

Barbour Ralph Henry

Right Guard Grant



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CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN AND COACH

Although the store had reopened for business only that morning several customers had already been in and out, and when the doorway was again darkened momentarily Russell Emerson looked up from his task of marking football trousers with merely perfunctory interest. Then, however, since the advancing figure, silhouetted flatly against the hot September sunlight of the wide-open door, looked familiar, he eased his long legs over the edge of the counter and strode to meet it.

“Hello, Cap!” greeted the visitor. The voice was unmistakable, and, now that the speaker had left the sunlight glare behind him, so too was the perspiring countenance.

“Mr. Cade!” exclaimed Russell. “Mighty glad to see you, sir. When did you get in?”

Coach Cade lifted himself to the counter and fanned himself with a faded straw hat. “About two hours ago. Unpacked, had a bath and here I am. By jove, Emerson, but it’s hot!”

“Is it?”

“Is it?” mimicked the other. “Don’t you know it is?” Then he laughed. “Guess I was a fool to get out of that bath tub, but I wanted to have a chat with you, and I’m due at Doctor McPherson’s this evening.” He stopped fanning his reddened face and tossed his hat atop a pile of brown canvas trousers beside him. “Johnny” Cade was short of stature, large-faced and broad in a compact way. In age he was still under thirty. He had a pleasantly mild voice that was at startling variance with his square, fighting chin, his sharp eyes and the mop of very black and bristle-like hair that always reminded Russell of a shoe brush. The mild voice continued after a moment, while the sharp eyes roamed up and down the premises. “Got things fixed up here pretty nicely,” he observed commendingly. “Looks as businesslike as any sporting goods store I know. Branched out, too, haven’t you?” He nodded across to where three bicycles, brave in blue-and-tan and red-and-white enamel, leaned.

“Yes,” answered Russell. “We thought we might try those. They’re just samples. ‘Stick’ hasn’t recovered from the shock of my daring yet.” Russell laughed softly. “Stick’s nothing if not conservative, you know.”

“Stick? Oh, yes, that’s Patterson, your partner here.” Mr. Cade’s glance swept the spaces back of the counters.

“He’s over at the express office trying to trace some goods that ought to have shown up three days ago,” explained Russell. “How have you been this summer, sir?”

“Me? Oh, fine. Been working pretty hard, though.” The

coach's mind seemed not to be on his words, however, and he added: "Say, that blue-and-yellow wheel over there is certainly a corker. We didn't have them as fine as that when I was a kid." He got down and walked across to examine the bicycle. Russell followed.

"It is good-looking, isn't it? Better let me sell you one of those, sir. Ought to come in mighty handy following the squads around the field!"

Coach Cade grinned as he leaned the wheel back in its place with evident regret. "Gee, I suppose I'd break my silly neck if I tried to ride one of those things now. I haven't been on one of them for ten years. Sort of wish I were that much younger, though, and could run around on that, Cap!"

"You'd pick it up quickly enough," said Russell as he again perched himself on the counter. "Riding a bicycle's like skating, Mr. Cade: it comes back to you."

"Yes, I dare say," replied the other dryly. "Much the same way, I guess. Last time I tried to skate I nearly killed myself. What are you trying to do? Get a new football coach here?"

Russell laughed. "Nothing like that, sir. What we need isn't a new coach, I guess, but a new team."

"H'm, yes, that's pretty near so. I was looking over the list this morning on the train and, well – " He shrugged his broad shoulders. "Looks like building from the ground up, eh?"

"Only three left who played against Kenly."

"Three or four. Still, we have got some good material in sight,

Cap. I wouldn't wonder if we had a team before the season's over." The coach's eyes twinkled, and Russell smiled in response. He had a very nice smile, a smile that lighted the quiet brown eyes and deepened the two creases leading from the corners of a firm mouth to the sides of a short nose. Russell Emerson was eighteen, a senior at Alton Academy this year and, as may have been surmised, captain of the football team.

"Seen any of the crowd lately?" asked the coach.

"No. I ran across 'Slim' once in August. He was on a sailboat trying to get up the Hudson; he and three other chaps. I don't think they ever made it."

"Just loafing, I suppose," sighed the coach. "I dare say not one of them has seen a football since spring practice ended."

"Well, I don't believe Slim had one with him," chuckled Russell. "I guess I ought to confess that I haven't done very much practicing myself, sir. I was working most of the time. Dad has a store, and he rather looks to me to give him a hand in summer."

"You don't need practice the way some of the others do," said Mr. Cade. "Well, we'll see. By the way, we're getting that fellow Renneker, from Castle City High."

"Renneker? Gordon Renneker you mean?" asked Russell in surprise.

Mr. Cade nodded. "That's the fellow. A corking good lineman, Cap. Made the Eastern All-Scholastic last year and the year before that. Played guard last season. If he's half the papers say he is he ought to fill in mighty well in Stimson's place."

“How did we happen to get him?” asked Russell interestedly.

“Oh, it’s all straight, if that’s what you’re hinting at,” was the answer. “You know I don’t like ‘jumpers.’ They’re too plaguy hard to handle, generally. Besides, there’s the ethics of the thing. No, we’re getting Renneker honestly. Seems that he and Cravath are acquainted, and Cravath went after him. Landed him, too, it seems. Cravath wrote me in July that Renneker would be along this fall, and just to make sure I dropped a line to Wharton, and Wharton wrote back that Renneker had registered. So I guess it’s certain enough.”

“Well, that’s great,” said Russell. “I remember reading about Gordon Renneker lots of times. If we have him on one side of Jim Newton and Smedley on the other, sir, we’ll have a pretty good center trio for a start.”

“Newton? Well, yes, perhaps. There’s Garrick, too, you know, Cap.”

“Of course, but I thought Jim – ”

“He looks good, but I never like to place them until I’ve seen them work, Emerson. Place them seriously I mean. Of course, you have to make up a team on paper just to amuse yourself. Here’s one I set down this morning. I’ll bet you, though, that there won’t be half of them where I’ve got them now when the season’s three weeks old!”

Russell took the list and read it: “Gurley, Butler, Smedley, Garrick, Renneker, Wilde, Emerson, Carpenter, Goodwin, Kendall, Greenwood.” He smiled. “I see you’ve got me down, sir.

You're dead wrong in two places, though."

"Only two? Which two? Oh, yes, center. What other?"

"Well, I like 'Red' Reilly instead of, say, Kendall. And I'll bet you'll see Slim playing one end or the other before long."

Mr. Cade accepted the paper and tucked it away in a pocket again. "Well, I said this was just for amusement," he observed, untroubled. "There may be some good material coming in that we haven't heard of, too. You never know where you'll find a prize. Were any of last year's freshmen promising?"

"I don't know, sir. I didn't see much of the youngsters."

"Seen Tenney yet?"

"Yes, he blew in this morning. He's going to make a good manager, I think."

"Hope so. Did he say anything about the schedule?"

"Yes, he said it was all fixed. Hillsport came around all right. I don't see what their kick was, anyway."

"Wanted a later date because they held us to a tie last season," said the coach, smiling.

"Gee, any one could have tied us about the time we played Hillsport! That was during that grand and glorious slump."

"Grand and glorious indeed!" murmured the coach. "Let's hope there'll never be another half so grand! Well, I'll get along, I guess. By the way – " Mr. Cade hesitated. Then: "I hope this store isn't going to interfere too much with football, Emerson. Mustn't let it, eh? Good captains are scarce, son, and I'd hate to see one spoiled by – er – outside interests, so to speak. Don't

mind my mentioning it, do you?"

"Not a mite, sir. You needn't worry. I'm putting things in shape here so that Stick can take the whole thing on his own shoulders. I'm not going to have anything to do with this shop until we've licked Kenly Hall."

"Good stuff! See you to-morrow, then. Practice at three, Cap, no matter what the weather's like. I guess a lot of those summer loafers will be the better for losing five or six pounds of fat! And about this Renneker, Cap. If you run across him it might be a good idea to sort of make yourself acquainted and – er – look after him a bit. You know what I mean. Start him off with a good impression of us, and all that."

Russell chuckled. "It's a great thing to bring a reputation with you, isn't it?" he asked.

"Eh?" The coach smiled a trifle sheepishly. "Oh, well, I don't care what you do with him," he declared. "Chuck him down the well if you like. No reason why we should toady to him, and that's a fact. I only thought that –"

"Right-o!" laughed Russell. "Leave him to me, sir. Can't sell you a bicycle then?"

"Huh," answered Mr. Cade, moving toward the door, "if you supply the team with its outfits and stuff this fall I guess you won't need to sell me a bicycle to show a profit! See you to-morrow, Cap!"

In front of the store, under the gayly-hued escutcheon bearing the legend: Sign of the Football, Mr. Cade paused to shake

hands with a tall, thin youth with curly brown hair above gray eyes, a rather large nose and a broad mouth who, subsequent to the football coach's departure, entered the store hurriedly, announcing as he did so: "They can't find it, Rus! The blamed thing's just plain vanished. What'll we do? Telegraph or what?"

"I'll write them a letter," replied Russell calmly. "I dare say the stuff will show up to-morrow."

"Sure," agreed Stick Patterson sarcastically. "It's been turning up to-morrow for three days and it might as well go on turning – What was Johnny after?"

"Just wanted to talk over a few things. Give me a hand with this truck, will you? I want to get in an hour's practice before supper. Bring some more tags along. Where's the invoice? Can you see it?"

"Yes, and so could you if you weren't sitting on it. My, but it's hot over in that office! I suppose Johnny wasn't awfully enthused over the outlook, eh?"

"No-o, but he brought some good news, Stick. Ever hear of Gordon Renneker?"

"No, who's he?"

"He's a gentleman who played football last year down on Long Island with the Castle City High School team. Won everything in sight, I think."

"Who did? Runniger?"

"The team did. Renneker played guard; right guard, I guess; and got himself talked about like a moving picture hero. Some

player, they say. Anyway, he's coming here this fall."

"Oh, joy! I'll bet you anything you like he'll turn out a lemon, like that chap Means, or whatever his name was, two years ago. Remember? The school got all het up about him. He was the finest thing that ever happened – until he'd been around here a couple of weeks. After that no one ever heard of him. He didn't even hold a job with the second!"

"I guess Renneker's in a different class," responded Russell. "They put him down on the All-Scholastic last fall, anyway, Stick."

"All right. Hope he turns out big. But I never saw one of these stars yet that didn't have something wrong with him. If he really could play, why, he was feeble-minded. Or if he had all his brains working smooth he had something else wrong with him. No stars in mine, thanks! Shove the ink over here. How about dressing the windows? Want me to do it?"

"Sure. Want you to do everything there is to be done, beginning with twelve o'clock midnight to-night. That's the last. Pile them up and let's get out of here. It's after five. If you'll come over to the field with me for an hour I'll buy your supper, Stick. And the exercise will do you good!"

CHAPTER II

TWO IN A TAXI

Something over eighteen hours later the morning train from New York pulled up at Alton station and disgorged a tumultuous throng of youths of all sizes and of all ages between twelve and twenty. They piled down from the day coaches and descended more dignifiedly from the two parlor cars to form a jostling, noisy mob along the narrow platform. Suit-cases, kit-bags, valises, tennis rackets, golf clubs were everywhere underfoot. Ahead, from the baggage car, trunks crashed or thudded to the trucks while an impatient conductor glanced frowningly at his watch. Behind the station the brazen clanging of the gongs on the two special trolley cars punctuated the babel, while the drivers of taxicabs and horse-drawn vehicles beckoned invitingly for trade and added their voices to the general pandemonium. Then, even as the train drew on again, the tumult lessened and the throng melted. Some few of the arrivals set forth afoot along Meadow street, having entrusted their hand luggage to friends traveling by vehicle. A great many more stormed the yellow trolley cars, greeting the grinning crews familiarly as Bill or Mike, crowding through the narrow doors and battling good-naturedly for seats. The rest, less than a score of them, patronized the cabs and carriages.

Leonard Grant was of the latter. As this was his first sight of Alton he decided that it would be wise to place the responsibility of delivering himself and a bulging suit-case to Alton Academy on the shoulders of one who knew where the Academy was, even if it was to cost a whole half-dollar! The taxi was small but capable of accommodating four passengers at least, and when Leonard had settled himself therein it became evident that the driver of the vehicle had no intention of leaving until the accommodations were more nearly exhausted. He still gesticulated and shouted, while Leonard, his suit-case up-ended between his knees, looked curiously about and tried to reconcile the sun-smitten view of cheap shops and glaring yellow brick pavement with what he had learned of Alton from the Academy catalogue. Judging solely from what he now saw, he would have concluded that the principal industries of the town were pressing clothes and supplying cheap meals. He was growing sensible of disappointment when a big kit-bag was thrust against his knees and a second passenger followed it into the cab.

“Mind if I share this with you?” asked the new arrival. He had a pleasant voice, and the inquiry was delivered in tones of the most perfect politeness, but something told Leonard that the big fellow who was making the cushion springs creak protestingly really cared not a whit whether Leonard minded or not. Leonard as courteously replied in the negative, and in doing so he had his first glimpse of his companion. He was amazingly good-looking; perhaps fine-looking would be the better term, for it was not only

that his features were as regular as those on a Greek coin, but they were strong, and the smooth tanned skin almost flamboyantly proclaimed perfect health. In fact, health and physical strength fairly radiated from the chap. He was tall, wide-shouldered, deep-chested, and yet, in spite of his size, which made Leonard feel rather like a pygmy beside him, you were certain that there wasn't an ounce of soft flesh anywhere about him. He had dark eyes and, although Leonard couldn't see it just then, dark hair very carefully brushed down against a well-shaped head. He was dressed expensively but in excellent taste: rough brownish-gray tweed, a linen-colored silk shirt with collar to match, a plain brown bow-tie, a soft straw hat, brown sport shoes and brown silk socks. The watch on his wrist was plainly expensive, as were the gold-and-enamel links in his soft cuffs. What interested Leonard Grant more than these details of attire, however, was the sudden conviction that he knew perfectly well who his companion was – if only he could remember!

Meanwhile, evidently despairing of another fare, the driver climbed to his seat and set forth with loud grinding of frayed gears, cleverly manipulating the rattling cab around the end of the nearer trolley car and dodging a lumbering blue ice-wagon by a scant four inches. Then the cab settled down on the smooth pavement and flew, honking, along Meadow street.

“Are you an Alton fellow?” inquired Leonard's companion as they emerged from the jam. He spoke rather slowly, rather lazily, enunciating each word very clearly. Leonard couldn't have told

why he disliked that precision of speech, but he did somehow.

“Yes,” he answered. “And I suppose you are.”

The other nodded. There was nothing really supercilious about that nod; it merely seemed to signify that in the big chap’s judgment the question was not worthy a verbal reply. As he nodded he let his gaze travel over Leonard and then to the scuffed and discolored and generally disreputable suit-case, a suit-case that, unlike the kit-bag nearby, was not distinguished by bravely colored labels of travel. The inspection was brief, but it was thorough, and when it had ended Leonard knew perfectly that no detail of his appearance had been missed. He became uncomfortably conscious of his neat but well-worn Norfolk suit, his very unattractive cotton shirt, his second-season felt hat, his much-creased blue four-in-hand tie, which didn’t match anything else he had on, and his battered shoes whose real condition the ten-cent shine he had acquired in the New York station couldn’t disguise. It was evident to him that, with the inspection, his companion’s interest in him had died a swift death. The big, outrageously good-looking youth turned his head toward the lowered window of the speeding cab and not again did he seem aware of Leonard’s presence beside him.

Leonard didn’t feel any resentment. The big fellow was a bit of a swell, and he wasn’t. That was all there was to it. Nothing to be peevish at. Doubtless there’d be others of the same sort at the Academy, and Leonard neither expected to train with them or wanted to. What did bother him, though, was the persistent

conviction that somewhere or other he had seen the big chap before, and all the way along Meadow street he stole surreptitious glances at the noble profile and racked his mind. So deep was he in this occupation that he saw little of the town; which was rather a pity, since it had become far more like his preconceived conception of it now; and the cab had entered the Meadow street gate of the Academy grounds and was passing the first of the buildings before he was aware that he had reached his destination. He would have been more interested in that first building had he known that it was Haylow Hall and that he was destined to occupy a certain room therein whose ivy-framed window stared down on him as he passed.

The driver, following custom, pulled up with disconcerting suddenness at the entrance of Academy Building, swung off his seat, threw open the door on Leonard's side and wrested the battered suit-case from between the latter's legs. Then he as swiftly transferred Leonard's half-dollar from the boy's fingers to his pocket and grabbed for the distinguished kit-bag beyond. Leonard, unceremoniously thrust into a noonday world dappled with the shadows of lazily swaying branches and quite unfamiliar, took up his bag and instinctively ascended the steps. There were other youths about him, coming down, going up or just loitering, but none heeded him. Before he reached the wide, open doorway he paused and looked back. Straight away and at a slight descent traveled a wide graveled path between spreading trees, its far end a hot blur of sunlight. At either side of the main path stretched

green sward, tree dotted, to the southern and northern boundaries of the campus. Here and there a group of early arrivals were seated or stretched in the shade of the trees, coolly colorful blots against the dark green of the shadowed turf. Two other paths started off below him, diverging, one toward a handsome building which Leonard surmised to be Memorial Hall, holding the library and auditorium, the other toward the residence of the Principal, Doctor Maitland McPherson, or, in school language, "Mac." Each of these structures stood close to the confines of the campus; the other buildings were stretched right and left, toeing the transverse drive with military precision; Haylow and Lykes, dormitories, on the south flank; Academy Building in the center: Upton and Borden, dormitories, too, completing the rank. Somewhere to the rear, as Leonard recalled, must be the gymnasium and the place where they fed you; Lawrence Hall, wasn't it? Well, this looked much more like what he had expected, and he certainly approved of it.

He went on into the restful gloom of the corridor, his eyes for the moment unequal to the sudden change. Then he found the Office and took his place in the line before the counter. He had to wait while three others were disposed of, and then, just as his own turn came, he heard at the doorway the pleasant, leisurely voice of his late companion in the cab. There was another boy with him, a tall, nice-appearing chap, who was saying as they entered: "You're in Upton, with a fellow named Reilly, who plays half for us. It's a good room, Renneker, and you'll like Red, I'm

sure.”

“Thanks.” The other’s voice was noncommittal.

Leonard, moving past the desk, turned swiftly and stared with surprise and incredulity. He remembered now. Last November he had gone up to Philadelphia to see a post-season football game between a local team and an eleven from Castle City, Long Island. The visitors had won by the margin of one point after a slow and gruelling contest. Leonard’s seat had been close to the visiting team’s bench and a neighbor had pointed out to him the redoubtable Renneker and told him tales of the big fellow’s prowess. Leonard had had several good looks at the Castle City star and had admired him, just as, later, he had admired his playing. Renneker had proved all that report had pictured him: a veritable stone wall in defense, a battering ram in attack. He had worn down two opponents, Leonard recalled, and only the final whistle had saved a third from a like fate. As Leonard had played the guard position himself that fall on his own high school team he watched Renneker’s skill and science the more interestedly. And so this was Renneker! Yes, he remembered now, although in Philadelphia that day the famous player had been in togs and had worn a helmet. It is always a satisfaction to finally get the better of an obstinate memory, and for the first moment or two succeeding his victory Leonard was so immersed in that satisfaction that he failed to consider what the arrival of Gordon Renneker at Alton Academy would mean to his own football prospects. When he did give thought to that subject his spirits fell, and, rescuing his

suit-case, he went out in search of Number 12 Haylow Hall with a rueful frown on his forehead.

Leonard was only seventeen, with little more than the size and weight belonging to the boy of that age, and he had told himself all along that it was very unlikely he would be able to make the Alton team that fall. But now he realized that, in spite of what he had professed to believe, he had really more than half expected to win a place on the eleven this season. After all, he had done some pretty good work last year, and the high school coach back in Loring Point had more than once assured him that by this fall he ought to be able to pit himself against many a lineman older and heavier. "Get another twenty pounds on you, Len," Tim Walsh had said once, "and there's not many that'll be able to stand up to you in the line. I'll give you two years more, son, and then I'll be lookin' for your name in the papers. There's lots of fellows playing guard that has plenty below the neck, but you've got it above, too, see? Beef and muscle alone didn't ever win a battle. It was brains as did it. Brains and fight. And you've got both, I'll say that for you!"

And then, just a week ago, when Leonard had gone to bid Tim good-bye, the little coach had said: "I'm sorry to lose you, Len, but you'll be getting a bigger chance where you're going. Sure. And you'll be getting better handlin', too. Take those big schools, why, they got trainers that knows their business, Len, and you'll be looked after close and careful. Here a fellow has to do his own trainin', which means he don't do none, in spite of all I say

to him. Sure. You'll do fine, son. Well, so long. Don't put your name to nothin' without you read it first. And don't forget what I been tellin' you, Len: get 'em before they get you!"

Well, he hadn't put on that twenty pounds yet, for in spite of all his efforts during the summer – he had gone up to his uncle's farm and worked in the field and lived on the sort of food that is supposed to build bone and tissue – he was only seven pounds heavier than when he had weighed himself a year ago. And now here was this fellow Renneker to further dim his chances. Leonard sighed as he turned in at the doorway of the dormitory building. If there were eleven guards on a football team he might stand a show, he thought disconsolately, but there were only two, and one of the two would be Gordon Renneker! He wondered what his chance with the scrubs would be!

He tugged his heavy suit-case up one flight of stairs in Haylow and looked for a door bearing the numerals 12. He found it presently, cheered somewhat to observe that it was toward the campus side of the building. It was closed, and a card thumb-tacked to the center bore the inscription, "Mr. Eldred Chichester Staples." Leonard read the name a second time. That "Chichester" annoyed him. To have a roommate named Eldred might be borne, but "Chichester" – He shook his head gloomily as he turned the knob and pushed the door open. It seemed to him that life at Alton Academy wasn't starting out very well for him.

He was a bit relieved to find the room empty, although it was

evident enough that Eldred Chichester Staples had already taken possession. There were brushes and toilet articles atop one of the two slim chiffoniers, books on the study table, photographs tacked to the wainscoting, a black bag reposing on a chair by the head of the left-hand bed, a pair of yellow silk pajamas exuding from it. Leonard set his own bag down and walked to the windows. There were two of them, set close together, and they looked out into the lower branches of a maple. Directly below was the brick foot-path and the gravel road – and, momentarily, the top of an automobile retreating toward the Meadow street gate. Some fortunate youth had probably arrived in the family touring car. Leonard had to set one knee on a comfortably broad window-seat to get the view, and when he turned away his knee swept something from the cushion to the floor. Rescuing it, he saw that it was a block of paper, the top sheet bearing writing done with a very soft pencil. With no intention of doing so, he read the first words: “Lines on Returning to My Alma Mater.” He sniffed. So that was the sort this fellow Chichester was! Wrote poetry! Gosh! He tossed the tablet back to the window-seat. Then the desire to know how bad the effort might be prompted him to pick it up and, with a guilty glance toward the door, read further. There were many erasures and corrections, but he made out:

“Oh, classic shades that through the pleasant years
Have sheltered me from gloomy storm and stress,

See on my pallid cheeks the happy tears
That tell a tale of banished loneliness.”

“What sickening rot!” muttered Leonard. But he went on.

“Back to your tender arms! My tired feet
Stand once again where they so safely stood.
Could I want fairer haven, fate more sweet?
Could I? *Oh, boy, I'll say I could!*”

Leonard re-read the last line doubtfully. Then he pitched the effusion violently back to the cushion.

“Huh!” he said.

CHAPTER III

ENTER MR. ELDRED CHICHESTER STAPLES

Eldred Chichester Staples had not arrived by the time Leonard had unpacked his bag. His trunk, which was to have joined him inside an hour, according to the disciple of Ananias who had accepted his claim check, had not appeared, and, since it was dinner time now, Leonard washed, re-tied his scarf, used a whisk brush rather perfunctorily and descended the stairs in search of food. It wasn't hard to find Lawrence Hall. All he had to do was follow the crowd, and, although the entire assemblage of some four hundred students was not by any means yet present, there were enough on hand to make a very good imitation of a crowd. Leonard endured some waiting before he was assigned a seat, but presently he was established at a table occupied by five others – there were seats for four more, but they weren't claimed until supper time – and was soon enjoying his first repast at Alton. The food was good and there was plenty of it, but none too much for the new boy, for his breakfast, partaken of at home before starting the first leg of his journey to New York City, was scarcely a memory. He followed the example of his right-hand neighbor and ordered “seconds” of the substantial articles of the menu and did excellently. Towards dessert he found leisure to

look about him.

Lawrence Hall was big and airy and light, and although it accommodated more than twenty score, including the faculty, the tables were not crowded together and there was an agreeable aspect of space. The fellows about him appeared to be quite the usual, normal sort; although later on Leonard made the discovery that there was a certain sameness about them, somewhat as though they had been cut off the same piece of goods. This sameness was rather intangible, however; he never succeeded in determining whether it was a matter of looks, manner or voice; and I doubt if any one else could have determined. Dinner was an orderly if not a silent affair. There was an ever-continuing rattle of dishes beneath the constant hum of voices and the ripples of laughter. Once a dish fell just beyond the screen that hid the doors to the kitchen, and its crash was hailed with loud hand-clapping from every quarter. After awhile the scraping of chairs added a new note to the pleasant babel, and, contributing his own scrape, Leonard took his departure.

He had seen a notice in the corridor of Academy Building announcing the first football practice for three o'clock, and he meant to be on hand, but more than an hour intervened and he wondered how to spend it. The question was solved for him when he reached the walk that led along the front of the dormitories, for there, before the entrance of Haylow, a piled motor truck was disgorging trunks. His own proved to be among them, and he followed it upstairs and set to work. It wasn't a very large

trunk, nor a very nobby one, having served his father for many years, before falling to Leonard, and he was quite satisfied that his room-mate continued to absent himself. He emptied it of his none too generous wardrobe, hung his clothes in his closet or laid them in the drawers of his chiffonier, arranged his small belongings before the mirror or on the table and finally, taking counsel of a strange youth hurrying past in the corridor, lugged the empty trunk to the store-room in the basement. Then, it now being well past the half-hour, he changed into an ancient suit of canvas, pulled on a pair of scuffed shoes and set forth for the field.

The hot weather still held, and, passing the gravel tennis courts, a wave of heat, reflected from the surface, made him gasp. The gridiron, when he reached it, proved to have suffered in many places from the fortnight of unseasonable weather and lack of rain. Half a dozen fellows, dressed for play, were laughingly squabbling for a ball near the center of the field, and their cleats, digging into the dry sod, sent up a cloud of yellow dust. Early as he was, Leonard found at least a score of candidates ahead of him. Many of them had, perhaps wisely, scorned the full regalia of football and had donned old flannel trousers in lieu of padded canvas. A perspiring youth with a very large board clip was writing busily in the scant shade of the covered stand, and a short, broadly-built man in trousers and a white running shirt, from which a pair of bronze shoulders emerged massively, was beside him. The latter was, Leonard concluded, the coach. He looked

formidable, with that large countenance topped by an alarming growth of black hair, and Leonard recalled diverse tales he had heard or read of the sternness and even ferocity of professional football coaches. Evidently football at Alton Academy was going to prove more of a business than football at Loring Point High School!

This reflection was interrupted by a voice. A large youth with rather pale blue eyes that, nevertheless, had a remarkable sparkle in them had come to a stop at Leonard's elbow. "I've accumulated seventeen pounds this summer," the chap was saying, "and it cost the dad a lot of good money. And now – " his blue eyes turned from Leonard and fell disapprovingly on the sun-smitten gridiron – "now I'm going to lose the whole blamed lot in about sixty minutes." He looked to Leonard again for sympathy. Leonard smiled doubtfully. It was difficult to tell whether the stranger spoke in fun or earnest.

"If it comes off as easy as that," he replied, "I guess you don't want it." Looking more closely at the chap, he saw that, deprived of those seventeen pounds, he would probably be rather rangy; large still, but not heavy. Leonard judged that he was a backfield candidate; possibly a running half; he looked to be fast.

"I suppose not," the fellow agreed in doubtful tones. "Maybe it isn't losing the weight that worries me so much as losing it so quick. You know they say that losing a lot of weight suddenly is dangerous. Suppose it left me in an enfeebled condition!"

Now Leonard knew that the chap was joking, and he ventured

a laugh. "Maybe you'd better not risk it," he said. "Why not wait until to-morrow. It might be cooler then."

"I would," replied the other gravely, "only Johnny rather leans on me, you know. I dare say he'd be altogether at a loss if I deserted him to-day. Getting things started is always a bit of a trial."

"I see. I suppose Johnny is the coach, and that's him up there." Leonard nodded in the direction of the black-haired man on the stand.

"Him or he," answered the other gently. "You're a new fellow, I take it. Fresh?"

Leonard, nettled by the correction, answered a bit stiffly, "Sophomore."

The tall youth gravely extended a hand. "Welcome," he said. "Welcome to the finest class in the school."

Leonard shook hands, his slight resentment vanishing. "I suppose that means that you're a soph, too."

The fellow nodded. "So far," he assented. Then he smiled for the first time, and after that smile Leonard liked him suddenly and thoroughly. "If you ask me that again after mid-year," he continued, "you may get a different answer. Well, I guess I'd better go up and get Johnny started. He's evidently anxious about me." He nodded once more and moved past Leonard and through the gate to the stand. Leonard had not noticed any sign of anxiety on the coach's countenance, but it wasn't to be denied that the greeting between the two was hearty. Leonard's new

acquaintance seated himself at the coach's side and draped his long legs luxuriously over the back of the seat in front. The youth with the clip looked up from his writing and said something and the others threw their heads back and laughed. Leonard was positively relieved to discover that the coach could laugh like that. He couldn't be so very ferocious, after all!

The trainer appeared, followed by a man trundling a wheelbarrow laden with paraphernalia. The throng of candidates increased momentarily along the side-line and a few hardy youths, carrying coats over arms, perched themselves on the seats to look on. Leonard again turned to observe the coach and found that gentleman on his feet and extending his hand to a big chap in unstained togs. The two shook hands, and then the big fellow turned his head to look across the field, and Leonard saw that he was Gordon Renneker. A fifth member had joined the group, and him Leonard recognized as the boy who had accompanied Renneker into the office. Leonard surmised now that he was the captain: he had read the chap's name but had forgotten it. After a moment of conversation, during which the other members of the group up there seemed to be giving flattering attention to Renneker's portion, the five moved toward the field, and a minute later the business of building a football team had begun.

Coach Cade made a few remarks, doubtless not very different from those he had made at this time of year on many former occasions, was answered with approving applause and some laughter and waved a brown hand. The group of some

seventy candidates dissolved, footballs trickled away from the wheelbarrow and work began. Leonard made one of a circle of fifteen or sixteen other novices who passed a ball from hand to hand and felt the sun scorching earnestly at the back of his neck. Later, in charge of a heavy youth whose name Leonard afterwards learned was Garrick, the group was conducted further down the field and was permitted to do other tricks with the ball – two balls, to be exact. They caught it on the bound, fell on it and snuggled it to their perspiring bodies and then again, while they recovered somewhat of their breath, passed it from one to another. In other portions of the field similar exercises were going on with other actors in the parts, while, down near the further goal balls were traversing the gridiron, propelled by hand or toe. Garrick was a lenient task-master, and breathing spells were frequent, and yet, even so, there were many in Leonard's squad who were just about spent when they were released to totter back to the benches and rinse their parched mouths with warm water from the carboy which, having been carefully deposited an hour ago in the shade of the wheelbarrow, was now enjoying the full blaze of the westing sun. Leonard, his canvas garments wet with perspiration, his legs aching, leaned against the back of the bench and wondered why he wanted to play football!

Presently he forgot his discomforts in watching the performance of a squad of fellows who were trotting through a signal drill. Last year's regulars these, he supposed; big, heavy

chaps, most of them; fellows whose average age was possibly eighteen, or perhaps more. The quarterback, unlike most of the quarters Leonard had had acquaintance with, was a rather large and weighty youth with light hair and a longish face. His name, explained Leonard's left-hand neighbor on the bench, was Carpenter. He had played on the second team last year and was very likely to prove first-choice man this fall. He was, the informant added admiringly, a corking punter. Leonard nodded. Secretly he considered Mr. Carpenter much too heavy for a quarterback's job. The day's diversions ended with a slow jog around the edge of the gridiron. Then came showers and a leisurely dressing; only Leonard, since his street clothes were over in Number 12 Haylow, had his shower in the dormitory and was wearily clothing himself in clean underwear and a fresh shirt when the door of the room was unceremoniously opened and he found himself confronted by a youth whose countenance was strangely familiar and whom, his reason told him, was Eldred Chichester Staples, his poetic roommate. Considering it later, Leonard wondered why he had not been more surprised when recognition came. All he said was: "Well, did you get rid of the whole seventeen?"

CHAPTER IV

LEONARD GETS PROMOTION

Eldred Chichester Staples appeared to be no more surprised than Leonard. He closed the door, with the deftness born of long practice, with his left foot, sailed his cap to his bed and nodded, thrusting hands into the pockets of his knickers.

“The whole seventeen,” he answered dejectedly. “Couldn’t you tell it by a glance at my emaciated frame?”

Leonard shook his head. “You look to me just hungry,” he said.

“Slim” Staples chuckled and reposed himself in a chair, thrusting his long legs forward and clasping lean, brown hands across his equator. “Your name must be Grant,” he remarked. “Where from, stranger?”

“Loring Point, Delaware.”

“We’re neighbors then. My home’s in New Hampshire. Concord’s the town.”

“Isn’t that where the embattled farmers stood and – and fired – er – ”

“The shot that was heard around the world? No, General, you’ve got the dope all wrong. That was another Concord. There aren’t any farmers in my town. Come to think of it, wasn’t it Lexington, Massachusetts, where the farmers took pot-shots at

the Britishers? Well, never mind. I understand that the affair was settled quite amicably some time since. Glad to be here, General?”

“I think so. Thanks for the promotion, though. I’m usually just ‘Len.’”

“Oh, that’s all right. No trouble to promote you. What does ‘Len’ stand for?”

“Leonard.”

“Swell name. You’ve got the edge on the other Grant. Ulysses sounds like something out of the soda fountain. Well, I hope we’ll hit it off all right. I’m an easy-going sort, General; never much of a scrapper and hate to argue. Last year, over in Borden, I roomed with a chap named Endicott. Dick was the original arguer. He could start with no take-off at all and argue longer, harder and faster than any one outside a court of law. I was a great trial to him, I suspect. If he said Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote ‘The Merchant of Venice’ I just said ‘Sure, Mike’ and let it go at that. Arguing was meat and drink to that fellow.”

“And what became of him? I mean, why aren’t you – ”

“Together this year? He didn’t come back. You see, he spent so much time in what you might call controversy that he didn’t get leisure for studying. So last June faculty told him that he’d failed to pass and that if he came back he’d have about a million conditions to work off. He did his best to argue himself square, but faculty beat him out. After all, there was only one of him and a dozen or so faculty, and it wasn’t a fair contest. At that, I

understand they won by a very slight margin!"

"Hard luck," laughed Leonard. "I dare say he was a star member of the debating club, if there is one here."

"There is, but Dick never joined. He said they were amateurs. What do you say to supper? Oh, by the way, you were out for football, weren't you? What's your line?"

"I've played guard mostly."

"Guard, eh?" Slim looked him over appraisingly. "Sort of light, aren't you?"

"I guess so," allowed Leonard. "Of course, I don't expect to make the first; that is, this year."

Slim grinned wickedly. "No, but you'll be fit to tie if you don't. Take me now. Last year I was on the second. Left end. I'm only a soph, and sops on the big team are as scarce as hen's teeth. So, of course, I haven't the ghost of a show and absolutely no hope of making it. But if I don't there's going to be a heap of trouble around here!"

"Well, I suppose I have a sneaking hope," acknowledged Leonard, smiling.

"Sure. Might as well be honest with yourself. As for playing guard, well, if you got hold of a suit about three sizes too large for you, stuffed it out with cotton-batting and put heel-lifts in your shoes you might stand a show. Or you might if it wasn't for this fellow Renneker. I dare say you've heard about him? He's absolutely sure of one guard position or the other. And then there's Smedley and Squibbs and Raleigh and Stimson and two-three

more maybe If I were you, General, I'd switch to end or quarter."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to elbow you out," laughed Leonard.

"That's right." Slim grinned. "Try quarter then. We've got only two in sight so far."

Leonard shook his head. "Guard's my job," he said. "I'll plug along at it. I might get on the second, I dare say. And next year – The trouble is, I can't seem to grow much, Staples!"

"Better call me 'Slim.' Everybody else does. Well, you know your own business best. Only, if you tell Johnny that you belong to the Guard's Union and that the rules won't allow you to play anything else, why, I'm awfully afraid that the only thing you'll get to guard will be the bench! Let's go to chow."

At the door of the dining hall they parted, for Slim's table was not Leonard's. "But," said the former, "I guess we can fix that tomorrow. There are a couple of guys at our table that don't fit very well. I'll arrange with one of them to switch. Care to go over to Mac's this evening? Being a newcomer, you're sort of expected to. They'll be mostly freshies, but we don't have to stay long. I'll pick you up at the room about eight."

Under Slim's guidance Leonard went across to the Principal's house at a little after the appointed hour and took his place in the line that led through the front portal and past where Doctor McPherson and Mrs. McPherson were receiving. Slim introduced the stranger and then hustled him away into the library. "Might as well do it all up brown," he observed sotto voce. "Met any of the animals yet?"

“Animals?” repeated Leonard vaguely.

“Faculty,” explained Slim. “All right. We’ll find most of ’em in here. They can see the dining room from here, you’ll observe, and so they sort of stand around, ready to rush the minute the flag goes down. Not so many here yet. Try to look serious and intellectual; they like it. Mr. Screven, I want you to meet my friend Grant. General, this is Mr. Screven. And Mr. Metcalf. Mr. Metcalf wrote the French and Spanish languages, General.”

“If I had, Staples, I’d have written them more simply, so you could learn them,” replied the instructor with a twinkle.

“*Touche!*” murmured Slim. “Honest, though, I wasn’t so rotten, was I, sir?”

“You might have been much worse, Staples. Don’t ask me to say more.”

“Well, I’ll make a real hit with you this year, sir. They say Sophomore French is a cinch.”

“I trust you’ll find it so,” replied Mr. Metcalf genially. “Where is your home, Mr. Grant?”

Presently Slim’s hand tugged him away to meet Mr. Tarbot and Mr. Kincaid and Mr. Peghorn, by which time Leonard couldn’t remember which was which, although Slim’s running comment, en route from one to another, was designed to aid his friend’s memory. “Peghorn’s physics,” appraised Slim. “You won’t have him, not this year. He’s a bit deaf. Left ear’s the best one. Don’t let him nail you or he’ll talk you to death. Here we are.”

There were others later, but Leonard obtained sustenance before meeting them, for Slim so skillfully maneuvered that when the dining room doors were thrown open only a mere half-dozen guests beat him to the table. To the credit of the faculty be it said that Mr. Kincaid only lost first place by a nose. The refreshments were satisfactory if not elaborate and Slim worked swiftly and methodically, and presently, their plates well piled with sandwiches, cake and ice-cream, the two retired to a corner. The entering class was large that fall and, since not a few of the other classes were well represented, the Doctor's modest residence was crowded. Slim observed pessimistically that he had never seen a sorrier looking lot of freshies.

"How about last year?" asked Leonard innocently.

"The entering class last year," replied Slim with dignity, "was remarkably intelligent and – um – prepossessing. Every one spoke of it. Even members of the class themselves noticed it. Want another slice of cake?"

Leonard rather pitied some of the new boys. They looked so timid and unhappy, he thought. Most of them had no acquaintances as yet, and although the faculty members and some of the older fellows worked hard to put them at their ease they continued looking like lost souls. Even ice-cream and cake failed to banish their embarrassment. The Principal's wife, good soul, haled them from dark corners and talked to them brightly and cheerfully while she thrust plates of food into their numbed hands, but so soon as her back was turned they fled nervously

to cover again, frequently losing portions of their refreshments on the way. Reflecting that even he might do some small part to lighten the burden of gloom that oppressed them, he broached the subject to Slim when that youth had returned with another generous wedge of cake. But Slim shook his head.

“I wouldn’t,” he said. “Honestly, General, they’re a lot happier left alone. I’m supposed to be on the welcome committee myself, but I’m not working at it much. Fact is, those poor fish had a lot rather you didn’t take any notice of them. They just get red in the face and fall over their feet if you speak to ’em. I know, for I was one myself last year!”

“Somehow,” mused Leonard, “I can’t imagine it.”

“Can’t you now?” Slim chuckled. “I want you to know that the shrinking violet hasn’t a thing on me. Chuck your plate somewhere and let’s beat it. There’s no hope of seconds!”

Back in Number 12 Haylow they changed to pajamas and lolled by the window, through which a fair imitation of a cooling breeze occasionally wandered, and proceeded to get acquainted. It wasn’t hard. By ten o’clock, when the light went out, they were firm friends and tried.

The business of settling down consumed several days, and as the Fall Term at Alton Academy began on a Thursday it was Monday before Leonard really found himself. Slim was of great assistance to him in the operation and saved him many false moves and unnecessary steps. As both boys were in the same class Leonard had only to copy Slim’s schedule and, during

the first day, follow Slim dutifully from one recitation room to another, at the end of each trip renewing Wednesday evening's acquaintance with one or another of the faculty members, though at a distance. In various other matters Slim was invaluable. Thursday evening Leonard took his place at Slim's table and so enlarged his circle of speaking acquaintances by eight. Several of the occupants of the board Leonard recognized as football candidates. There was, for instance, Wells, universally known as "Billy," heir apparent to the position of left tackle, and Joe Greenwood, who might fairly be called heir presumptive to the fullback position, only one Ray Goodwin thus far showing a better right. There was, also, Leo Falls, who, like Leonard, was a candidate for guard. Thus, five out of the ten were football players, a fact which not only made for camaraderie, but provided a never-failing subject for conversation. Of the others at the table, two were freshmen, likeable youngsters, Leonard thought; one was a sober-faced senior named Barton, and the other two were juniors who, being the sole representatives of their class there, were banded together in an offensive and defensive alliance that, in spite of its lack of numbers, was well able to hold its own when the question of class supremacy was debated. On the whole, they were a jolly set, and Leonard was thankful to Slim for securing him admission to them; even though, as Slim reminded him, several of them would be yanked off to the training table not later than next week.

What the others thought of Leonard the latter didn't know,

but they seemed to take to him readily. Perhaps the fact that he was sponsored by Slim had something to do with it, for Slim, as Leonard soon noted, was a favorite, not only at his table but throughout the school in general. (The fact that Slim was President of the Sophomore Class was something that Leonard didn't learn until he had been rooming with the former for nearly three weeks; and then it wasn't Slim who divulged it.) I don't mean to convey the idea that Leonard was unduly exercised about the impression he made on his new friends, but no fellow can help wanting to be liked or speculate somewhat about what others think of him. After a few days, though, he became quite satisfied. By that time no one at the board was any longer calling him Grant. He was "General." Slim's nickname had struck the popular fancy and gave every sign of sticking throughout Leonard's stay at school.

There wasn't anything especially striking about the newcomer, unless, perhaps, it was a certain wholesomeness; which Slim, had he ever been required to tell what had drawn him to his new chum, would have mentioned first. Leonard was of average height, breadth and weight. He had good enough features, but no one would ever have thought to call him handsome. His hair was of an ordinary shade of brown, straight and inclined to be unruly around the ears and neck; his eyes were brown, too, though a shade or two darker; perhaps his eyes were his best feature, if there was a best, for they did have a sort of faculty for lighting up when he became interested or deeply amused; his nose was

straight as far as it went, but it stopped a trifle too soon to satisfy the demands of the artist; his mouth was just like any other mouth, I suppose; that is, like any other normal mouth; and he had a chin that went well with his somewhat square jaw, with a scarcely noticeable elevation in the middle of it that Slim referred to as an inverted dimple. Just a normal, healthy youngster of sixteen, was Leonard – sixteen verging closely on seventeen – rather better developed muscularly than the average boy of his years, perhaps, but with nothing about him to demand a second glance; or certainly not a third. He didn't dress particularly well, for his folks weren't over-supplied with wealth, but he managed to make the best of a limited wardrobe and always looked particularly clean. He was inclined to be earnest at whatever he set out to do, but he liked to laugh and did it frequently, and did it in a funny gurgling way that caused others to laugh with him – and at him.

He might have made his way into the Junior Class at Alton had he tutored hard the previous summer, but as he had not known he was going there until a fortnight before, that wasn't possible. His presence at the academy was the unforeseen result of having spent the summer with his Uncle Emory. Uncle Emory, his mother's brother, lived up in Pennsylvania and for many years had displayed no interest in the doings of his relatives. The idea of visiting Uncle Emory and working for his board had come to Leonard after Tim Walsh, football coach at the high school, had mentioned farm work as one of the short paths to physical

development. Rather to the surprise of the rest of the family, Uncle Emory's reply to Leonard's suggestion had been almost cordial. Uncle Emory had proved much less of the bear than the boy had anticipated and before long the two were very good friends. By the terms of the agreement, Leonard was to receive board and lodging and seventy-five cents a day in return for his services. What he did receive, when the time for leaving the farm arrived, was ninety-three dollars, being wages due him, and a bonus of one hundred.

"And now," asked Uncle Emory, "what are you doing to do with it?"

Leonard didn't know. He was far too surprised to make plans on such short notice.

"Well," continued Uncle Emory, "why don't you find yourself a good school that don't ask too much money and fit yourself for college? I ain't claiming that your father's made a big success as a lawyer, but you might, and I sort of think it's in your blood. You show me that you mean business, Len, and I'll sort of look out for you, leastways till you're through school."

So that is the way it had happened, suddenly and unexpectedly and gorgeously. The hundred and ninety-three dollars, less Leonard's expenses home, hadn't been enough to see him through the year at Alton, but his father had found the balance that was needed without much difficulty, and here he was. He knew that this year was provided for and knew that, if he satisfied Uncle Emory of his earnestness, there would be two more years

to follow. Also, a fact that had not escaped Leonard, there were scholarship funds to be had if one worked hard enough. He had already set his mind on winning one of the five available to Sophomore Class members. As to the Law as a profession, Leonard hadn't yet made up his mind. Certainly his father had made no fortune from it, but, on the other hand, there were men right in Loring Point who had prospered exceedingly thereby. But that decision could wait. Meanwhile he meant to study hard, win a scholarship and make good in the eyes of Uncle Emory. And he meant to play as hard as he worked, which was an exceedingly good plan, and hadn't yet discerned any very good reason for not doing that on the Alton Academy Football Team!

CHAPTER V

THE BOY ON THE PORCH

He liked the school immensely and the fellows in it. And he liked the town, with its tree-shaded streets and comfortable old white houses. A row of the latter faced the Academy from across the asphalt thoroughfare below the sloping campus, home-like residences set in turf and gardens, guarded by huge elms and maples. Beyond them began, a block further east, the stores. One could get nearly anything he wanted in the two short blocks of West street, without journeying closer to the center of town. In school parlance this shopping district was known as Bagdad. Further away one found moving picture houses in variety. Northward at some distance lay the river, and under certain not too painful restrictions one might enjoy boating and canoeing. On Sunday Alton rang with the peeling of church bells and Bagdad was empty of life save, perhaps, for a shrill-voiced purveyor of newspapers from whom one could obtain for a dime an eight-section New York paper with which to litter the floor after the return from church. On that first Sunday Slim acted as guide and Leonard learned what lay around and about. They penetrated to the sidewalk-littered foreign quarter beyond the railroad, where Slim tried modern Greek on a snappily-attired gentleman who to-morrow would be presiding over a

hat cleaning emporium. The result was not especially favorable. Either Slim's knowledge of Greek was too limited or, as he explained it, the other chap didn't know his own language. Then they wandered southward, to the Hill, and viewed the ornate mansions of the newly rich. Here were displayed tapestry brick and terra cotta, creamy limestone and colorful tile, pergolas and stained glass, smooth lawns and concrete walks, immaculate hedges and dignified shrubs. Being a newer part of town, the trees along the streets were small and threw little shade on the sun-heated pavement, and this, combined with the fact that to reach the Hill one had of necessity to negotiate a grade, left the boys rather out of breath and somewhat too warm for comfort. On the whole, Leonard liked the older part of Alton much better, and confided the fact to his companion.

"So do I," agreed Slim. "Of course these places up here have a lot of things the old houses lack; like tennis courts and garages and sleeping porches; but there's an old white house on River street, just around the corner from Academy, that hits me about right. I'll show it to you some time. I guess it's about a hundred years old; more, likely; but, gee, it's a corking old place. When I have a house of my own, General, none of these young city halls or Carnegie libraries for mine! I want a place that looks as if some one lived in it. Take a squint at that chocolate brick arrangement over there. Can you imagine any one being really comfortable in it? Why, if I lived there I'd be always looking for a bell-hop to spring out on me and grab whatever I had and push

me over to the register so I could sign my name and get a key. That's a fine, big porch, but I'll bet you wouldn't ever think of sitting out there on a summer evening in your shirt sleeves and sprinkling water on that trained mulberry tree!"

"I don't believe," laughed Leonard, "that they put anything as common as water on that cute thing. They probably have a Mulberry Tree Tonic or something like that they bathe it in. Say, there is some one on the porch, just the same, and it looks to me as if he was waving to us."

"Why, that's Johnny McGrath!" said Slim. "Hello, Johnny! That where you live?"

"Sure. Come on over!"

Slim looked inquiringly at Leonard. "Want to go?" he asked in low tones. "Johnny's a good sort."

Leonard nodded, if without enthusiasm, and Slim led the way across the ribbon of hot asphalt and up the three stone steps that led, by the invariable concrete path, to the wide porch. A boy of about Leonard's age stood awaiting them at the top of the steps, a round-faced chap with a nose liberally adorned with freckles and undeniably tip-tilted. He wore white flannel trousers and a gray flannel coat, and there was a liberal expanse of gray silk socks exposed above the white shoes.

"Want you to meet my friend Grant," said Slim, climbing the wide steps. "General, this is Johnny McGrath, the only Sinn Feiner in school. What you been doing to-day, Johnny? Making bombs?"

Johnny smiled widely and good-humoredly. “You’re the only bum I’ve seen so far,” he replied. “Come up and cool off.”

“That’s a rotten pun,” protested Slim, accepting the invitation to sit down in a comfortable wicker chair. “Say, Johnny, there must be money in Sinn Feining.” He looked approvingly about the big porch with its tables and chairs, magazines and flowering plants. “Is this your real home, or do you just hire this for Sundays?”

“We’ve been living here going on three years,” answered Johnny. “Ever since dad made his pile.” He turned to Leonard and indulged in a truly Irish wink of one very blue eye. “Slim thinks he gets my goat,” he explained, “but he doesn’t. Sure, I know this is a bit of a change from The Flats.”

“The Flats?” repeated Leonard questioningly.

“That’s what they call it over beyond the Carpet Mills,” explained Johnny. “Shanty Town, you know; Goatville; see?”

“Oh, yes! I don’t believe I’ve been there yet.”

“Well, it isn’t much to look at,” laughed Johnny. “We lived there until about three years ago. We weren’t as poor as most of them, but there were six of us in five rooms, Grant. Then dad made his pile and we bought this place.” Johnny looked about him not altogether approvingly and shook his head. “It’s fine enough, all right, but, say, fellows, it’s awfully – what’s the word I seen – saw the other day? Stodgy, that’s it! I guess it’s going to take us another three years to get used to it.”

“He misses having the pig in the parlor,” observed Slim

gravely to Leonard. The latter looked toward Johnny McGrath anxiously, but Johnny only grinned.

“Twas never that bad with us,” he replied, “but I mind the day the Cleary’s nanny-goat walked in the kitchen and ate up half of dad’s nightshirt, and mother near killed him with a flat-iron!”

“Why did she want to kill your father with a flat-iron?” asked Slim mildly.

“The goat, I said.”

“You did not, Johnny. You told us it was a nanny-goat and said your mother nearly killed ‘him.’ If that doesn’t mean your father – ”

“Well, anyway, I had to lick Terry Cleary before there was peace between us again,” laughed Johnny. Then his face sobered. “Sure, up here on the Hill,” he added, “you couldn’t find a scrap if you was dying!”

The others had to laugh, Slim ejaculating between guffaws: “Johnny, you’ll be the death of me yet!” Johnny’s blue eyes were twinkling again and his broad Irish mouth smiling.

“It’s mighty queer,” he went on, “how grand some of these neighbors of ours are up here. Take the Paternos crowd next door here. Sure, six years ago that old Dago was still selling bananas from a wagon, and to-day – wow! – the only wagon he rides in is a limousine. And once, soon after we moved in, mother was in the back yard seeing the maid hung the clothes right, or something, and there was Mrs. Paternos’ black head stuck out of an upstairs window, and thinking to be neighborly, mind you, mother says

to her, ‘Good morning, ma’am,’ or something like that, and the old Eye-talian puts her nose in the air and slams down the windy – window, I mean!”

“You’ve got to learn, Johnny,” explained Slim, “that you can’t become an aristocrat, even in this free country of ours, in less than five years. That gives you about two to go, son. Be patient.”

“Patient my eye,” responded Johnny serenely. “It’ll take more than five years to make aristocrats of the McGraths, for they’re not wanting it. Just the same, Slim, it makes me sick, the way some folks put on side just because they’ve been out of the tenements a few years. I guess the lot of us, and I’m meaning you, too, couldn’t go very many years back before we’d be finding bananas or lead pipe or something ple-bee-an like that hanging on the old family tree!”

“Speak for yourself,” answered Slim with much dignity. “Or speak for the General here. As for the Stapleses, Johnny, I’d have you know that we’re descended from Jeremy Staples, who owned the first inn in Concord, New Hampshire, and who himself served a glass of grog to General George Washington!”

“That would be a long time ago,” said Johnny.

“It would; which is why we can boast of it. If it happened last year we’d be disclaiming any relationship to the old reprobate.”

“McGrath’s right,” said Leonard, smiling but thoughtful. “We’re all descended from trade or something worse. I know a fellow back home whose several-times-great grandfather was a pirate with Stede Bonnet, and his folks are as proud of it as

anything. If it isn't impertinent, McGrath, how did your father make his money?"

"In the War, like so many others. He was a plumber, you see. He'd gone into business for himself a few years before and was doing pretty well. Joe – that's my oldest brother – was with him. Well, then the War came and Joe read in the paper where they were going to build a big cantonment for the soldiers over in Jersey. 'Why not try to get the job to put in some of the plumbing?' says he. 'Sure, we haven't a chance,' says my dad. 'Twill be the big fellows as will get that work.' But Joe got a copy of the specifications, or whatever they're called, and set down and figured, and finally persuaded the Old Man to take a chance. So they did, and some surprised they were when they were awarded the contract! Dad said it was too big for them and they'd have to give some of it to another, but Joe wouldn't stand for that. He had a hard time getting money for the bond, or whatever it was the Government wanted, but he did it finally, and they did the job and did it honestly. Their figures were away under the estimate of the other firms, but in spite of that they made themselves rich. Now I say why isn't dad as much of a gentleman as old Pete Paternos? Sure lead pipe's as clean as rotten bananas!"

"That's just the point," replied Slim. "The rotten bananas are old and the lead pipe's new. Give the lead pipe another two years, Johnny, and you can slap Paternos on the back and get away with it."

"I'm more likely to slap him on the head with a crow-bar,"

grumbled Johnny. Then: "Say, fellows, want some lemonade?"

"Not for worlds," answered Slim promptly. "Where is it?"

"I'll have Dora make a pitcher in a shake of a lamb's tail," said Johnny eagerly, as he disappeared. Slim smiled over at Leonard and Leonard smiled back. Then the latter exclaimed protestingly.

"Just the same, he's a mighty decent sort, Slim!"

"Of course he is," agreed the other calmly. "I told you that across the street. Johnny's all right."

"Well, then, aren't you – aren't you afraid of hurting his feelings? Talking to him the way you do, I mean."

"Not a bit. Johnny knows me, and he knows that what I say is for the good of his soul. We aristocrats, General, have got to make the hoi polloi understand that they can't shove into our sacred circle off-hand. They've got to train for it, old man; work up; go through an initiation."

Leonard observed Slim in puzzlement and doubt.

"Why," Slim went on soberly, "what do you suppose old Jeremy Staples would say if he could see me now hob-nobbing with the son of a plumber? The poor old rascal would turn over in his grave, General. Bet you he'd turn over twice!"

"Oh," said Leonard, "I thought you meant it!"

"Who says I don't? Ah, that sounds mighty cheerful, Johnny! Sure you didn't put any arsenic in it? My folks are English on my uncle's side!"

"I'd not waste good arsenic on the likes of you," answered Johnny, pouring from a frosted glass pitcher. Followed several

moments of deeply appreciative silence during which visitors and host applied themselves to the straws that emerged from the glasses. Then Slim sighed rapturously and held his glass out for more.

“It may be poisoned, Johnny,” he said, “but I’ll take a chance.”

“Are you at Alton?” Leonard asked presently of his host.

“Didn’t I tell you he was?” asked Slim in mild surprise. “He certainly is. Johnny’s the one bright spot on the basket ball team. You’ll never know the poetry of motion, General, until you’ve seen him toss a back-hander into the hoop. The only trouble with him is that, true to his race, he always mistakes a basket ball game for the Battle of the Boyne. At least, I think I mean the Boyne. Do I, Johnny?”

“Maybe. I wasn’t there. Anyhow, you’re giving Grant here a wrong idea of me entirely. I’m the most peaceable lad on the team, Slim Staples, and you know it.”

“I know nothing of the sort,” protested Slim stoutly. “All I do know is that whenever you’re playing the casualties are twice as heavy as when you’re not. Oh, I know you have a foxy way of handing out the wallops, and that the referee seldom catches you at it, but facts are facts, Johnny, and I’m nothing if not factotum.”

“You’re nothing if not insulting,” corrected Johnny. “Why does he call you ‘General?’” he continued of Leonard.

“Why, he hit on that – ” Leonard began.

“Is it possible you never heard of General Grant?” demanded Slim incredulously.

“Oh, that’s it? Well,” as Slim stood up to go and Leonard followed his example, “I’m pleased to have met you. Come again, won’t you? I’ll not be asking Slim, for he’s too insulting.”

“Oh, now that I know where you live and what good lemonade you keep on draught, I’ll come frequently,” said Slim kindly. “Maybe we might drop around next Sunday afternoon about this time, or a little before. You’d better make it a point to have plenty of lemons on hand.”

“Why, if you come we’ll not be without them,” Johnny assured him sweetly.

“Fine! And now, before we go, may we see the pig, Johnny?”

“Sure,” replied the other, relapsing into a rich brogue, “it’s sorry I am, Slim my darlint, but the pig do be havin’ his afternoon nap in the panthry, and he’d be that angry if I was wakin’ him!”

Going back down the slope of Melrose Avenue Leonard remarked: “He said there were six of them, Slim. Are there other brothers beside the Joe he spoke of?”

“There were,” answered Slim. “There’s one other now, a little chap about twelve. I don’t know his name.”

“What happened to the other brother?”

“Killed in the War,” replied Slim briefly.

“Oh!”

“There was a citation,” added Slim. “Johnny says it’s framed and hanging over his mother’s bed. It’s a lucky thing for the country, General, that it doesn’t have to look up a fellow’s

pedigree before it can let him fight; what?"

CHAPTER VI

THE SEASON BEGINS

In spite of Slim's predictions, Leonard's calm announcement to Manager Tenney that he was a candidate for guard on the football team occasioned no evident surprise. Considering that within forty-eight hours Tenney had registered the name of a fat and pudgy junior whose consuming ambition was to play quarterback and had listened to the calm assurance of a lathe-like youth that he would be satisfied with nothing save the position of center, the manager's absence of emotion was not surprising. Anyhow, Leonard was relieved to find that he was not to meet opposition at the outset, and took his place in Squad C quite satisfied. Football practice at Alton Academy differed from the same occupation at Loring Point High School in at least two essentials, he decided. It was more systematic and it was a whole lot more earnest. There was little lost motion during the hour and a half that the candidates occupied the field. You didn't stand around waiting for the coach to remember your existence and think up a new torture, nor, when the coach was present, did you spend precious minutes in banter. From the moment of the first "Let's go!" to the final "That's all, fellows!" you had something to do and did it hard, impressed every instant with the importance of the task set you. Of course, practice was less amusing, less fun

here at Alton. There was no social side to the gathering. Even after a week of practice Leonard knew almost none of the fellows he worked with. He did know the names of many, and he had a "Hello" acquaintance with a half-dozen, but there was no time for the social amenities.

He had been put down as a lineman and spent at least a half-hour daily being instructed in the duties of blocking and charging. Always there was another half-hour for each squad with the tackling dummies, of which headless opponents there were two. Generally the balance of the period was occupied in learning to handle the ball and in running through a few simple formation plays. In these Leonard was played anywhere that the assistant coach, usually acting as quarter, fancied. Generally he was a guard or a tackle, now on this side and now on that, but on two occasions he found himself cast for a backfield rôle and trotted up and down the field as a half. On Tuesday afternoon the first and second squads held the first scrimmage, and by Thursday Coach Cade had put together a tentative eleven to meet Alton High School on Saturday. No one was surprised to see Gordon Renneker occupying the position of right guard, for Renneker's fame had already spread throughout the school.

That first engagement was played under a hot sun and with the temperature hovering around seventy-two when High School kicked off. Naturally enough, as an exhibition of scientific football it left much to be desired. High School showed lack of condition and her players were to be seen stretched on their

backs whenever time was called. Alton appeared of somewhat sterner stuff, but there was no doubt that half-time came as a welcome interruption even to her. “Johnny” Cade started Gurley and Emerson at ends, Butler and Wilde at tackles, Stimson and Renneker at guards and Garrick at center. The backfield consisted of Carpenter, Goodwin, Kendall and Greenwood. But this line-up didn’t persist long. Even by the end of the first quarter “Red” Reilly was at right half and Wells was at right tackle. During the remainder of the game changes were frequent until, near the end of the final period, second- and third-string players made up the team. Coach Cade tried out much unknown material that afternoon, and it seemed to Leonard that he was the only candidate who hadn’t been given a chance. As a matter of fact, though, there were some twenty others in like case, for the squad had not yet been cut. It was when Alton was presenting her weakest line-up that High School cut loose with her second bombardment of overhead shots – the first essay, in the second quarter, had netted her little enough – and secured her lone touchdown. She failed to add a goal since her line didn’t hold long enough for her kicker to get the ball away. The final score of the slow and ragged contest was 23 to 6. Talking it over afterwards in the comparative coolness of Number 12 Haylow, Slim was pessimistic. Perhaps the fact that his own efforts during approximately half of the forty minutes of actual play had not been brilliantly successful colored his mood.

“We’ve got plenty of material,” pronounced Slim, elevating

his scantily-clad legs to the window-sill, “and I guess it’s average good, but it’s going to take us a long time to get going this year. You can see that with half an eye. Look at the army of queers that Johnny tried out this afternoon. That’s what slows up development, General. Now, last year we had the makings of a team right at the start. Only three or four first-string lads, I think, but a perfect gang of experienced substitutes, to say nothing of second team fellows. Result was that we started off with a bang and kept going. You bet High School didn’t do any scoring last season!”

“But,” objected Leonard, “weren’t you telling me the other day that the team had an awful slump about the middle of the season, and – ”

“Oh, well, that had nothing to do with the start. Two or three things accounted for that. What I’m getting at is just this. It’s mighty poor policy to spend the first two weeks of a football season finding out that more than half of your material’s no good to you. If I ever coach a team there’ll be no mob under my feet after the first three or four days. Thirty men’ll be all I’ll want. If I can’t build a team out of them, all right. I get out.”

“Glad that rule doesn’t hold good now,” said Leonard. “If it did I’d be out of it already.”

“Well, I don’t know. No, you wouldn’t either! That’s what I’m getting at. You can play football. You’ve done it for two years. You’ve had experience. All right. But look at the run of the small fry that – that’s infesting the field so you have to watch your

step to keep from tramping on 'em. Why, suffering cats, most of 'em won't be ready to play football for two years yet! There are chaps out there who couldn't stop a ball with their heads! The ball would knock 'em right over. Well, Johnny gives each of 'em the once-over, and it takes time. He knows they aren't going to show anything. It's just this silly policy of giving every one a chance to make good. That's why you're sitting on the bench and a bunch of scrawny little would-be's are letting High School shove over a score on us."

"You may be right," answered Leonard, "but it seems to me that it's only by giving every one a chance to show what he's good for that you can be sure of not overlooking something. I've seen more than once a fellow who didn't look like anything at all at the start of the season turn into something good later on."

"Sure, that happens now and then, but what of it? If the fellow really has ability he keeps on playing. He goes to the scrubs or one of the class teams. If he makes good there he mighty soon finds himself yanked back to the first. And the coach hasn't wasted a week or two trying to find out about him."

"Well, I guess I'm – I'm conservative, or something," laughed Leonard, "for I sort of like a team that starts slow and gets up its speed gradually. I know that back home our coach used to point us for our big game, the last one, and all the other games were taken as they came, more or less. Of course, when we played Delaware Polytechnic we smoothed out a bit and learned two or three new plays just beforehand, but we didn't go out of our way

much even for her.”

“Oh, that’s all right, General. I don’t want to see any team hit its stride too early. Safe and slow is my motto, too, but that doesn’t mean you’ve got to get started a fortnight after school opens. Look here, I’ll bet you that next Saturday Johnny won’t be any nearer settled on the team’s make-up than he was to-day. Well, of course, he’ll know about some positions, but he’ll still be experimenting. Rus Emerson’s the same sort he is, too; has an ingrown conscience or – or sense of responsibility toward others. If Rus had his way any fellow who could borrow a pair of football pants could have a week’s try-out!”

“Who plays us next Saturday?” asked Leonard.

“Lorimer Academy. They’re a nice crowd of chaps, and they don’t give us much trouble. Last year, though, they did sort of throw a scare into us. We got three scores to their two. It was right after that we played a tie game with Hillsport and went into a jolly slump. Say, that guy Renneker didn’t show up so mighty wonderful to-day, did you think?”

“N-no, he looked a bit slow to me. But I guess he hasn’t got used to the place yet. Either that or he was sort of saving himself.”

“Saving himself for what?” demanded Slim.

“Search me.” Leonard smiled. “Maybe he thought there wasn’t much use working too hard against a weak team like Alton High.”

Slim shook his head, looking incredulous. “All I know is that the short time we were in together he was generally ‘on the

outside looking in.' Rather gives me the impression of being a poser. Still, to-day wasn't much of a test; and he's pretty big and perhaps the heat stalled him some. Hope he pans out big, for we sure need a corking good guard. Smedley's a pippin, and Raleigh isn't too bad, but we need another. To look at Renneker you'd expect him to be a hustler, but he didn't show it to-day. He was outside most of the plays when I saw him. Not like Jim Newton. Jim's always in the middle of it. For a center, Jim's a live wire. Doesn't matter much where the play comes in the line; Jim's always sitting on the enemy's head when the dust clears away! Say, I wish you'd switch your game, General, and try for tackle or something, something you'd have a show at."

"But you just said," answered the other demurely, "that the team needed another good guard."

Slim grinned and shook his head. "All right, son, but I'd like to see you on the team. That's all."

"Think one of us ought to get on, eh?"

"Huh? Oh, well, there's something in that, too. I'm not very sure of a place, and that's no jolly quip. Gurley's a good end, worse luck! And there's Kerrison, too. But I'll give them a fight for it. They'll know they've been working if they beat me out, General! Let's go and see what they're giving us for supper."

Leonard met the captain that evening for the first time. Met him socially, that is to say, Russell Emerson and Billy Wells overtook Leonard and Slim on their way to the movies. Wells was one of those Leonard already had a speaking acquaintance with,

but Emerson had thus far remained outside his orbit. Continuing the journey, Leonard fell to Billy Wells and Rus and Slim walked ahead, but coming home they paired differently and Leonard found himself conversing with the captain, at first somewhat embarrassedly. But the football captain was easy to know, as the saying is, and Leonard soon forgot his diffidence. Of course, football formed some of the conversation, but Leonard sensed relief on the other's part when the subject changed to the pictures they had just witnessed. After that they talked of other things; the school, and Leonard's home in Rhode Island – Rus, it seemed, had never been farther south than he was now – , and the faculty and some of the fellows. The captain seemed to take it for granted that his companion was familiar with the names he mentioned, although as a fact most of them were new to Leonard. Mention of “Jake,” the trainer, introduced a laughable story about Jake and a track team candidate, in which Rus tried to imitate Jake's brogue. That reminded Leonard of Johnny McGrath, and he asked Rus if he knew him.

“Yes, I've met him several times,” was the answer. “I've been trying to get him to try football. He's a very good basket ball player and I've a strong hunch that he'd make a corking half. But his folks, his mother especially, I believe, object. He had a brother killed in the War, and his mother is dead set against taking chances with another of them. Too bad, too, for he's a fast, scrappy fellow. The good-natured kind, you know. Plays hard and keeps his temper every minute. There's a lot in keeping your

temper, Grant.”

“But I’ve heard of teams being ‘fighting mad’ and doing big things.”

“Yes, the phrase is common enough, but ‘fighting earnest’ would be better. Just as soon as a fellow gets really mad he loses his grip more or less. He makes mistakes of judgment, begins to play ‘on his own.’ If he gets angry enough he stops being any use to the team. Of course there are chaps now and then who can work themselves up to a sort of fighting fury and play great football, but I suspect that those chaps aren’t really quite as wild as they let on. There’s Billy back there. He almost froths at the mouth and insults the whole team he’s playing against, but he never loses anything more than his tongue, I guess. The old bean keeps right on functioning as per usual. Billy doesn’t begin to warm up until his opponent double-crosses him or some one hands him a wallop! By the way, Grant, you’re on the squad, aren’t you? Seems to me I’ve seen you out at the field.”

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