reassuringly. "I'd say he was quite open to conviction, McNatt. In fact—" and here Willard smiled to himself—"in fact, I think I can promise that he will listen to anything that promises success for the team. There's one thing, though, that might bother you, old chap. You've been out of training a good while and of course condition's got a heap to do with playing football well."

McNatt shook his head impatiently. "My condition's all right," he answered. "I'll have to read up on the new rules, though. They've made several changes since I played before. I suppose I ought to see Myers and tell him I've changed my mind."

"I've got a rules book," said Willard, "and I'll bring it over to you the first thing in the morning. As for telling Myers, I wouldn't trouble. I'm quite likely to run across him myself this evening and I'll pass the good word to him if you like."

"I'd be very much obliged," answered McNatt gratefully, "but don't go out of your way, please. Funny you should turn up here tonight, Harmon. I'm glad you did, though, I really am. I wouldn't have realized what an opportunity this thing affords me if you hadn't!"

# CHAPTER XVII
# M'NATT JOINS THE TEAM

A great many years before the period of this story Alton Academy manufactured its own illuminating gas from gasoline by means of a machine in the basement of Academy Hall. The machine was connected by pipe with a gasoline tank set in a covered pit some sixty feet from the building. One fine day there was trouble with the gasoline supply and one of the faculty members known as Old Grubby descended into the pit to investigate matters. Just what occurred down there was never known, but shortly after Old Grubby disappeared from sight he reappeared with vastly more celerity, and his reappearance was accompanied by a violent concussion that brought everyone rushing to the scene or to the dormitory windows. A fortunate few gained points of vantage in time to see the teacher's ascent interrupted by the force of gravitation and to watch his return to earth. This happened at a point many feet distant from the crater that had once been a brick-lined pit, and was quite spectacular. Fortunately, aside from a severe shaking up, some contusions and a nervous shock, Old Grubby was uninjured, although just at first it seemed to the horrified spectators that he had suffered a direful fate, since he had gone into the pit with a luxuriant growth of dark hair on his head and had subsequently descended from his flight with his scalp as bare and polished as a pale-pink billiard ball! None was more horror-stricken than the unfortunate gentleman himself, however, when he realized his plight. Clapping both hands to

his head, he broke loose from the solicitous rescuers and ran agitatedly around in circles. Such extraordinary behavior on the part of an ordinarily sane gentleman was naturally adjudged to be the result of temporary dementia produced by the accident, and so, of course, all those who had arrived on the scene took up the chase. Old Grubby dodged and eluded, giving vent to inarticulate ejaculations of dismay, and the chase might have continued for quite a while had he not finally, with a cry of relief and triumph, snatched a brown object from a lower branch of a tree, clapped it on his shining head and dashed for his room.

The incident created a remarkable sensation; not so much that portion concerned with the interesting explosion of the gasoline tank as the resultant revelation. For many years Old Grubby had managed to deceive the sharpest eyes in his classes and never had there been the faintest of doubts expressed as to the naturalness of his beautiful dark brown locks. And then before the eyes of the whole school he had been exposed! After the first shock of incredulous surprise, Alton Academy roared and rocked with laughter. Students and faculty gasped and gurgled fraternally, and you may well believe that the spectacle of the Principal seated on the lower step of Academy Hall, swaying rhythmically from side to side and holding his head in his hands, did nothing to quell the contagion. History has it that at the end of that term Old Grubby resigned and took himself to distant fields where his precious secret was not known.

Now this has no place in the present narrative save as a prelude to the statement that not since its occurrence had the School known such a sensation as was caused by the

appearance of Felix Adelbert McNatt as a member of the football squad!

McNatt reported on Friday afternoon, clad in ancient regalia that included the disreputable green sweater, and the news spread like wildfire. Society rooms, studies, tennis courts were deserted, and the stands beside the gridiron were so filled that you would have thought the Big Game was in progress. Disbelief vanished as the unmistakable form of McNatt was descried on the field and amused conviction took its place. “Hooray for McNutt!” shrilled an irrepressible freshman, and the audience cheered loudly. “Regular cheer, fellows!” bawled a junior, “with nine ‘McNatts’!” The response was thrilling, even if the “McNatts” became “McNutts” in the performance, and after that the new candidate had only to move a hand or a long leg to be greeted by uproarious applause!

Whether McNatt realized the sensation he was producing, or the nature of it, I can’t say. At least, he gave no sign. Perhaps he thought that every practice witnessed a similar loyal attendance and that the applause that fell to him was no more than was generally accorded. McNatt, fortunately, was not self-conscious nor sensitive. If he had been he might have found it difficult to perform the duties set him. As it was, he worked hard and faithfully and with surprising ability, proving at once that he had neither forgotten what he had formerly known of football nor had allowed his long absence from the game to put him out of condition. He tackled the dummy with the rest of the squad and showed how it should be tackled, he swung a clever foot against the ball and got thirty-five yards at a punt and he caught the returning pigskin with ease and certainty. In short, McNatt that Friday

afternoon caused Coach Cade to stare and shake his head and almost rub his eyes and the audience along the sidelines to change their laughter to enthusiastic, ungrudging applause before the practice session was ended.

A mere five minutes with a squad in formation drill taught McNatt the signals sufficiently for his purpose, and later, when the second team came across, filled with ambition and an overwhelming desire to see what all the laughing and cheering was about, and McNatt was put in at full-back on the first, why, he made good from the first moment. He clung doggedly to that green sweater, though others were down to canvas, and it shone resplendent in every play. Kruger, whose wont it was to take the ball for the second and go rearing through inside or outside of tackle, saw his glory fade. The first time he tried it he ran straight into a green sweater. Those nearest heard an amazed "Whoof!" from Kruger, and then he was borne back and placed expeditiously on the turf, and a chuckling referee added another yard to the distance to be gained. But the best came when the first team, having wrested the ball from a surprised second, sprang to the assault. Cochran gained three past left guard and then Tarver called on McNatt. Gil said afterwards that the full-back got to him so quick that he almost missed the pass. Bob and Stacey did their part, and then a green streak passed between them, smashed into a luckless second team guard, caromed off a tackle and proceeded down the field, spurning the backs much as a cannon ball might treat the attentions of so many toy terriers, and, with an easy if ungraceful stride, ate up the intervening sixty-seven yards and deposited the pigskin squarely behind the goal. After which McNatt seated himself on the ball and waited for the others to come along.

Not for seasons of football on Alton Field had there been such a wild paean of delight as arose to the blue October sky just then! Reversing the usual order, McNatt had arisen from the ridiculous to the sublime, and Alton loved him for it! Joy and laughter were mingled in that long-continued outburst, continued since the sight of the elongated McNatt seated unconcernedly on the football down there moved the onlookers to new merriment. Cochran kicked a goal and the game went on, and the audience breathlessly awaited another enlivening spectacle. But another such incident would have been too much for the Law of Probabilities. McNatt smashed and wormed and twisted his way through the second team's astonished line time after time for good gains, but when eleven outraged and argus-eyed youths are watching for the appearance of one green-sweatered enemy that enemy hasn't much chance of escaping detection and detention, and for that reason McNatt didn't again get free that afternoon. But he did gain every time he was given the ball, which is glory enough, while the fact that the opponents played for McNatt every time the lines heaved afforded Cochran and Mawson—or, later, Willard—an absence of attention that enabled them to do wonders.

Before the end of the game McNatt was taken out, not, it appeared, because he was exhausted or had lost any of his enthusiasm, but probably because Jake, the trainer, willed it so. After that he sat on the bench, surrounded by admirers, and explained gravely his views on Science as a Foundation for Football.

Yes, the advent of Felix Adelbert McNatt was certainly a sensation, and as such it served as a topic of conversation for not only the rest of that day but for many days following.

After the first flush of delight occasioned by the finding of such a wonder, captious ones asked why McNatt hadn't been discovered before, dwelling on the fact that he had been there right along and could have been discovered as long ago as the season before last if those in charge of football had known their business! But on the whole the School was much too well pleased to indulge in criticism. The one weak position on the team had been strengthened and a victory over Kenly loomed large. Willard received almost tearful thanks from Joe and warm commendations from the coach. The latter's evident gratitude gave Willard the courage to offer advice. "You see, sir," he confided, "McNatt's got a lot of queer ideas about how football ought to be played, and he really agreed to join the team because he hopes to—to sort of reform things. He asked me if you were the sort of man he could explain his theories to and I said you were. So, if you don't mind, I guess it would be a pretty good plan to sort of—sort of humor him, Mr. Cade, and let him tell you about Science."

"He can tell me about Science and Art, too, if he will play the way he played yesterday!" replied the coach emphatically. "And if he can talk the way he tackles I'll listen to him all night. And you may tell him so!"

But McNatt was biding his time. He didn't mean to spoil his chances to put the game of football on a proper scientific basis by introducing his ideas too early. He meant to erect a firm basis first, to show by the scientific playing of a single position the plausibility of his theory that all positions were capable of like treatment, both individually and collectively in the form of the team. Also, he wanted to establish cordial relations with the powers, the coach and captain, before beginning his proselytism. Meanwhile, as Willard learned

later, he devoted much time to further study of the subject, collecting much data and drawing interesting if not altogether convincing conclusions from it. As it turned out, McNatt was far too busy playing his position as it should be played to do much more that season than drive the entering wedge of reform into the football situation. He spent all one evening in Mr. Cade's rooms on one occasion and expounded to his heart's content, referring at intervals to a wealth of memoranda, and was listened to courteously and patiently. And on numerous other occasions he held forth to such as would listen, and, while his audience was secretly amused, outwardly his remarks met sober and reverent attention. Perhaps some day—even when you are reading this story for all I know—McNatt will be hailed as the Prophet of Scientific Football and the game will be played according to his ideas. In which case, all I can say is that I shan't care to see it!

The day after McNatt's first appearance with the team was the day of the Hillsport game. Hillsport School was a much smaller institution than Alton Academy, but it made up for lack of numbers by self-esteem and aggressiveness. It had held a place on Alton's football schedule for four years, during which time it had met with one defeat, had played one tie and had won one victory.

The victory had come to it last year, on Alton Field, and in the ecstasy of triumph the Hillsport supporters had tarried in town long enough to record that triumph for posterity. Loyal Altonians on their way to church Sunday morning found to their horror and indignant surprise that the legend: "H. S. 14, A. A. 6," appeared in large green characters on a dozen hitherto blank walls and boardings! The worst of it was that the insulting inscriptions were there to stay. Perhaps the

elements would, in the course of years, subdue, perhaps obliterate, those vivid brush streaks, but today they looked as glaring as they had on that first calm Sabbath morning. Alton had viewed and exclaimed and muttered vengefully for some days, but as time passed familiarity bred indifference, and now it was only when a visiting relative innocently asked the meaning of the cryptic signs that indignation and a thirst for revenge welled again in the Alton breast.

Last year's defeat and those insulting green painted symbols of disgrace combined to form a mad desire for revenge this fall in the heart of every Alton fellow. There were some whose outraged sensibilities even induced the opinion that a victory over Hillsport was more to be desired than a triumph over that arch-enemy, Kenly Hall. This, however, was an extreme view held by only a few, although among the few were several representative minds: as, for instance, Mr. Robert Wallace Newhall and Mr. Calvin Grainger. Mr. Newhall stated distinctly and with much feeling, in the presence of Mr. Grainger, Mr. Myers, Mr. Proctor and Mr. Harmon, that if "we don't lick the tar out of those fresh mutts tomorrow I won't come back here!" Mr. Grainger, who had earnestly striven the preceding spring to wreak revenge on Hillsport on the baseball diamond, and had failed, applauded the sentiment, but others, frivolous-minded persons like Martin Proctor and Joe Myers, expressed only derision.

"What would you do, Bob?" asked Martin. "Stay over in Hillsport and blow up the school buildings?"

"He knows blamed well," laughed Joe, "that he's safe. With old Felix McNutt tearing holes in the line, Hillsport's

got about the same chance to escape a walloping as Bob has to get to heaven!"

"I hope you're right," said Cal Grainger. "I'd feel disgraced if those fresh guys licked us again."

"They won't," Joe assured him. "Not this year. Boy, we've got a *team* now! With McNutt in there, that's a mighty pretty backfield, and Kenly's going to know it three weeks from tomorrow!"

"Three weeks!" exclaimed Willard. "Not really?"

"Why not?"

"But—but that's so soon! Gee, I thought the Kenly game was lots further off!"

"It isn't, though," answered Joe, shaking his head. "And those three weeks will be gone before you know it, too. It's funny about that. One day you're in the middle of the season, and then, seems like it was the next day, you wake up and the Big Game's right on top of you! It—it sort of scares you, too!"

"Say, Joe, what's the real dope on Kenly this year, anyway?" asked Bob thoughtfully.

Joe shrugged. "You know as much as I do. She's had about an average season, I guess. She's played five games, one more than we have, and has lost two, won two and tied the other. You can't tell much about Kenly until along toward the end of the season, any more than you can about us. Last year she didn't look very good until the Lorimer game. Then she walked all over Lorimer to the tune of twenty-something to nothing. That was the week before we played her, you know,

and it made us sit up and take notice. But taking notice didn't do us much good, for she walloped us when our turn came."

"The papers speak pretty well of her backs," observed Cal. "She has one fellow, I forget his name—"

"Puckhaber?" asked Joe.

"That's it, Puckhaber! Some name, I'll say! He's good, isn't he?"

"He's all right, but he wasn't anything remarkable last fall. We stopped him as well as we stopped any of her backs. She's got a good man in Timmons, though, her left end. He'll bear watching, fellows. Well, it's nine-thirty, Bob. Time to turn in. This may be your last night in the old school, son: better make the most of it!"

# CHAPTER XVIII
# REVENGE!

Alton played the enemy at Hillsport this year, a small town some twelve miles to the south. The distance, however, didn't measure up to the time it took for the journey, for team and supporters had to take the train to Darlington, nine miles away, and then cross to Hillsport by trolley, consuming all of an hour and ten minutes on the way. Saturday was what Martin called a "mushy" day. The sun came and went from beyond a haze of gray clouds and a light, damp breeze blew inland from the sea. It was too warm for an ideal football day, but those who were to look on found no fault with it. Most of the School accompanied the players and, since Manager Ross when providing for the team's transportation had failed to make any arrangement for the followers, a lamentable lack of conveyances developed at Darlington. There was a special car waiting for the players, but the single regular car which was due to make the trip to Hillsport ten minutes later could not possibly be made to hold more than eighty of the nearly three hundred fellows who fought for places. A hurry call was telephoned to Hillsport for extra cars, but before they came several scores of good-natured but impatient youths had set forth on foot to cover the last two-and-a-half-mile leg of the journey. Fortunately for these, the game was not started until nearly fifteen minutes after the advertised time and the last flushed and perspiring Altonian had dragged himself to a seat before the Green kicked off to the Gray-and-Gold.

There is no good reason for devoting much space to the contest, for, although the final score was not as one-sided as early evidences promised, it was plainly to be seen from the first moment that the visiting horde was certain of victory. Save that McLeod was in Macon's place at right end for Alton, the line-up was quite as expected. McNatt was at full-back and Mawson at left half. Gil Tarver held the helm. There were no substitutes introduced by Coach Cade until the third inning was well along. Then Jack Macon, who had been suffering from a mild attack of tonsillitis, went back to his position, and Willard and Moncks were sent in to replace Mawson and Cochran. Still later, Hutchins ousted Gil Tarver and Cravath replaced Nichols at center. Both teams found the weather uncomfortable and toward the last the play slowed up until it fairly dragged.

There were no spectacular incidents. Alton used few plays and made them go. There was never at any time necessity for uncovering anything new. Hillsport, encouraged by much excellent support from the east side of the field, started off very confidently to make gains through the opposing line. After several failures she shifted her attention to the ends, and still later attempted a kicking advance. To the latter, to the surprise and delight of the visiting spectators, McNatt replied and replied eloquently. Substitutions had deprived the Alton team of her usual punters and the task of returning Hillsport's kicks devolved on the full-back, and the full-back accepted the task untroubledly and, while he was too much out of practice to quite equal the best efforts of the rival punter, he performed some very satisfactory feats in aerial warfare. McNatt was held back today, being afforded few chances to shine lest his fame reach Kenly too early in the season.

Whether there were any Kenly scouts on hand to take notes was not known, but Coach Cade was determined that if there were they should have but little to report. McNatt on defense, though, was not to be repressed, and many an ambitious Hillsport back was nipped in the bud, so to speak. On the attack McNatt gained whenever he was called on, but the work was very evenly distributed among the backs. Willard played a strong, hard game which, if no better than Mawson had put up, was equally as good. Alton made her first score in the first period, smashing Cochran over for a touchdown at the end of eight minutes of playing. Cochran crowned his touchdown with a goal. In the second period Alton worked to Hillsport's eighteen yards and lost the ball on a fumble by Tarver, and was on her way to a second touchdown when the whistle blew, leaving her in possession of the ball on the enemy's twenty-three yards. In the third period, after Hillsport had rallied and taken the pigskin to near Alton's thirty, the Gray-and-Gold took the ball on downs and began a fourth journey up the field that finally resulted in the second score, McNatt going off left tackle for four yards and the touchdown. Tarver kicked a neat goal. That ended the scoring, and, while Hillsport opened up several long passes after the next kick-off and occasioned a moment of uneasiness once, neither side threatened the opponent's goal, and the play became utterly listless as the end approached.

Today's Hillsport eleven was not by any means the team that had worsted Alton last fall, and Alton's victory was nothing to be very proud of. It was, consequently, satisfaction from revenge achieved rather than pride of performance that caused the visiting crowd to cheer and sing with such unction when the game was over. Alton "rubbed it in" a little, I fear,

and, since the Hillsport fellows didn't take defeat any too gracefully, it looked at one time as if there would be trouble before the marching victors left the field. However, a clash was averted, and Alton, waving gray-and-gold banners and still cheering, took herself across the grounds to the car line. Better accommodations were afforded for the return trip to Darlington and no one had to walk.

The Alton team had dressed in the field-house, a small wooden structure built under one of the grandstands, and by the time they were once more in street clothes the spectators had long since vanished. Willard and Martin had shared the same suitcase and when, having reached the waiting trolley car, some three blocks distant from the field, it was discovered the suitcase was missing each laid the blame on the other.

"I thought you had it," said Martin.

"I thought you had it," replied Willard. "You were at it last."

"I was? I'll bet you! I'll match you to see which of us goes back for it."

"I don't mind going," said Willard, "but I'll miss the car, I guess."

"We'll wait for you," said Bob, who, with Cal Grainger, had been enjoying the joke. "There'll be another car pretty quick. Get a move on, Brand!"

Willard found the field-house locked when he reached it again, and no one was in sight. There was just one thing to be done, and he did it. Finding a flat piece of iron amongst the litter behind the little building, he forced a window and

crawled through. Rather to his surprise, the suitcase was just where they had left it, and, leaving as he had entered, he closed the window again and hurried back across the school grounds. It was well after five o'clock and lights were showing in some of the dormitory windows. At the main entrance a group of three awaited him; Martin, Bob and Cal. The special car had gone, but Bob assured him that there would be another one along pretty soon, and so, their bags at their feet, they perched themselves on the coping of the wall and waited. At intervals Hillsport youths passed through the gateway, eyeing them with a disfavor that brought chuckles from Bob.

"Gee, they're a sore bunch," he said. "We could get up a scrap without half trying."

"Don't see what they've got to be sore about," observed Cal Grainger belligerently. "We haven't daubed green paint all over their town!"

Willard held his watch to the light and inquired uneasily: "What time does that train go, fellows?"

"Quarter to six," answered Martin. "What time is it?"

"Nearly half-past five," replied Willard.

Bob whistled. "We'll never make it," he laughed. "When's the next one? Anyone know?"

No one did. Cal remarked that even if the car came right then it wouldn't get them to Darlington in time for the train that the others were taking.

"What do we care?" asked Bob. "We don't *have* to get back until ten if we don't want to. Look here, let's get some

supper here and go home afterwards!"

"Might as well," agreed Martin. "We couldn't possibly get to school before seven. Got any money? I'm broke."

"A couple of dollars," answered Bob. "How about you, Cal?"

Cal confessed to being the Croesus of the party, having the magnificent sum of four dollars and some cents on his person, and, unlike some wealthy persons, he was quite willing to share his riches. So, all being agreed, they set forth for the center of town, following the car-track for guidance. The long-awaited car overtook them presently, but, although Bob was for taking it because of his suitcase, he was overruled, Cal relieving him of his burden. Half a mile from the school a quite pretentious restaurant rewarded their search and they trooped in and took possession of a table for four. Having ordered rather an elaborate repast, it was decided that Cal should go out and gather information regarding the train service, and Cal, hastily swallowing the rest of the slice of bread that he was engaged on, went. He returned five minutes later grinning broadly.

"What's the trouble?" asked Bob. "Spill it, son. I know that grin of yours!"

"There was a train two minutes ago," chuckled Cal, "and the next one doesn't go until eight-thirty-three!"

"What do we care?" asked Bob. "That'll get us home long before ten."

"Sure, but what'll we do for two hours in this benighted burg?" asked Martin.

“Maybe there’s a movie house. There’s bound to be,” said Bob.

“I didn’t see any,” Cal replied. “I guess they don’t allow ’em here.”

“We’ll ask someone.” Bob hailed a waiter.

“Movies? No, sir, not in Hillsport. There’s two good ones over to Warner, though,” replied the waiter.

“How far’s Warner?”

“Three miles by the trolley. It takes about twenty minutes.”

“Great green grasshoppers!” exclaimed Cal. “What a place to live in! What do you do at night here?”

“Well, there’s a pool-room on the street above and a bowling-alley across the square,” chuckled the waiter. “Mostly, though, we go to bed!”

“I don’t blame you,” muttered Martin. “Only thing to do is eat as much as we can and take our time about it. How long before those steaks’ll be here?”

“Guess they’re ready now, sir. I’ll go see.”

When the waiter had departed Cal took another piece of bread, levied on Willard’s butter and spoke thickly. “Listen, fellows,” he said. “Tell you what we can do. We can get back at Hillsport.”

“Get back at it!” jeered Martin. “Get out of it’s what we want!”

“I mean we can do a little celebrating,” continued Cal, lowering his voice, although the tables were empty on each side of them. “Get me?”

“Not clearly,” answered Bob. “Elucidate, please. Also, kindly keep away from my butter, you big hog!” Bob removed his modest pat to a safer place, and Cal, foiled, ate the remainder of the slice unbuttered.

“Have you forgotten what they did to us last year?” he demanded indignantly.

“Hardly! They licked us. And then they painted the score all over—I get you! By jiminy, that’s a corking scheme, Cal! We’ll do it! We’ll make this old burg as pretty as a picture! We’ll—”

“We’ll get in a peck of trouble,” interrupted Martin. “Not for me, thanks!”

“Oh, don’t be a piker,” begged Cal. “They did it to us and didn’t get into any trouble. What’s sauce for the sauce—I mean—”

“Is sauce for the saucer,” aided Bob. “Righto! We get your meaning, son. I see no reason why we shouldn’t be allowed some slight—ah—evidence of our joy. Hillsport got away with it, so why shouldn’t we?”

The arrival of supper interrupted further discussion of the matter, and it was not until the first intense pangs of hunger had been appeased that Martin returned to the subject. “We’d have to have paint and brushes,” he said discouragingly, “and we couldn’t get them at this time of night.”

“We’d only need one bucket of paint and one brush,” replied Bob. “And how do you know we can’t get them? This is Saturday night, and there’s sure to be some place open.”

“Well, we couldn’t get gray and gold in one bucket, you lobster,” returned Martin impolitely.

“We don’t need gray and gold, you shrimp. They wouldn’t show up well enough. We want a nice quart can of black. That’s the ticket! Nice, black black! Who’s going to have pie?”

It appeared that as many as four of their number were going to indulge in that delicacy, and that Martin, having consumed one large glass of milk, was in the market for a second. He had the forethought, though, to count his money before giving his order, and, finding he was safe, added: “How much does paint cost? I’ve only got carfare left.”

“Cal’s got a dollar yet, haven’t you?” answered Bob. “Paint isn’t expensive. Maybe seventy-five cents for a quart. A brush oughtn’t to be more than a quarter, had it?”

“You can buy a toothbrush for a quarter,” said Cal, “but I guess a paint brush costs a heap more. I’ve got a dollar and sixty cents left, though, and I’ll gladly devote it to the cause. Finish your eats, fellows, and let’s get started.”

Willard followed doubtfully when the repast was over. “I’ll go along,” he said, “but I’d rather not have anything to do with the game. It doesn’t look healthy to me.”

Martin laughed. “It’s all right if we don’t get nabbed, Brand. I’d like mighty well to see the expressions on the faces of some of these chaps over here tomorrow!”

# CHAPTER XIX
# BLACK PAINT

As Bob had pointed out, it was Saturday night, and even in Hillsport most of the merchants kept their shops open. As it was considered unwise to ask the location of a hardware store, the quartette was some time finding one. But success rewarded their efforts presently and, lest numbers create suspicion, Bob was delegated to do the purchasing alone. Cal emptied his pocket of all it contained except sufficient to pay his fare back to Alton and Bob pulled his cap down and entered the store. In a very few minutes he emerged, a paper-covered package under one arm, and strolled casually along the street to a dimly lighted corner where the others awaited him.

"Get it?" whispered Martin.

"Sure! Also and likewise a brush." Bob pulled the latter article from a trousers pocket and waved it triumphantly. "Here's the change," he added.

Cal held the few coins that dropped into his palm to the uncertain light of a distant street lamp. "Huh, there isn't much of it," he said.

"Paint's high, owing to—to—I forget what," answered Bob cheerfully. "But the brush was only thirty cents. That was cheap, eh?"

"It must be a wonder!" commented Cal. "Bet you the bristles all come out before we get through with it."

“We ought to soak it in water first,” said Bob, “but I guess there isn’t time.”

“You’re a swell little guesser,” answered Martin. “Which way do we go?”

“Back the way we came,” said Cal. “The nearer the school, the better, I say.”

“That’s right. I wonder should we stir this stuff up.” Bob tore off the disguising paper and revealed a quart can. “Guess we’ll have to. Let’s get the cover off and find a stick or something.”

Getting the cover off was not difficult, Cal prying it up with his locker key, but finding a piece of wood with which to stir was more of a problem. They searched and poked around in the gloom of the back street without success until Martin found a broken fence picket and pulled off a nice long splinter. Then, in the added darkness of a tree, they put the can on the sidewalk and proceeded to mix the ingredients thoroughly. Once a passer on the other side caused them to straighten up and assume casual attitudes, but for the rest they were undisturbed. Even on the business thoroughfares Hillsport was not a crowded town tonight. Presently they set off, Bob bearing the paint and Cal the brush, keeping to the darker streets until the center of the town was left behind. Then they crossed to the residence avenue by which they had returned from the school and began to look for blank walls or fences appropriate to their purpose.

After some five blocks had been traveled Bob voiced disparagement. “This is a punk town for decorating,” he said. “Nothing but iron and picket fences.”

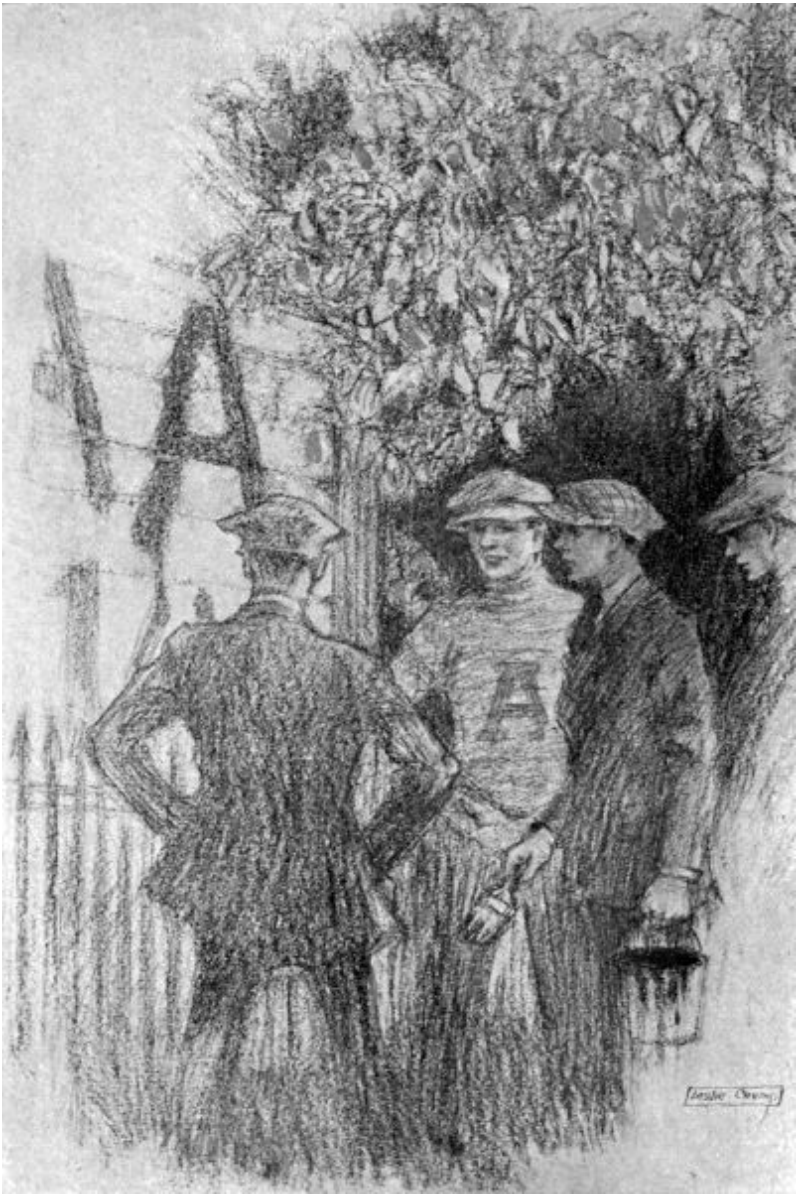
“What’s that over there?” asked Martin, pointing. It proved, when they had crossed the street, to be the clapboarded side of a stable or garage set some three feet back from the fence. Bob gloated fiendishly and called for the brush. But, although until that instant scarcely half a dozen persons had been sighted, now the long street suddenly became densely populated, or so it seemed to the vandals. A man came out of a house across the way, a boy and a dog appeared from a cross thoroughfare and two ladies appeared from the direction of the shopping district. Bob deposited the paint can against the fence and the boys stood in front of it in negligent attitudes. Cal whistled idly and unmusically. The boy passed unsuspiciously, but the dog showed signs of curiosity until Martin lifted him swiftly but mercifully from the vicinity with a dexterous foot. Then the man, having lighted a cigar very deliberately, took himself off and the two ladies passed, casting nervous glances at the quartette, and the street was again quiet.

Bob dipped brush in paint and reached toward the immaculate whiteness of the building. Willard looked on dubiously, but forebore to remonstrate. It was a difficult reach and Bob was grumbling before he had formed the big A that started the inscription. But, although the black paint ran down the handle of the brush and incommoded him vastly, he persevered and in a minute the sign stood forth in the semi-darkness, huge and startling:

A. A. 14
H. S.  0

One brief instant they tarried to admire, and then they hurried away from the place. It seemed to them that those big

black letters and numerals were visible for blocks! By common consent they turned the next corner and dived into the comparative blackness of a side street. Presently they stopped and exchanged felicitations.



One brief instant they tarried to admire

“Swell!” chuckled Cal. “Gee, I wish I could see the Hillsport fellows tomorrow when they catch sight of it!”

“So do I,” said Bob. “Didn’t it show up great? Who’s got a handkerchief he’s not particular about?”

“Wipe your hands on your trousers,” advised Martin coldly.

“What’s the matter with your own handkerchief?” inquired Cal. “You get too much paint on your brush, anyway.”

“Well, you can’t be very careful when you’ve got to hurry,” grumbled Bob. “You can do the next one, seeing you know so blamed much about it! Gosh, the silly stuff is running up my sleeve!”

“I’ve got an old handkerchief you can have,” said Willard.

“Thanks, Brand. You’re the only gentleman in the bunch. Excepting me,” added Bob as Martin laughed.

“Where next?” asked Cal while Bob wiped his hand.

“Let’s paint a good one somewhere near the school,” Martin suggested. “Seems to me there was a brick wall across from where we were waiting for the car that would be just the ticket.”

“Lead me to it,” begged Cal. “This is my turn.”

They got back to the main street a block farther on and a few minutes’ walk brought them in sight of the main entrance to the school. “We don’t want to stay around too long,” said Willard. “It’s nearly eight o’clock now.”

“Guess we’ll have to do one more and call it a day,” replied Bob. “I never saw such a punk town for—for decorative

purposes!”

Three Hillsport fellows, returning to school, overtook them as they neared the entrance and, as it seemed, viewed them very, very suspiciously. But the four kept their heads down, and Cal, now carrying the pot of paint, was careful to keep it hidden. The three entered the school grounds and were lost to sight and the conspirators breathed more freely. The wide street ended at the campus. A cross street ran right and left and for a block in each direction the high iron fence of the school bore it company. From the right the street car line came, turning in front of the gate. As, however, they had seen but one car since they had started forth on their expedition, interruption from that source seemed unlikely. The brick wall of which Martin had spoken could not have been placed more advantageously. It surrounded the small premises of a residence on the left-hand corner, and, as Bob triumphantly pointed out, a sign painted there would be the first thing seen by anyone coming through the school gate.

“That’s all right,” returned Cal dubiously, “but it’s awfully light here.” And so it was, for just inside the gate an electric arc lamp shed its blue radiance afar.

“I’ll stand at the gate,” volunteered Bob, “and Mart and Brand can watch the streets. If anyone comes we’ll whistle.”

“What about the folks in the house?” Cal’s enthusiasm was rapidly waning. The residence was brightly lighted and the strains of a piano came forth.

“They can’t see through the wall, you lunkhead,” answered Bob, “and if anyone comes out we’ll see ’em and let you know. All you need to do then is set the paint pot down and just walk away, careless-like.”

"We-ell, but you fellows watch," said Cal resignedly.

Bob posted himself across the street at the entrance and Martin and Willard took up positions from where they could see anyone approaching on either street. Then Cal set to work. Painting on the rough surface of a brick wall is not so simple as painting on wood, and Cal made slow progress. Now and then the others heard disgusted murmurs from where, a darker form against the shadows, he stooped at his task. Several minutes passed, and Willard, concerned with the fact that train time was approaching, grew nervous; which, perhaps, accounted for a momentary lapse from watchfulness. At all events, the approaching pedestrian, coming along on the school side of the cross street, was scarcely a dozen yards distant when Willard saw him. The latter's warning might, it seemed, have been heard a mile away.

"Beat it!" yelled Willard.

Afterwards he explained that shouting was quicker than whistling, and that if he had taken time to pucker his lips they would never have got away without being seen.

They came together a block down the main thoroughfare, breathless and hilarious. "He—he went in the gate," panted Bob. "I saw him. Looked like one of the faculty, too. Gee, it was a lucky thing he didn't catch us! D-did you get it done, Cal?"

"Just! I was going over the naught a second time when I heard Brand yell. I had the paint can in one hand and the brush in the other and I just heaved 'em both over the wall and ran!"

"I'll bet it looks great," chuckled Martin.

“I know it does,” answered Cal proudly. “I made the letters and figures as big as that.” He held his hands nearly a yard apart. “It took most of the paint, too. Brick’s awfully hard to work on. What did you do with Brand’s handkerchief, Bob?”

“Gave it back,” said Bob.

“No, you didn’t,” denied Willard.

“Didn’t I? I thought I did. Meant to, anyway. Must have dropped it somewhere, then. Wipe your hands on your own hanky. That’s what you told me to do!”

“I will like fun,” muttered Cal. “I’ll bet the stuff is all over me, hang it!”

“You can wash up at the station,” said Martin. “Who knows when the cars run over to Darlington?”

An uneasy silence followed. Then Bob said: “What about it, Cal? You asked, didn’t you?”

“I asked when the trains went,” replied Cal. “I—I suppose the cars go every ten minutes or so, don’t they?”

“What time is it now?” asked Martin bruskly.

“Five to eight,” answered Willard.

With one accord the four broke into a trot. “If we miss that train we’re dished!” said Bob. “Seems to me you’d find out something, Cal, while you were at it! What time does the train go?”

“Eight-thirty-eight,” replied Cal. “You didn’t ask me to find out about the trolley. I thought you knew about it. How was I to know—”

“Save your breath for running,” advised Bob coldly. “If we can’t get a trolley we’ll have to foot it.”

“Gee, we’ll never do it in thirty minutes!” exclaimed Martin.

“We’ll have to,” said Bob grimly, “if we can’t get a car. If we’re not back at school by ten we’ll get fits. And then, if the faculty over here makes a fuss about those signs, why, we’ll be nabbed!”

“I told you it was too risky,” mourned Martin.

“Well, you took a hand in it, didn’t you?” asked Bob shortly. “Shut up and get a move on! Isn’t that the square ahead there?”

It was, and when, very much out of breath, the quartette reached it, a car obligingly swung around a corner and paused in front of a waiting station a block away. “Come on!” yelled Cal. “That’s ours!”

Of course, having reached it and staggered breathlessly inside, they had to sit there for quite ten minutes before the car resumed its journey. But they were too grateful to mind that, and, although Willard looked at his watch frequently and anxiously, the conductor assured them that, if they didn’t burn out a fuse or run off the track or if the power didn’t give out, they would reach the Darlington station eight minutes before train time. Bob advised Cal to keep his hands out of sight and Cal hung them down between his knees all the way. The conductor’s prediction proved correct, and, as there were no misadventures on the journey, Cal was able to eradicate most of the paint from his hands before the train arrived. To his disgust, however, he discovered that his coat and trousers

were liberally specked with black, and when Bob told him cheerfully that the paint wouldn’t be very noticeable on mixed goods he became quite angry. In the end they reached the Academy well before ten o’clock and unobtrusively sought their rooms, everyone very weary and, if the truth must be told, rather short-tempered by now.

# CHAPTER XX
# EVIDENCE

Coach Cade was pleased with Saturday's game, and said so. So, too, was the school in general. In fact, it seemed that the school found more encouragement than was warranted. One heard a good deal on Sunday about what Alton was going to do to Kenly when the time came. Doubtless much of this optimism was due to the arrival of Felix McNatt in the backfield, which, with the placing of Proctor at left tackle, appeared to round out the team remarkably. Certainly there was little in Saturday's victory over a palpably weaker opponent to account for all the enthusiasm which spread over the school like a contagion.

Sunday afternoon, walking across to Academy Hall to post a letter, Willard encountered McNatt bent on a similar errand. McNatt showed evidences of having played football recently, for three strips of adhesive plaster formed a star over one cheek-bone. Having dropped their letters in the box beside the entrance, the two boys stood for a few minutes and talked. McNatt was evidently a trifle discouraged about his mission of reforming football on a more scientific basis.

"Mr. Cade says there's a good deal in it, but thinks the—ah—impetus should come from the colleges. Now I don't agree with him there, Harmon— By the way, is your name Harmon or Brand? I heard some of the players calling you Brand yesterday."

"Harmon. Brand's just a nickname."

"I see. Well, as I was saying, I don't think Mr. Cade is right. I believe that if we fellows at this school developed the game along the lines that you and I have discussed so frequently, others would follow. There—there'd be a movement, Harmon. If we look to the colleges to make the start we'll have to wait a long time, I fear. In my opinion colleges are extremely conservative in the matter of football, especially the larger ones, the—ah—the leaders. Of course I realize that the season is so far advanced that any extreme changes now would possibly militate against the team's success. Nevertheless, I am hoping that Mr. Cade will decide to experiment in a small way. I have spoken to quite a number of the players and they all appeared most interested. In fact, I don't recall that any of them offered a serious criticism."

"I guess it'll take time," murmured Willard. "Great ideas generally have to—to overcome a good deal of opposition, don't you think? How does it seem to be playing again, McNatt?"

The full-back's face lighted. "Splendid," he replied. "Do you know, Harmon, I didn't suppose I could find so much pleasure in the game again. Of course I realize that I'm still rather stale, but it's coming back to me, it's coming back." McNatt nodded gravely. "I make mistakes and I'm frightfully slow, but with practice I'll improve. At least, I hope to," he corrected modestly. "It's possible, though, that I shan't do as well as I should. The fact is, Harmon, I'm conscious of the variance of thought that exists between those in charge of the team and me. I approach the problem confronting us scientifically. They approach it in the old hit-or-miss style. I strive not to let the lack of—shall I say?—harmony trouble me, but I fear it does at times. So often, when the quarter-

back signals one play, I know that the situation calls for another, and I fear that the absence of a sympathetic approval of the play demanded sometimes—ah—unconsciously reduces my enthusiasm for it. And, really, one must be thoroughly convinced of the propriety of a play before one can go into it wholeheartedly, just as one must be convinced as to any other act. You see what I mean, Harmon?"

"Oh, absolutely," answered Willard, "absolutely! But, really, McNatt, I wouldn't trouble much about that. Seems to me you've been playing a mighty sweet game."

"You think so?" asked the other doubtfully. "I don't know. If only it was possible to give reasoning thought to the conduct of the game! But it will come, I'm certain of that. Meanwhile I shall do the best I can."

"I'm sure of that," said Willard earnestly.

"There's just one thing that might happen," resumed McNatt as they strolled away from Academy, knitting his brows. "Some time that quarter-back—is his name Tarbox?"

"Tarver, Gilbert Tarver," replied Willard gravely.

"I think I've called him Tarbox several times. Well, as I was saying, there is a possibility that some time he may call a play that I shall subconsciously rebel against and, under a certain mental condition, it might be that I would—ah—spill the beans."

Willard went off into a gale of laughter. McNatt viewed him in mild surprise. "I'm afraid," he said, gently reproving, "the result would be far from humorous. It is conceivable that it might, happening at a crucial moment in the contest, even prove disastrous to our fortunes!"

"I—I wasn't laughing at that," moaned Willard, wiping his streaming eyes. "I was laughing at—at your slang!"

"Slang? Oh!" McNatt smiled. "I dare say it did sound queer. I pick up quite a good deal of slang from Winfred. Well, I must get back. I'm working on a plan that will, I think, produce more certainty of result to the kick-off. You may have noticed how seldom the team in possession of the ball at the kick-off is able to concentrate defensively in the locality of the catch. My idea, if it proves practical—and I think it will—would enable the team to know where the ball would descend and so concentrate on that point. Well, I'll see you again, Harmon."

Willard reported the conversation to Martin, who was doing his best today to convince himself that what had every appearance of a cold in the head was merely a touch of hay fever, and Martin mixed laughter with his sniffles. "The poor nut," he said. "He'd try to introduce science into eating a fried egg if he thought of it! How the dickens can the team know where a kick-off is going to land when the fellow who kicks the ball doesn't know himself half the time? I suppose his idea is to have the ball brought back if it doesn't go where it's expected to! Say, Brand, remind me to get a Darlington paper tomorrow, will you? There ought to be something about last night's job in it. I'll bet those fresh chumps over at Hillsport are hopping mad today!"

"That's a safe bet," laughed Willard. "I only hope they're not mad enough to raise a row about it."

"How could they?" asked Martin indignantly. "Didn't they do the same thing to us last fall? Much good it would do 'em if they did get sore! I guess faculty would have a pretty good

comeback, son! Anyhow, you should worry. You didn't have anything to do with it. Any more than I did," added Martin after a moment.

Willard laughed. "It sounds fine the way you say it, Mart," he answered, "but I guess faculty would have a lot of trouble getting your point of view. We were right there, old chap, and we even kept watch while the—the nefarious deed was perpetrated."

"Where do you get that talk?" demanded Martin, punctuating the question with three mighty sneezes. "You'd better keep away from McNatt, son. You're catching it! Brand, just so long as my conscience is at rest I care naught for what faculty may say or do. And I've got what is probably the most restful conscience in captivity!"

"Well, I guess Hillsport's too good a sport to make a howl," replied Willard. "Cal's clothes are simply covered with paint, Bob says. And he doesn't dare wear them for fear faculty might notice and get a line on what happened. He's going to smuggle them over to the tailor's and have 'em cleaned."

"Well, he would have a hand in it," said Martin complacently. "You didn't see me begging to be allowed to desecrate the walls of the dear old town, did you? I knew better. Paint always spatters, especially when you try to put it on bricks. I could have told Cal that, but he's so blamed knowing that he wouldn't have paid any attention to me." Martin sneezed again and shook his head. "It was coming over in that old trolley that gave me this cold. I guess I got worse than a spoiled suit out of the adventure. If I don't

manage to break this up tonight I'll be out of football for days! I know these colds of mine."

"I thought you said it was hay-fever," remarked Willard innocently.

Martin growled. "It's more than a month too late for hay-fever, I guess." He seized his handkerchief, opened his mouth and twitched his nose. Nothing happened, however, and he relapsed again, with a dismal shake of his head. "It's getting worse all the time," he muttered. "Is there a window open anywhere?"

"No, but I'll open one," answered Willard obligingly.

"Don't be a silly ass," requested the other. "If you had this grippe you wouldn't be so plaguey comic!"

"It's growing fast," laughed Willard. "An hour ago it was just hay-fever. Then it was a cold. Now it's grippe. Better see a doctor, Mart, before pneumonia sets in!"

"Oh, shut up! What time is it?"

"Almost time for supper. What shall I bring you? Do you care for milk-toast?"

"I do not! And I'll look after my own supper. I guess maybe some food will do me good. If it turned out to be influenza I'd be all the better for having lots of strength. It's weakened constitutions that cause so many fatalities. A fellow wants power of resistance, I guess."

"Well, I don't know about that, but a clean handkerchief wouldn't hurt!"

Monday introduced real November weather. The sky was overcast when Willard piled out of bed in the morning, and a

cold breeze was blowing from the east. Radiators were sizzling and the bath-robed, gossiping groups were noticeably absent from the corridor when he set forth for the lavatory. Winter was in the air, and the coffee at breakfast never tasted so good.

It was just before ten that Willard received the disturbing message from the school office. Mr. Wharton, the secretary, desired to see him immediately after twelve. Oddly, perhaps, Willard failed to connect the summons with the Hillsport episode for some time. All during his ten o'clock recitation he subconsciously tried to think of some neglected study or duty that would account for the secretary's desire for his company, and it wasn't until he had disposed of that explanation by the slow process of elimination that Saturday night's affair obtruded itself.

He didn't allow that to alarm him, though. After all, a mere prank of that sort, common wherever there were boys' schools, couldn't be taken very seriously. In any case, he would get off with a reprimand. What bothered him more was the question of how Mr. Wharton had managed to associate him with the affair, and he wondered whether Martin and the others were wanted at the office also. He hoped to run across one or the other of them and compare notes, but luck was against him, and as soon as he was released from classroom at twelve he set forth a trifle uneasily down the corridor to the office.

He had to wait several minutes while the secretary heard and denied a freckle-faced freshman's request for leave of absence over the next Sunday and then he made his identity known and received a distinct shock when Mr. Wharton

jerked a thumb over his shoulder and said: “Doctor McPherson.”

The thumb indicated a closed door across the width of the outer office. Although Willard had never passed through that portal, he knew that it admitted to the Principal’s sanctum. His confidence waned as he opened the gate in the railing, heard it click behind him and hesitated before the blank portal.

“You needn’t knock,” said the secretary, over his shoulder. “The Doctor expects you.”

Willard thought the latter sentence sounded horribly grim!

The Principal’s office, unlike the outer room, was large and spacious, with a flood of pale light entering by three big windows that overlooked the Green. A half-dozen mahogany armchairs stood about the room, a wide bookcase almost filled one wall space and a huge table-desk, remarkably free from books or papers occupied the geometrical center of the soft green rug. At the desk, his back toward the windows, sat Doctor Maitland McPherson, a man of well under fifty years, thin-visaged, clean-shaven, somewhat bald. He laid aside the book he had been reading at Willard’s entrance, slipping an ivory marker between the pages before he closed it, and nodded pleasantly.

“Harmon?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Bring one of those chairs here, please, and be seated.”

Willard followed instructions and then looked inquiringly across the few feet of shining mahogany and green blotting

pad to the countenance of the Principal. This was his first close view of Doctor McPherson, although he had seen him at least once every day. Usually the length of the assembly hall separated them, and just now Willard wished mightily that it still separated them. Not that the Doctor looked very formidable, for he didn't. He wasn't a large man, and his strength and vigor were evidently that of the mind rather than of the body. His brown eyes, rather golden brown, were soft and kindly, and two deep creases that led from the corners of his short, straight nose to the ends of his rather wide mouth suggested that he preferred smiling to frowning. Even now there was a smile on the Doctor's face, although it wasn't a smile that encouraged the caller to emulate it.

"I presume," said the Doctor, "that you know why I sent for you, Harmon."

"No, sir," answered Willard, honestly enough.

"Really?" The Doctor's grizzled brows went up in faint surprise. Leisurely, he swung his chair a little and opened the upper left-hand drawer beside him. Then he laid something midway between him and Willard, something that by its appearance seemed to desecrate the immaculateness of the mahogany on which it rested. It was a crumpled object, white in places, black in other places, smeared and stiffened. In brief, it was a white handkerchief befouled with black paint.

"Have you ever seen that before, Harmon?" asked the Doctor.

# CHAPTER XXI
# BOB SAYS SO

Willard's heart sank. There was no need to pick the thing up for closer examination. Its crumpled, distasteful folds showed one border missing, and, if evidence had still been lacking, closer inspection would have elicited the fact that, half obliterated by a paint smudge, the word "Harmon" was plainly printed on a corner. It was the handkerchief that he had given to Bob Newhall Saturday night to wipe his hands on.

"Yes, sir," replied Willard.

"When and where?" asked the Doctor quietly.

"Last Saturday night, sir, at Hillsport."

The Doctor picked the object up gingerly and dropped it back in the drawer. Then he closed the drawer slowly and gazed thoughtfully for a short moment at the book he had laid aside.

"I have received a very indignant letter from Doctor Handley, at Hillsport School," he said presently. "He tells me that some time during Saturday night the wall of his residence was defaced with black paint in—um—in ill-advised celebration of Alton's football victory over Hillsport."

Willard gasped. "We—I didn't know it was his wall, sir!" he exclaimed.

“Is that true? You didn’t know that Doctor Handley’s residence stood at the corner, across from the school entrance?”

“No, sir,” answered the boy earnestly. “I’d never been there before, sir.”

“But the others? They must have known.”

“The others?” stammered Willard.

“Yes,” replied the Doctor gently. “You said ‘we’ a moment ago.”

Willard reddened. “I—I corrected myself,” he answered.

Doctor McPherson smiled whimsically and shook his head. “I wouldn’t call it a correction, Harmon. You see, it’s extremely unlikely that you would have engaged in such a—such an amusement by yourself. Defacing property in that manner is ‘gang work’: I’ve never known it otherwise.”

Willard gulped. “Yes, sir. Well, none of us knew that wall was Doctor—Doctor—”

“Handley’s?” asked the Principal helpfully.

“Yes, sir. We wouldn’t have done it for anything if we had known. We—we just wanted to get even with those—fellows for what they did to us last year. They painted green signs all around town here, sir, and we thought it was perfectly fair to get back at them. That’s all there was to it.”

“A very silly proceeding, Harmon. Defacing the property of others is a particularly mean and contemptible form of mischief. And the fact that the Hillsport boys indulged in it was no excuse. Indeed, the appearance of your own town should have shown you how atrocious such vandalism is. I

sympathize with the resentment that was felt here last fall when it was found that Hillsport had scrawled the score on our fences and walls, but I do not sympathize in the least with the motive that led you and your companions to commit the same indecency, Harmon. Another thing is that Hillsport was careful not to deface school property. Indeed, as I recall, she displayed some care in the selection of old fences and such places for her—um—decorations. In your case you seem to have tried to do as much damage as possible."

"But we didn't know, sir!" protested Willard again.

"And that I find hard to believe," replied the Doctor, shaking his head. "How many times did you paint the score up?"

"Only twice. The first time on a stable or something. We looked for fences and things like that, but there weren't any, sir. And we wanted to put it where the Hillsport fellows would be sure to see it, and finally we found that wall! It was outside the school grounds and we didn't any of us know it was the Principal's house. We wouldn't have thought of doing it there if we'd known. It was just—just a joke, sir!"

"A frightfully poor one, Harmon! Who were the others with you?"

Willard dropped his gaze and a moment of silence passed. When he raised his eyes again it was to look rather miserably at the Doctor and shake his head. "I guess I oughtn't to say, sir," he answered in low tones.

"I shan't insist," said the Doctor gently. "I know how you fellows look at such things. I can't help reflecting, however, Harmon, that your code of honor as regards matters amongst

yourselves is somewhat finer than you display in other matters. You don't hesitate, it appears, to daub black paint over a man's brick wall, although that man has never offended you in the least, but you're outraged at the mere thought of giving information against companions who have aided you in your offenses. Well, you shall suit yourself. I think it my duty, though, to point out to you that, in deciding on the proper punishment in your case, the question of whether you knew or did not know that you were defacing property belonging to the school and occupied by the school Principal is important. You tell me that you did now know and that the others did not know. If, as you say, you had not been in Hillsport before, I am inclined to believe what you tell me of yourself, but I cannot take your word for the others, Harmon. It seems to me extremely unlikely that one or more of them did not know whose property it was. If I knew their names I could question them and find out. As I don't know their names I am forced to give more credence to the probabilities than to your testimony. You see, Harmon, the affair looks very much like a deliberate insult to Doctor Handley, and it certainly calls for an apology. In apologizing I'd like greatly to be able to assure him that the affair was merely a schoolboy prank and that the depredators were not aware that it was his property they were defiling. But I can't tell him that without more evidence than your unsupported testimony affords me. Is that clear to you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Willard unhappily.

"And you still prefer not to give me the names of the others? Remember that I shall make every effort to find out and shall doubtless succeed."

"I—I'd rather not, sir," answered Willard steadily.

“In that case there is no more to be said. Pending a decision as to what disciplinary measures shall be taken, Harmon, you will observe hall restrictions. I am very sorry this has happened, my boy, and I hope it will lead you to a—um—greater respect for the rights and property of others. Good morning, Harmon.”

Willard stood up, rather pale but very straight. “I’m sorry I can’t tell you about the others, sir,” he said earnestly, “but—but I don’t believe you’d act any different yourself if you were in my place. And I’ll take the punishment without kicking, Doctor McPherson. But, just the same, it doesn’t seem fair to me that those fellows should get away with what they did and we—I should get punished for doing no more. We didn’t know we were painting up Doctor Handley’s wall. You needn’t believe me unless you want to, but it’s so! What—what’s he want to live outside the school for, anyway?” Willard ended in an indignant wail and the Doctor’s mouth trembled in a smile.

“If your idea is to shift the blame to Doctor Handley,” answered the Principal dryly, “I’m afraid it won’t work! You’ll hear from me later, Harmon. Good morning.”

“Good morning, sir,” murmured Willard.

He found Martin hidden behind a newspaper when he got back to the room, and so absorbed was the reader that not until the door had slammed shut did he know of Willard’s entry. Then he showed perturbed countenance above the Darlington *Daily Messenger*. “Seen this, Brand?” he asked ominously. Willard shook his head and took the proffered paper. The Hillsport correspondent had made quite a story of it.

# VISITING VANDALS DEFACE PROPERTY

## Saturday's Football Game at Hillsport Commemorated by Smears of Paint

"Hillsport, Nov. 4: This town awoke on Sunday morning to find that some time during the preceding night vandals had been at work with paint and brush. In a number of conspicuous places the score of Saturday's football game between Hillsport and Alton Academy was set forth in great black figures. To the youthful perpetrators of the outrage no place was sacred, for the ornamental brick wall about Principal Handley's residence, adjoining the school campus, was one of the sites selected for the derisive inscription. On Parker Street, the stable belonging to Chief of Police Starbuck likewise tells the story of Alton Academy's football victory. Probably other instances of property defacement will be found, but these so far are the most glaring that have come to light. Indignation is widespread and both town and school authorities propose to use every effort to bring the guilty persons to justice. While complete evidence is still lacking, it is generally believed that certain of the visiting party of Alton Academy students, over-excited by an unusual and unlooked for triumph over the local school, remained behind on Saturday evening and celebrated the victory in this reprehensible fashion. Indeed, it has been already established

> that four or five Alton youths were seen about town as late as half-past six or seven that evening. Unfortunately for them, the miscreants left a clue which if followed will undoubtedly lead to their apprehension. This is now in the hands of Chief of Police Starbuck. We understand that Principal Handley is already in correspondence with the authorities at Alton Academy and that the wanton defacement of school property will not be allowed to pass unpunished."

Willard handed the paper back in silence. Martin grinned. "Have you anything to say before sentence is passed?" he asked sepulchrally.

"Sentence has been passed, so far as I'm concerned," answered Willard. Martin stared. Then:

"What do you mean?" he demanded anxiously.

"I mean that I've just come from a fine moment with Doctor McPherson. That Principal over there, Handley or whatever his silly name is, has written to the Doctor, and sent that clue along, too."

"Wow!" muttered Martin awedly. "Wha—what was the clue?"

"My handkerchief."

"*Good night!*"

"And sweet dreams," added Willard ironically.

"What did he say?" asked Martin after a moment of painful thought. Willard shrugged.

“He said a lot! He wasn’t so bad, though. I’ll have to say that for him. I’m on hall bounds until the faculty gets together and decides whether I’m to be boiled in oil or merely drawn and quartered. You fellows may get by all right, though. I’m the only one they’re sure of so far. Why the dickens didn’t someone say that that brick wall was the Principal’s?”

“How were we to know?” demanded Martin. “Why doesn’t he live inside where he ought to? Say, we managed to pick a couple of fine spots, didn’t we? It was a clever idea to paint up the side of the Chief of Police’s barn! Oh, we were a grand little bunch of nuts!” And Martin laughed mirthlessly.

“Yes,” agreed Willard, “we surely managed to do things up brown while we were doing!”

“Didn’t you tell ‘Mac’ that you didn’t have anything to do with it?”

“That would have been a fine song-and-dance!” jeered Willard. “What if I didn’t do any of the actual painting? I went along, didn’t I? Besides, there was my handkerchief, all stuck up with black paint. He didn’t waste any time asking me whether I’d done it. All he wanted to know was who the others were.”

“You might as well have told him,” said Martin gloomily. “He’ll find out quick enough.”

“I don’t think so,” answered Willard. “No one saw us come back, and short of taking the whole school over there and letting the restaurant folks pick you fellows out, I don’t see how they’re going to tell.”

Martin brightened. Then his face fell again. “We’ll have to fess up, Brand. It wouldn’t be fair to let you stand the whole

racket."

"That's a swell idea," answered the other derisively. "You and Bob off the team would help a lot, wouldn't it?"

"We-ell—" Martin scowled in concentrated study of the problem. Then: "Look here," he said, "a fellow's got to eat, anyway. Let's go to dinner. Afterwards we'll find Bob and—"

His remark was interrupted by a knock at the door followed by the entrance of Bob himself, a somewhat troubled looking Bob who, without noticing anything unusual in the looks of the roommates, plunged into speech. "Say, fellows," he announced, lowering himself into a chair and viewing them frowningly, "I'm not quite easy in my mind about that business the other night."

"Really?" asked Martin. "How strange!"

The sarcasm was lost, however. Bob shook his head and went on. "No, because I have a horrible suspicion that I tied that handkerchief to the handle of the paint can, Brand. And if I did they'll find it, sure as shooting. I—I suppose it had your initials on it, eh?"

Willard shook his head. "No," he answered gently.

"Honest?" Bob perked up. "Then it won't matter if they do find it, will it? Gee, I was getting sort of worried! You see, I thought first I'd given it back to you, Brand, and then I thought I'd thrown it away, but Cal said last night that he sort of remembered feeling it around the handle and I sort of half remember putting it there. But if it didn't have any mark on it, we shouldn't worry."

“I didn’t say that,” corrected Willard. “I said it didn’t have any initials, and it didn’t. All it had was ‘Harmon’, in nice big letters.”

“Great Scott!” gasped Bob.

“By the way, you haven’t cast your eye over the Darlington paper by any chance, have you?” drawled Martin.

“No. Is there anything in it?” asked Bob anxiously.

“Why, yes, you might say so. Like to look at it?”

Bob viewed the others with growing disquiet. “What’s the joke?” he demanded, scowling. “What are you two fellows so blamed creepy about? Let’s see that paper!”

Willard and Martin said nothing until Bob had finished the story. Then: “Looks like we might have a bit o’ weather,” drawled Martin.

Bob laid the paper down softly and grinned in sickly fashion.

“I’ll say so,” he answered.

# CHAPTER XXII
# ON PROBATION

By mid-afternoon the news was all over school and conjecture was rife. Alton took it as a fine joke and laughed and chuckled enjoyably. Hillsport had been paid back in her own coin, and painting the football score on Principal Handley's sacred wall was considered a veritable master-stroke of genius! Decorating the premises of Hillsport's chief of police was also looked on approvingly, for, while it lacked the magnificence of the other effort, it nevertheless held a touch of daring that kindled youthful enthusiasm. Some of the seniors shook their heads and soberly predicted trouble, but others, knowing themselves innocent, were unconcerned with that feature of the affair. They wouldn't have to suffer, so why worry? Oddly enough, the identity of the heroes remained a mystery, although many fellows looked wise and pretended to be able to tell a lot if they would. To Bob and Martin and the others it seemed impossible that none should recall the fact that they had remained behind when the car that bore the football players had left the school. But things had been confused that afternoon and excitement had reigned, and if anyone did recall that significant fact none made mention of it. You may be certain that none of the four jogged the memories of any of the others!

Hall restrictions, or hall bounds in student phraseology, was ordinarily not a very severe infliction. You went to chapel, classes and meals as usual, but for the rest you stayed in your dormitory building and let the world wag along

without you. You were allowed the freedom of the recreation room downstairs and you could, if the hall master saw fit to allow, visit other fellows in the building. So long as you were not engaged in athletic activities you didn't suffer greatly, although after a few days the régime began to seem decidedly monotonous. In Willard's case hall bounds was a real punishment since it meant no more football, and he had very dreary thoughts that Monday afternoon. As required, he had acquainted Manager Ross of his forced absence from the field, and Ross had scowled and scolded, and even stormed a little, but had not, apparently, connected the fact with the happening at Hillsport on Saturday night.

Willard didn't dare prophesy to himself what the outcome would be. He had a well-developed notion that fellows had been expelled from Alton School for misdemeanors no more heinous. In any case, he was quite certain that there would be no more football for him that fall, since even if, by a miracle, his punishment should be ultimately no worse than at present, a week or a fortnight of absence from practice would end his usefulness to the team. Coach Cade, he reflected grimly, wasn't going to hold the left half-back position open for him! There were moments when he felt somewhat aggrieved and when he told himself bitterly that it wasn't fair that he should be made the goat for the whole crowd. But second thought did away with all that. If he could keep the others out of it, he decided, he would do it ungrudgingly, even if it cost his dismissal. After all, the success of the football team was the big thing, and, although he couldn't help any longer with his playing, he could help a whole big lot by keeping his tongue still.

If Willard couldn't visit outside Haylow, there was nothing to prevent occupants of other dormitories visiting him, and after practice that afternoon four disturbed and perturbed youths sat in Number 16 and faced a puzzling situation. Martin was strong for confessing and making a public apology to Doctor Handley at Hillsport, in the hope that the Alton faculty would be lenient. He was decidedly obstinate in the matter, and it took much persuasion from Willard and Cal to alter his view. Bob was the least talkative of the four. He said he was perfectly willing to do whatever the others decided was best, but he offered no opinions. Bob blamed himself for the whole affair, from first to last, ignoring the fact that Cal had originated the scheme, and insisted that if it hadn't been for his carelessness it would never have been connected with Willard. *Mea culpa* was written large on Bob's countenance and Martin's repeated assertion that they were all tarred with the same brush—an allusion that made Cal wince, in view of the fact that his gray suit was costing him two and a half dollars for cleansing—had no effect on his melancholy.

In the end it was Willard whose words produced conviction. "You fellows make me tired," he declared impatiently. "What's the use of going all over it a dozen times? The whole thing's just this: If you fellows squeal on yourselves it isn't going to do me any good, so far as I can see, and it'll just about bust up the team. With the best right guard and left tackle out for the rest of the year, what's going to happen? You know plaguey well they can't find fellows to fill your places in the little time that's left. We'd get licked good and hard, and that's all there is to that. As for faculty being lenient, well, maybe they might be, but you can bet

being lenient won't let any of us play football! If we'd done something perfectly mean and putrid I'd say fess up and take the medicine, but we haven't. We didn't any of us know that Doctor Thingumbob lived in that house. We were just playing a practical joke and the rest was simply tough luck. You fellows just keep your silly mouths shut and go on and play football and lick the hide off Kenly. That's all you need to do. I'll take the punishment, whatever it is, and keep right on smiling. There's just one thing I won't stand for, though." Willard looked at Bob and Martin fiercely. "If I get canned and you fellows don't beat Kenly I'll come back here and I'll —I'll mighty near kill you!"

"Oh, dry up," muttered Bob. "You know blamed well we'll claw the wool off those guys, Brand! You don't have to talk that way."

"It isn't right, though," said Martin.

"It's as right as anything we can do," asserted Cal. "We haven't done anything criminal, even if faculty thinks we have. Brand's got the right dope, fellows. There's no use killing off the team just to—to salve our consciences. Look here, I don't play football. I'll go in with Brand. Maybe Mac will be easier if there's two of us."

"Oh, don't play the silly goat," begged Willard. "What good would it do? Where's the sense of two getting canned, maybe, instead of one? Stop chewing the rag, for the love of mud! And pull your face together, Bob, before it freezes that way. Gosh, anyone would think you were going to be hung! You fellows beat it out of here before someone suspects, and stop *looking* like the criminals you are!"

Willard carried the day.

During the next few days Doctor McPherson summoned various students before him and questioned them, but learned nothing new. The weekly faculty meeting was held Wednesday evening, and Thursday morning Willard found a buff envelope on the mail board in the lower corridor of Haylow. Inside was a request that he call on the Principal that afternoon at half-past four at his residence.

"Would you pack up now or wait until afterwards?" asked Willard smilingly of Martin. Martin, however, refused to treat the matter so lightly, and growled and fumed at a great rate. At four-thirty Willard pushed the button beside Doctor McPherson's front door and was ushered into a book-lined room on the right. The Doctor arose to meet him and shook hands, a ceremony dispensed with at the office. Then, when the visitor was seated, the Doctor picked up a typewritten sheet from the desk and handed it across.

"Read that, please, Harmon, and tell me whether you wish to sign it," he said.

It was a letter to Doctor Handley, at Hillsport School, apologizing very humbly and, at the same time, very gracefully for what had happened. It stressed the fact that the writer had not known that he was defacing school property and was offered "on behalf of myself and my companions who participated in the regrettable act." Willard read it through carefully and laid it back on the edge of the desk.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I'll be very glad to sign it."

"Very well. I am also writing to Doctor Handley and the two letters will go together." The Doctor dipped a pen in ink and handed it to Willard and the latter placed his signature at the bottom of the sheet.

“Thank you.” The Doctor laid the sheet aside and faced the boy again. “We gave some thought and discussion to your case last night, Harmon, and, I am glad to tell you, decided to accept your version of the incident. That is, we reached the conclusion that your statement to the effect that you and your companions were not aware of the fact that you were defacing Doctor Handley’s property was true. While you have been with us but a short time, your hall master and your instructors spoke extremely well of you, and that weighed in your favor. It was decided that you are to go on probation for the balance of the term, a penalty which you will, I think, realize is far from extreme. Probation, as you doubtless know, requires a certain standing in class and exemplary conduct. It also denies you certain privileges, amongst them participation in athletics. I may add that as fast as your fellow culprits are discovered a like penalty will be awarded to each. I hope this will be a lesson to you, Harmon. There is a very distinct line between harmless fun and lawlessness, and I trust that hereafter you will recognize it.”

Willard returned to Haylow too relieved over his escape from the extreme penalty to let the matter of probation trouble him for the time. Martin, returning from practice shortly after, performed a dance of triumph and joy. “That’s great, Brand!” he declared. “I don’t mind telling you now that I was fearing the worst. Of course, I didn’t let you see it— What are you laughing at?”

“Why, you crazy chump, I could see all along that you thought I was going to get canned! You’ve been about as jolly as an undertaker!”

“Honest? Well, I’ll tell you one thing you don’t know, son, and that is that if they had canned you I’d have gone along. I

made up my mind to that!"

"What good would that have done?" jeered Willard.

"Never mind, that's what would have happened," replied Martin doggedly.

"Well, don't be too care-free and light-hearted," laughed the other. "Mac says that as fast as you chaps are found out you'll get the same medicine."

"He's got to find us first," chuckled Martin. "If he was going to do it he'd have done it before this."

"Well, I hope you're right. How did practice go?"

"Fine! We scored three times on the second. Son, we've got a real team this year!"

"Who was at left half?"

"Mawson most of the time. Longstreth had a whack at it, too. We're going to miss you there, Brand."

"Much obliged," answered Willard dryly. "I guess you'll worry along, though. What's it like to be on pro?"

Martin's face sobered as he shook his head. "I've never been there yet, and I hope I never shall, but I guess it's sort of fairly rotten!"

And so it proved to be. While Willard was no longer confined to the dormitory, he was not allowed to go on the field and was debarred from being outside the school property after six in the evening, and the latter restriction meant that the movies, unless he chose to attend in the afternoon, would know him no more until after Christmas Recess. The hardest feature of his punishment, however, was the required standing

in all classes. Marks under 85 drew frowns of disapproval, and Willard reflected that the rule that kept him inside the grounds in the evenings was not such a bad one, for only by spending the evenings in diligent study could he hope to scrape through.

Being forbidden attendance at practice or games did not, however, prevent him from witnessing the game with New Falmouth High School on Saturday. He saw it, although at a distance and in a rather uncomfortable attitude, from Felix McNatt's window in Upton. McNatt's room, while not on the end of the building overlooking the field, was near the corner and, by opening a window and leaning well out Willard could see all of the gridiron save the stretch of it close to the nearer stand. Fortunately for his comfort, the day was only mildly cold. New Falmouth High was not a formidable antagonist and Alton had no difficulty in running up 34 points while the adversary was securing 7. Afterwards it was stated throughout the school that McNatt won that game single-handed, but that was an exaggeration. True it is, though, that the full-back carried the ball over for four of the five touchdowns and was largely instrumental in securing the fifth! Willard observed from his aery with mingled emotions that Mawson was far from effectual on attack, although he played a consistently good game on defense. Cochran, at right half, had an off-day, and Moncks, who took his place in the third quarter, was not much better. It seemed to Willard that the Gray-and-Gold deserved a larger score than she got, for she followed the ball closely, played hard and showed real end of the season form throughout. Two penalties in the last period undoubtedly saved the visitor from a worse drubbing. The visitor's touchdown was honestly earned in the first few

minutes of play when Gil Tarver's forward-pass to Lake fell into the hands of the enemy and a blue-and-white-legged youth raced thirty-odd yards and fell across the goal-line. A nimble-footed quarter-back added another point.

The New Falmouth game passed into history and Alton faced the next to the last contest with confidence. Oak Grove Academy was always a worthy competitor, and this year was to meet Alton on Oak Grove ground, but the Gray-and-Gold had reached her stride and the only question that concerned her adherents was the size of the score and whether Oak Grove would be represented in it. Kenly had played a stiff game with Lorimer Saturday and had won it in the last five minutes, the final score being 16 to 13. Although the best Alton had been able to do against Lorimer was to play her to a 3 to 3 tie, the Gray-and-Gold nevertheless found encouragement in the Kenly-Lorimer game, arguing that Alton's present playing was fifty per cent better than it had been a fortnight ago, granting which a meeting between Alton and Kenly on Saturday would have found the former easily superior. Whether this reasoning was correct or not, certain it is that neither players nor adherents doubted Alton's ability to beat Oak Grove Academy in most decisive fashion at the end of the week. But this was before Mr. Kincaid, physics instructor, put two and two together and beheld a great light.

# CHAPTER XXIII
# M'NATT TRIES PHOTOGRAPHY

Mr. Kincaid was a dapper, well-groomed little gentleman of middle age who wore a sandy mustache and squinted engagingly through a pair of gold-rimmed glasses because he was unusually near-sighted. On one occasion, when the instructor had removed his glasses to polish them and had subsequently mislaid them between the pages of a book for something like two minutes, things happened in Room G seldom witnessed! Being extremely fastidious, the instructor was a good customer of The Parisian Tailors, who occupied a small building on West Street. On the preceding Saturday, the day of the New Falmouth game, the instructor repaired himself to the tailoring shop shortly after dinner with a pair of trousers draped gracefully over one arm. He wanted those trousers nicely pressed for the next day's wearing, and he must have them no later than this evening. Having enjoined Mr. Jacob Schacht to that effect, he remained a moment and watched that gentleman, who, by the way, looked most un-Parisian in feature, proceed to the long-delayed cleaning of a gray suit. It was a peculiar looking suit, Mr. Kincaid decided, viewing it through his strong lenses, and he made mention of his decision to Mr. Schacht. "An odd mixture," he remarked agreeably. "I don't think I ever saw one just like it, Mr. Schacht."

"Them spots ain't in the goods," chuckled Mr. Schacht in an un-Parisian voice. "They're paint, Mr. Kincaid. One of the young gentlemen at the school brought this here suit to me

the first of the week just like you see it. All over the front is them spots, Mr. Kincaid, and I says 'A fine job you bring me,' I says, 'because,' I says, 'paint that's already got hard like this,' I says, 'you can't do much with it, Mr. Grainger.' So much I don't like it, I keep putting it off, sir, and here now it's already Saturday, and nothing ain't done to it yet, Mr. Kincaid. If there was two of me I'd still be working till it was midnight just like now, Mr. Kincaid."

His interest in the suit having vanished on learning that the peculiar appearance was due to specks of paint, Mr. Kincaid sympathized with Mr. Schacht in a few well-chosen words and withdrew. The incident did not again occur to him until Tuesday forenoon when his eyes again fell on the gray suit, now quite commonplace in appearance, adorning the form of Calvin Grainger. Just why at that moment Mr. Kincaid's thoughts should have reverted to the last faculty meeting it is hard to say, but they did, and he recalled the case of a student, whose name he had now forgotten, which had been before the meeting for consideration. That student had used black paint to adorn the brick wall surrounding the residence of the Principal of Hillsport School, to the straining of the entente cordial existing between that school and Alton Academy. Mr. Kincaid removed his gold-rimmed glasses, closed his eyes, leaned back, and, while Rowlandson proceeded to prove how little attention he had given to today's lesson, added two and two, with the result that later on that day Calvin Grainger called at the office on request and spent some twenty minutes with Doctor McPherson. When he left he looked chastened to a degree; chastened and very disgusted; possibly more disgusted than chastened. For, as he asked later of a very

troubled roommate, what was a fellow going to do when he was asked point-blank like that?

"Of course," he explained moodily, "I didn't welch on you or Mart, but he'll get you, Bob, because he will be pretty sure we were together. After that he'll get Mart."

"He'll get me," agreed Bob, with a sigh, "but I don't see how he can connect Mart with the business."

"You don't? Well, it's funny to me he hasn't done it already. He knows that Brand and Mart room together, for one thing. Fellows who room together are generally in on things like that."

"Sure, if they happen around school, but I guess it didn't occur to him that Mart would be with Brand over at Hillsport. Maybe he won't think of me, either." But there was very little conviction in his tone.

"He will, though," answered Cal gloomily. "You'll be on the carpet in the morning. It's a shame, too. It doesn't matter much in my case, for I'm not on the football team, and I'll be off probation long before spring baseball practice starts, but you—" He shook his head dismally.

"Oh, well!" Bob shrugged. "What has to be, has to be. Might as well face it." He walked to the window and looked down on the darkening Green. Cal groaned.

"It's my fault," he muttered. "You fellows wouldn't have thought of it if I hadn't suggested it."

"It isn't your fault that we went into it," answered Bob, without turning. "Don't talk like a fish."

At noon the next day it was known pretty well all over school that Bob Newhall, Calvin Grainger and Willard Harmon were on probation as a result of the black paint episode over at Hillsport. Bob's fate brought consternation to the team and one of the worst quarter-hours Bob had ever put in occurred when Joe Myers sought him out and said what was on his mind. Joe took it badly.

Martin was all for hurrying to the office and acknowledging his complicity, but the others persuaded him not to. As Bob said, the team had suffered enough, and it was Martin's duty to stick as long as faculty would let him. "Not that it'll be long, though," added Bob pessimistically. "They'll get you, too, in a day or so."

Bob was mistaken, however, for they didn't "get him" until Friday. Even then they had no proof against Martin, but, knowing that he and Bob and Cal were much together, they shot at a venture and, questioned, Martin could do no less than confess. He acknowledged to Willard that it was a relief to have it over with. "I've been feeling like a thief ever since they got you, Brand," he said, "and I'd have gone to Mac long ago if you fellows hadn't kicked up such a row about it."

The next day Alton journeyed to Hubbardston and met Oak Grove. With Rowlandson in Bob's position and Putney playing left tackle in place of Martin, it wasn't the same team that had rolled up those 34 points against New Falmouth. The Gray-and-Gold, thanks to the spirit displayed by every fellow on the team and to some wonderful work by McNatt, managed to score a touchdown in the third period, but against that Oak Grove made two, and the score at the end of the game was 14 to 6 in Oak Grove's favor.

The school felt very sore after that game and Bob and Martin and Willard were far from popular. There was a distinct atmosphere of discouragement over the Academy on Sunday, and it didn't lift perceptibly until Monday evening, when, at the third of the football mass meetings, Coach Cade made an earnest appeal for support that brought the audience to their feet, cheering madly.

"We've been hit hard," he said. "There wouldn't be any sense in my denying that. But this is a fight that we're in, and one blow isn't going to beat us. It's just going to get our blood up, fellows, and we're going to fight harder than we ever thought of fighting. We're going into the Kenly game, maybe, beaten on paper, but we're coming out of it victorious. It won't be the first time that a supposedly weaker team has won. It's spirit that counts, the spirit to fight and conquer, no matter the odds. And that's the spirit Alton is going to have next Saturday. There isn't a man on the team, from Captain Myers down to the greenest substitute, that thinks we are going to be beaten; there isn't one of them that doesn't know that we can win and will win! And I know it. And I want everyone of you fellows to know it, too, and to let the team know that you know it! We'll do our part, but you've got to do yours. Will you?"

The answer was convincing.

The four on probation didn't attend that meeting, nor were they able to see the efforts that Coach Cade put forth to repair the team in the few days remaining, but they heard of each, and each was affected in his own fashion. Martin stormed at his fate and got red in the face, Bob was very silent and pathetic and Willard smiled to hide a sore heart. Cal was frankly miserable, blaming himself for the mischief and

taking the misfortune to the others perhaps a little harder than they did. Willard dropped in on Felix McNatt Tuesday afternoon before supper and got much inside news of the football situation.

"Rowlandson will probably do very well," reported McNatt, "but Putney isn't the right sort for tackle, and I wish Mr. Cade would see it. He hasn't the proper temperament, Harmon."

"How about the backfield?" asked Willard. "How—how's Mawson getting on?"

"Mawson is a hard worker, but he's lighter than he should be and he's not so clever at finding the holes as you were, Harmon," answered McNatt judicially. "Cochran is remarkably good when at his best, but he—ah—fluctuates."

"It doesn't sound hopeful," murmured Willard.

"Oh, I've no doubt that we will win from Kenly," answered McNatt. "You see, since we lost Proctor and Newhall we've come together a lot better, and the morale of the team is much finer. Kenly, as I figure it, will enter the game fairly sure of winning. We'll go in realizing that, while we may win it, we've got to play powerful football to do it. When you just have to do a thing, you do it," concluded McNatt convincedly.

Willard considered that conclusion a moment in silence, a silence broken at length by his host. "I presume," he said, "that there's no hope of Newhall and Proctor—and you—getting back on before Saturday."

"Hardly," answered Willard, smiling wryly. "We're on pro for the rest of the term."

“I didn’t know,” murmured McNatt sympathetically. “Just —ah—just what was it that happened, Harmon? I don’t think I ever heard the rights of it.”

So Willard told him, giving a very complete and detailed account of the affair, and McNatt listened and nodded and blinked occasionally until he had finished. Then, after a moment’s consideration, he said: “It seems, then, that you fellows made your mistake in painting the score on the Principal’s wall. I mean, you did no worse than Hillsport did otherwise.”

“We didn’t do as much as she did,” answered Willard resentfully. “Those fellows painted the score all over the town here; more than a dozen times, I guess; we only painted it twice.”

“Yes, I recall seeing the signs,” McNatt reflected. “Has it occurred to you as possible that a proper presentation of your case has not been made to the Hillsport Principal?”

“I don’t know. Anyway, what he thinks doesn’t worry us. It’s what faculty here thinks. And they think we ought to be punished. And we are.”

“I see. I only thought that possibly—” McNatt’s voice trailed into silence, and he remained silent so long that Willard finally got up and took his departure. McNatt pulled the cord that operated the door bolt in a most absent-minded manner and aroused himself from his abstraction only long enough to murmur “Good afternoon.” Outside, Willard smiled to himself and shook his head.

“McNutt!” he muttered.

Usually the last hard practice preceding the big game was held on Wednesday, but this year the team was kept at it on Thursday as well. On Wednesday the second team, fight as it might, was snowed under, three touchdowns and a field-goal to nothing, and on Thursday, although Coach Cade gave the ball to the second time and again inside the first's thirty-yard line, the latter's goal was not crossed. On the other hand, McNatt twice broke away for long runs that led to as many scores. The mass meeting on Thursday evening was more enthusiastic than any that had gone before, and the cheers had a grimly determined sound usually lacking.

It was on Thursday that Martin returned to Number 16 Haylow just before dinner time from a hurried trip to West Street and, tossing his purchase on his bed and warming numbed fingers over the radiator, announced with a chuckle: "McNutt's got a new line, Brand."

"What sort of a line?" asked Willard, pushing his book away and tilting perilously back in his chair. "What do you mean, line?"

"Photography," replied Martin. "I met him over in Bagdad a few minutes ago taking pictures of the stores. It's colder than the dickens, but all he had on was a muffler around his neck."

"*What!*"

"Don't play the goat. You know what I mean. He looked awfully funny, standing there winding up his little camera in the middle of the street, with the wind blowing a gale!"

"What's he photographing the stores for?" asked Willard, puzzled.

"Search me! Some new science, I guess. He's a queer one. Coming to dinner?"

Friday was still cold and windy, with leaden skies, and after the team had run through signals for a quarter of an hour and the backs had punted and caught a few times, the players were hustled back to the gymnasium and straw was spread over the gridiron in case of a freeze.

The excitement and suspense that held the whole school that day affected Willard so that studying was an impossibility. About five, as Martin had gone over to Lykes to get Eustace Ross to help him with his algebra, Willard gave up the attempt to study and, pulling on a sweater, wandered across to Upton. Number 49 held only young Fuller, however. "Felix went out early," he said in reply to Willard's inquiry. "About two o'clock I think it was. I guess he's photographing." The boy scowled. "That's his latest. He develops the pictures himself, too." He nodded at several trays and bottles that claimed a corner of the table. "This is a rotten hole to live in when he gets to messing with chemicals. Some day I'll be blown through the roof, I dare say."

"I don't think photographing chemicals are explosive," responded Willard soothingly.

"Well, they're mighty nasty," grumbled the other. "He stretched a string across the room yesterday and hung his films on it and they dripped all over my books!"

Willard retraced his steps to Haylow, very much at a loose end, and gloomed in the darkness until Martin returned and switched the light on. After supper that evening Bob and Calvin came up and the four listened to the singing and cheering that floated faintly across from Memorial Hall where

the final football mass meeting was being held, and talked desultorily about the game and Alton's prospects of victory. "They say," remarked Cal, "that faculty's holding a special meeting this evening and that Rowlandson may not play tomorrow."

"What's the matter with Rowly?" asked Martin.

"Back in his studies, they say."

"I guess it's just a scare," said Martin. "Who said that faculty was meeting?"

"Harry Johnson told me. I think it's so, too, for I saw the windows of Mac's room all lighted up."

"What of it? That doesn't necessarily mean that they're after Rowlandson," said Bob. "That would be about the last straw!"

"You hear a lot of silly yarns like that just before the game," said Martin. "Fellows get so excited they'll tell you anything."

"I wish I were excited," muttered Bob. "Gee, it's funny to think of the game being played tomorrow and not getting into it!"

"Not even seeing!" added Cal.

"That's worse still," said Martin. "I don't see why faculty needs to be so blamed mean. It wouldn't hurt them any to let us look at the old game!"

"Think they would if we all went and asked?" inquired Willard. "Doctor McPherson isn't a bad sort."

“He’s all right,” answered Cal grudgingly, “but some of the others are pills. I’d say—”

“We might try it,” interrupted Bob eagerly. “I’ll go if the rest of you will!”

“I’ll go,” said Martin promptly. “He can’t any more than turn us down. Gee, listen to that cheer! They’re certainly humping themselves over there tonight!”

“We’ll all go,” said Bob. “I suppose it’s too late tonight. Let’s do it right after breakfast. I don’t see why he shouldn’t, fellows.”

“Nor I,” growled Cal, “but he won’t!”

Long after midnight had rung out Willard called cautiously across the darkness: “Mart, you awake?”

“Yes, I can’t seem to get to sleep.”

“Same here,” sighed Willard. He thumped his pillow and dug his head into it again. “Gee, you’d think I was going to play tomorrow from the way I don’t get sleepy!”

“Last year,” said Mart, making the bed squeak as he tossed himself into a new position, “I was asleep before eleven. Let’s light up and read awhile, Brand.”

“Let’s try it again for awhile first,” was the answer. “Maybe if we stop thinking about the game we’ll make it.”

“Yes, but how are you going to stop thinking of it?” sighed Martin. “Well—”

Silence fell. The half-hour struck. Presently a gentle snore came from the left-hand bed, joined a few minutes later by a second.

# CHAPTER XXIV
# ALTON CELEBRATES

Cloud and sun were struggling for supremacy the next morning when Willard looked out the window. The tips of the trees were swaying briskly under a southwest breeze, but it was evident that, whether fair or cloudy, the day was to be milder than yesterday. Already there was a wild hubbub from the corridor as boys raced for the lavatory, and football songs sounded bravely. Willard didn't have much appetite at breakfast; nor, for that matter, did many of his table companions display any marvelous enthusiasm for food. They were far too excited. A holiday air prevailed and laughter was louder and conversation more incessant than usual. At intervals the broad windows across the crowded hall lighted up palely, making a promise that was never quite fulfilled.

The four met in the corridor after breakfast and discussed their mission beside one of the radiators. "Who's going to do the talking?" asked Calvin. "And what are we going to say?"

"Bob," answered Martin and Willard almost in unison.

Bob shrugged. "I don't mind. Anyway, there isn't anything to say. All we can do is ask to be allowed to attend the game. I don't know of any—any effective argument that we can put up, do you?"

It seemed that no one did, and presently they started forth for Doctor McPherson's residence, the Doctor seldom going across to Academy Hall before nine o'clock. They gave their

names to the maid and stood in a cluster outside the library door while she disappeared in the direction of the dining-room. “Guess he hasn’t finished breakfast,” whispered Martin. “Maybe we oughtn’t to have come so early.”

“He ought to be through it if he isn’t,” muttered Bob sternly. “Anyhow, we can wait.”

Then the maid appeared again. “The Doctor says he will see you at the office at half-past ten,” she reported. The four exchanged glances and filed out. Outside, Bob gave a sigh of relief.

“I guess he’d have turned us down, anyway,” he said.

“You don’t know,” replied Willard. “Aren’t you going to try again?”

“I don’t believe,” said Bob. “What’s the use?”

“Lots of use,” declared Martin stoutly. “Let’s see it through now we’ve started. Come on up to our room and wait. It’s nearly two hours.”

In the corridor Willard stopped at the mail rack while the others went on toward the stairs. When he overtook them he held two buff envelopes in his hand. “Here’s a billet-doux for you, Mart,” he said. “I’ve got one, too. Wonder what’s up.” He pulled out the printed slip and ran his eyes over it quickly. “That’s funny! It’s a date with Mac at ten-thirty!”

“So’s mine,” announced Martin. “What do you suppose—”

“That’s why he wouldn’t see us over at the house,” said Bob. “Say, I wonder if I’ve got one of those, too! I’m going to see!”

“So am I!” exclaimed Calvin.

Left alone, Willard and Martin went on up the stairway alternately eyeing the slips and each other. Martin shook his head troubledly as they gained the second floor corridor. “I’ll bet it’s that blamed algebra,” he muttered. “Peghorn’s been mighty nasty the last two or three days.”

“Well, I’m all right as far as I know,” said Willard, frowning thoughtfully. “Maybe Latin—”

Hurrying footsteps below interrupted, and then Bob’s head came into sight. Cal followed at his heels. Both boys were plainly excited. “We’ve got ’em, too!” called Bob. “Same hour! Say, know what I think? I think faculty’s going to let us see the game!”

Martin exhaled a deep sigh of relief. “Gee, I hope it is that!” he exclaimed. “I—I was getting scared!”

There was still an hour and a half to be lived through, and they made themselves comfortable in Number 16 and advanced numerous theories. Willard went so far as to suggest that perhaps Mac was going to let them all off probation, but that theory found no supporters. “You haven’t been here very long,” said Bob, “and so you don’t know that faculty gang like I do. It’s a sight more likely that Mac wants us to tell us they’ve changed their minds and that we’re to be shot at sunrise!”

Fully a quarter of an hour before the appointed time they set forth for Academy Hall, arriving there with thirteen and a half minutes to wait. They joined the group on the steps and listened half-heartedly to prognostications regarding the outcome of the game until Calvin, having referred to his watch for the sixth time, made a significant motion of his

head and the others followed him inside and down the corridor to the fateful portal.

"The Doctor is all ready for you, gentlemen," said the secretary when they entered. "Go right in, please."

They went in, Bob leading the way. Doctor McPherson greeted them pleasantly and bade them be seated, and when they were he took up a paper whose folds showed it to be a letter and fixed his glasses more firmly. Then he viewed them one after another and spoke.

"This is a communication that reached me yesterday by—um—by special messenger." Willard thought a faint smile quivered about the corners of the Doctor's mouth. "It is from Doctor William Handley, of Hillsport School. With your permission, boys, I will read it."

The ensuing silence gave unanimous and enthusiastic consent. The only sound was from Bob when he coughed nervously. The Doctor ran his eyes over the address and began: "The young gentleman who bears this, Mr. McNatt, has convinced me that the incident of which I wrote to you under date of the 5th instant has been wrongly construed by our faculty and that it was neither a deliberated discourtesy nor a mischievous attempt to cause property damage. In the light of Mr. McNatt's information I can readily believe that the proceeding was no more than a prankish attempt to retaliate for acts of a similar nature performed by the students of this school in Alton a year ago, acts which, I wish to assure you, were not known of by me until today. While two wrongs do not make a right, I can sympathize with the motives which actuated your students, and it is the purpose of this letter to assure you that so far as we of the Hillsport School Faculty

are concerned the unfortunate incident is fully condoned. As a personal favor will you not exercise such leniency toward the offenders as your conscience will permit? It would be a source of deep regret if, because of our somewhat hasty and, as we now conceive, too severe arraignment of the young gentlemen, the Alton Football Team should, lacking their services, meet with defeat tomorrow. In closing may I offer an apology on behalf of the Faculty of this school for the depredations caused by our students in your town last autumn? I assure you that such regrettable acts will not recur. With the most cordial greetings and assurances of my deep respect, I am, my dear Doctor, very sincerely yours, William Handley."

The Principal placed the letter back on the desk before him and again viewed his audience, this time with a frank smile.

"That document," he went on, "was presented to me late yesterday afternoon by McNatt, of the Senior Class. Last evening I called a meeting of the faculty, young gentlemen, and it was decided that, since the Hillsport faculty desired it, it would be ungracious on our part to refuse clemency. So it is my pleasant privilege to inform you that you are removed from probation. I need scarcely point out to you that you are chiefly under obligations to Felix McNatt."

There was a long moment of silence. Then Bob cleared his throat. "How—how did he do it, sir?" he asked rather huskily.

"I'm not very certain myself," replied the Doctor, smiling, "but I gathered from his story that his most potent argument was a collection of a dozen or so photographs which he took around town here and which showed that you boys didn't

exactly invent the painting of football scores on walls and buildings!”

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I might devote several pages to the Alton-Kenly game, but it really doesn’t deserve it. Seen in retrospect, it was not an uncommonly enthralling battle, although at the time there was excitement enough. You know without my telling it that Alton won. I think she would have won even without the assistance of Bob and Martin and Willard, for she had made up her mind to conquer and I don’t believe that anything Kenly could have done that afternoon would have prevented her from winning. As it was, Alton showed her superiority from the first and the outcome was never for an instant in doubt. Coach Cade had pleaded for the first score, for, like many coaches, he was a believer in the axiom which says: The team that scores first wins the game. And Alton gave him his wish when Cochran slid over the Kenly goal-line at the end of seven minutes of play for the initial touchdown.

Alton played good football that afternoon, played better football than her most hopeful supporter dared expect, and Kenly was fortunate to get the six points that came to her in the second period. Those six points constituted the only dregs in Alton’s cup of happiness, for, after McNatt had hurled himself across the last four yards that separated the Gray-and-Gold from the Kenly goal in the first few moments of the second quarter and Macon had brought the total to 14 points, it seemed to Alton that she would not only win but keep the adversary scoreless. That, however, was not to be, for Kenly, although outplayed during most of the game, enjoyed one

flash of desperate, heroic and successful endeavor. Getting possession of the ball on Alton's thirty-eight yards, she made two forward-passes good and landed on the twelve. From there, in spite of the home team's savage defense, she smashed her way to the seven in three attacks and then threw over the line for a score.

Yet Alton avenged that insult in the third period and again in the fourth, and might have done so once again in the last few minutes had not the substitutes, thrown in helter-skelter as the end drew close, suffered three successive penalties for over-eagerness. It was hard to pick the stars in the Alton eleven, for not a man stopped short of excellence. Possibly it was McNatt who shone the brightest, for the full-back had all that the others had of skill and spirit with, besides, a certain other quality which, for want of a better name, and at the risk of ridicule, I must call science. It was McNatt who stopped the much-touted Puckhaber time and again and fairly stood him on his head. It was McNatt who twice hurled himself across the Kenly goal-line for a score. And it was McNatt who, flaming himself with a white-hot intensity of purpose, constantly encouraged the others to fairly superhuman efforts.

But to speak too much of McNatt would be unfair to the rest: to Captain Joe Myers, and to Gil Tarver, who ran the team as never before, and to Bob and Martin and, finally, Willard, who, although he didn't see service until the third period started, played a wonderful game at left half. That run that started on Alton's twenty-eight yards and ended on Kenly's seventeen was made by Willard, and Willard it was who, near the last of the contest, took Tarver's long heave down the field and added another dozen yards to it, so preparing the way for McNatt's final touchdown. It was

Alton's day all through, and it is doubtful if there was ever a more stunned and disappointed team than Kenly when the last whistle blew and the score of 26 to 6 stared down at her from the board. That single touchdown afforded her scant comfort, it seemed.

**It was Alton's day all through**

Alton made merry that night. There was a parade that wound in and out of the town and back across the Green several times, and much singing and much cheering. It was while they were perched side by side in the rickety wagon that, serving as a chariot for the heroes, was drawn at the head of the procession, that Willard said to McNatt during a lull in the clamor: "How did you ever think of that scheme, McNatt?"

And McNatt, smiling, answered: “Well, Harmon, there’s a scientific way of doing everything, you know. And that was the scientific way of doing *that*!”

THE END

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## Transcriber’s Notes:

Except for the frontispiece, illustrations have been moved to follow the text that they illustrate, so the page number of the illustration may not match the page number in the Illustrations.

Punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected, except as noted below.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

Differences in M’Natt (chapter titles) and McNatt (Contents) for Chapters IX, XVII, and XXIII titles have been retained.

[The end of *Left Half Harmon* by Ralph Henry Barbour]