

Barbour Ralph Henry

Right Tackle Todd



Ralph Barbour
Right Tackle Todd

«Public Domain»

Barbour R.

Right Tackle Todd / R. Barbour — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	17
CHAPTER V	21
CHAPTER VI	26
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	29

Ralph Henry Barbour

Right Tackle Todd

CHAPTER I

“DIFFERENT”

“Stereotyped,” said Martin Gray. “That’s the word!” He spoke triumphantly, as one will when a moment’s search for the proper term has been rewarded. “Stereotyped, Clem!”

“Oh, I don’t know,” replied his room-mate, only mildly interested in Mart’s subject. “Of course they do look pretty much alike – ”

“It isn’t only their looks, though. But, come to think of it, that’s another proof of my – er – contention. Hang it, Clem, if they weren’t all alike as so many – er – beans – ”

“Don’t you mean peas?” asked Clement Harland, grinning.

“Beans,” continued Mart emphatically. “They wouldn’t all wear the same things, would they?”

“Don’t see that, Mart. After all, a chap’s simply got to follow the jolly old style, eh?”

“Not if he has any – er – individuality! No, sir! I saw fifty at least of the new class arrive yesterday, and except that sometimes one was shorter or taller or fatter than the others, you could have sworn they were all from the same town. Yes, sir, and the same street! Same clothes, same hats, same shoes, same – ”

“Well, after all, why not? Besides, after they’ve been here awhile they develop different – as you’d say – ‘er – characteristics.’ What if the kids do look alike when they first come?”

“But you don’t get the – er – the idea at all!” protested Martin. “What I’m trying to get at – ”

“Is that Alton Academy attracts a certain type of fellow and doesn’t get enough freaks to suit you.”

“Freaks be blowed! I don’t want freaks, I want new blood, something different now and then. You know as well as I do that new blood is what – ”

“You’ve got the ‘melting pot’ idea, eh?”

“Yes, I guess so. Why not? Look at the other schools; some of ‘em, anyway: Dexter, Dover – ”

“Croton?”

“I said some of ‘em. Take Dexter now.”

“I refuse.”

“Look at the – er – variety of fellows that go there. What’s the result?”

“Why, the result is that they manage to beat Dover pretty often at football, but I always thought that coach of theirs had a good deal to do with that!”

“Shucks, I’m not talking about athletics, although that’s a pretty good test, too. What I mean is that it’s the school that draws its enrollment from all over the country and from all – er – classes that does the biggest things; and that’s the most use, too.”

“I don’t believe it,” answered Mart. “It’s the school itself, its policy, its traditions that count. You might have every state in the Union – ”

“Oh, that, of course, but I say that a student body composed of a lot of totally different types – ”

“All right, but how are you going to get them?”

“Reach out for ‘em! How do other schools get ‘em?”

“Search me, old son! Maybe they advertise in the papers; Dakotas, New Mexico, Florida, Hawaii – ”

“Sure! Why not! This school’s in danger of – er – dry-rot, Clem! Four hundred or so fellows all alike, speaking the same language – ”

“I should hope so!”

“Thinking the same thoughts, having the same views on every subject. Gosh, can’t you see that you and I don’t get as much out of it as if we could rub up against something different now and then? Wouldn’t it be refreshing to find a fellow who didn’t think just as we think about everything, who didn’t wear exactly the same kind of clothes, who didn’t think the sun rose and set in New England?”

“But the sun does rise and set in New England,” objected Clem. “I’ve seen it.”

“Oh, shut up! You know what I mean. Wouldn’t it?”

Clem considered a moment. Then he shook his head doubtfully. “You should have gone to Kenly Hall, Mart,” he answered. “They have all kinds there, the whole fifty-seven varieties.”

“Yes, and they’re better off for it. Of course it’s the proper thing for us to make fun of Kenly, but you know mighty well that it’s every bit as good a school as Alton; maybe better in some ways. But Kenly isn’t much different from us. They get about the same lot year after year, just as we do. One year’s freshman class looks just like last year’s. Maybe they do get an occasional outsider. Quite a few middle-west chaps go there. But mostly they draw them from right around this part of the country, as we do. Gee, I’d certainly like to see, just for once, a fellow turn up here who didn’t look as if he’d been cast in the same mold with all the others!”

“You’re getting all worked up about nothing, old son,” said Clem soothingly. “You mustn’t do it. It always upsets you so you can’t eat your meals, and it’s only half an hour to supper.”

“If you weren’t so blamed stubborn – ”

“Shut up a minute! Hello! Come in!”

The door of Number 15 opened slowly until the more dimly lighted corridor was revealed through a narrow aperture and a voice said: “Excuse me, please, but is this where the fellow that hires the football players lives?”

From where Martin sat the owner of the voice was hidden, and so he could not account for the radiant grin that enveloped his room-mate’s countenance for an instant.

“I didn’t get it,” said Clem, politely apologetic. “Won’t you come in?” His face was sober again, unnaturally sober in the judgment of Martin Gray.

“Well,” said the unseen speaker doubtfully. Then the door again began its cautious passage across the old brown carpet, and Mart understood Clem’s grin.

The youth who now stood revealed to Mart’s astounded gaze was little short of six feet tall, it seemed. In age he might have been anywhere from sixteen to twenty, with eighteen as a likely compromise. He was attired neatly but, it appeared, uncomfortably in a suit of dark gray which fitted him too loosely across the shoulders and too abruptly at the ankles, its deficiency at the latter point exposing to Mart’s fascinated eyes a pair of wrinkled woolen socks of sky-blue. The low shoes were not extraordinary, but there was something deliciously quaint about the collar, with its widely parted corners, and the pale blue satin tie that failed to hide the brass collar-stud. Even the hat, a black Alpine shape, struck a note of originality, possibly because it was a full size too small and was poised so precariously atop a thickish mass of tumbled hair that seemed not yet to have decided just what shade of brown to assume. Clem coughed delicately and asked: “You were looking for some one?”

“Guess I’ve got the wrong place,” said the stranger, his first embarrassment increasing at the discovery of Mart beyond the door’s edge. “The fellow I’m looking for is the one who hires – well, takes on the football players. Guess he’s the manager, ain’t he?”

“Possibly,” answered Clem, turning to Mart with an inquiring glance. “What do you think?”

Martin took his cue promptly. “Or, maybe the coach,” he suggested. “You don’t know his name?”

The stranger shook his head. He held firmly to the outer knob of the door, resting his shoulders against the edge of it as he frowned in an effort of memory. “I heard it,” he replied, “but I forget what it was. He said I was to see him between five and six about me getting on the football team and I thought he said he lived in Number 15 in Lykes Hall, but – ”

“Well, you see, this isn’t – ”

But Clem interrupted Mart swiftly. “Sit down, won’t you?” he asked, smiling hospitably. “I dare say we can thresh out the mystery. And you might shove that door too, if you don’t mind. Thanks.”

The stranger closed the door as slowly as he had opened it, removed his hat and advanced gingerly to the chair that Clem’s foot had deftly thrust toward him. He gave them the impression of having attained his growth so suddenly as to be a little uncertain about managing it. He lowered himself almost cautiously into the chair, placing two rather large feet closely together and holding his hat firmly by its creased crown with both hands, hands generously proportioned, darkly tanned and extremely clean. He looked about the room and then back to Clem, while a slow smile radiated the long, somewhat plain face.

“You fellows got it right nice here,” he ventured.

“Like it?” asked Clem in a more friendly tone. The stranger’s smile had transformed him on the instant from a queer, almost uncouth figure to something quite human and likable. “Yes, it isn’t a bad room. Where do you hang out? By the way, you didn’t mention your name, did you?”

“Todd’s my name. My room’s over in Haylow; Number 33. A fellow named Judson and I have it together. It ain’t like this, though. Not so big, for one thing, and then the ceiling comes down, over there like, and I keep hitting my head on it.”

Mart laughed. “They didn’t build you for one of those third floor rooms, Todd.”

The slow smile came again and the gray eyes twinkled, and the visitor relaxed a little in the straight chair. “Gosh, I started to grow last year and it looks like I can’t stop. I didn’t use to be such an ungainly cuss.”

“I wouldn’t let that bother me,” returned Mart. “You’ll fill out pretty soon, I dare say. How tall are you?”

Todd shook his head. “I ain’t measured lately,” he acknowledged a trifle sheepishly. “Been scared to. Pop says if I don’t stop pretty soon it won’t be safe for me to go out in the woods less’n some one might mistake me for a tree and put an ax to me!”

“Where’s your home?” asked Clem, with a side glance at his room-mate.

“Four Lakes, Maine. At least, we don’t live right in the village, but that’s our postoffice address. We live about three miles north, up the Ludic road. You ever been around there?”

It seemed that they hadn’t, but once started Todd was not averse to supplying personal information. Clem fancied that Judson, whoever he might be, had not proved a sympathetic listener and that Todd was heartily glad to find some one to talk to. His father had a store, it seemed, and was also interested in timber lands and numerous other interests. There was a large family of children of which the present representative was the senior member. He had been going to school at Four Lakes until last Spring.

“I was set on going to college, you see, and I thought I’d learned enough, but I went down to Lewiston and talked with a fellow down there and he said I’d better go to a preparatory school for a couple of years first. I asked where and he said this place. So I came down here. Seems like he might have said some place nearer home, but I guess it don’t matter. This looks like a right nice school. I guess you fellows are seniors, aren’t you?”

“Juniors,” corrected Clem. “I suppose you’re one of us, Todd.”

“I guess so. I ain’t heard for sure yet. They started me off as a junior, though.”

“Oh, you’ll make it,” declared Mart. “So you’re going to play football, eh?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Todd smiled embarrassedly. “I ain’t ever yet, but this fellow I was looking for stopped me this morning and asked if I was going to and I said no, and then he asked didn’t I want to and I said I didn’t know if I did or not, and he said for me to come and see him between five and six o’clock and we’d talk about it. He said what his name was, but I forget. I think he said he managed the players.”

“He didn’t,” inquired Clem very innocently, “mention what position he thought you’d fill best on the team?”

Todd’s gray eyes twinkled again. “No, he didn’t, but I guess maybe one of the posts at the end of the field’s got broken and he’s looking for a new one.”

“I think it must have been Dolf Chapin you saw,” said Mart, smiling at Clem’s slight discomfiture. “He’s – ”

“That’s the name,” declared Todd with relief. “Where’s his room, please?”

“He’s in 15 Lykes.”

“Well, isn’t this – ” Then Todd’s countenance proclaimed understanding and he chuckled. “Gosh, I went right by it, didn’t I? I was over at that building where they have the library – ”

“Memorial,” said Mart.

“And meant to stop at the first building after I came off that path that comes from there. Instead of that I got right back in my own house, didn’t I? I ain’t got this place learned very well yet. Well, I’m much obliged to you. Maybe I’ll see you again. My name, like I told you, is Todd, Jim Todd.” He arose and offered a big hand to Clem and then to Mart.

“Glad to have met you, Todd,” responded Clem, spreading his fingers experimentally after the crushing grip they had sustained. “My name’s Harland, and this is Gray. Drop in again some time, won’t you? I’d like mighty well to hear how you get along with football.”

“Well, I ain’t so sure I’ll play it,” answered Todd from the doorway, frowning a little. “I guess playing games sort of interferes with a fellow’s school work, and what I’ve seen of the courses they’ve got me down for makes me think I’ll have to do some tall studying. I’m glad to have met you, and maybe I might come in and see you again some time.”

“Do that,” said Clem earnestly.

Then the door closed slowly but decidedly and Clem and Mart dropped back into their chairs. After a moment Clem said: “Looks to me like your prayer was answered, Mart.”

“Well, he’s only one, but he’s a hopeful sign.”

Clem chuckled softly. “You and Todd ought to get along pretty well together,” he continued. “You wanted something different, and there you have it. At least, he doesn’t wear clothes like the rest of us; he’s no slave to Fashion, old son. Maybe he won’t mind telling you where he buys his togs, eh?”

“Some way,” answered Mart, “it doesn’t seem quite fair to make fun of him. There was something awfully decent about the chap, in spite of his clothes and his – er – queer appearance.”

“That’s true, and I wasn’t really making fun. Only – ” Clem interrupted himself with a laugh. “Say, isn’t it just like Chapin to try to round that fellow up for the football squad? Honest, Mart, if a one-legged fellow showed up here and Dolf saw him he wouldn’t be happy until he had him out on the field!”

“At that,” replied Mart, as he arose to prepare for supper, “Jim Todd might be a blamed sight better player than some of those cripples who lost the game last year for us! I noticed that your delicate sarcasm was trumped very neatly by our recent guest, old timer!”

“Yes,” Clem acknowledged, “that’s so. I fancy our friend James isn’t such a fool as his hat makes him out!”

CHAPTER II

JIM TODD QUILTS

The occupants of Number 15 Haylow didn't see anything more of Jim Todd for a while. In fact, he had nearly gone from their memories when Clem collided with him at the entrance to the dormitory one day in late October. Jim only said "Hello" and would have gone by, but something prompted Clem to renew the acquaintance.

"Well, how do you like things now that you've been with us awhile, Todd?" he asked.

"Fine, thanks. I'm getting on real well."

"Good! By the way, you never paid that next call, you know. Gray and I have been wondering about you." That was more flattering than truthful perhaps. "Still playing football, or did you decide not to go in for the manly pastime?"

Jim smiled. "Well, I'm still on the squad," he said, "but I don't do very well at that game. Guess I'll be quitting this week. It's pretty hard, and it takes a good deal of a fellow's time, too."

"Well, if they've kept you all this time you'll probably last the season out," responded Clem, not a little surprised.

But Jim Todd shook his head. "I guess I'll be getting through pretty soon," he said firmly.

"Well, drop in and see us again, anyway." Clem hurried on to a recitation, wondering most of the way to Academy Hall why he had renewed the invitation. Nothing came of it for nearly a fortnight, however. Then, late one afternoon, Mr. James Todd knocked and entered. Six weeks had somewhat altered his appearance, and he looked far less "different." He was still the same tall, loose-jointed chap, but he wore a gray sweater and a pair of old blue trousers and no hat, and so much of his oddity was missing. He was, too, more at ease on this occasion, and settled his long length back in the Morris chair that Clem indicated without his former hesitation. Presently, in the course of conversation, Mart observed:

"I've been looking for you on the football team, Todd, but I missed you. Still, it's hard to recognize your friends under those leather domes you fellows wear. You didn't get into the Mount Millard game, did you?"

"I ain't been in any of them," answered Jim. "I ain't much of a football player."

"Oh, well, you've got two chances yet," replied Mart cheerfully. "Maybe Cade is keeping you back for the Kenly Hall game."

"I quit last week," said Jim simply.

"Quit? You mean – er – is that so?" floundered Mart. "Well, maybe next year –"

"It was pretty hard work," added Jim Todd. "Pretty wearing. I got tired of it finally. Mr. Cade and me had a sort of argument about it, but I told him I wouldn't ever make a football man and that I had sort of got behind with my studies and he let me go finally. I like him. He got sort of mad with me, but I guess he's over it by now."

Clem and Mart exchanged glances that indicated puzzlement. "You mean," asked Clem at last, "that you resigned? You weren't fired off?"

"No, I just quit," answered Jim untroubledly. "You see, it's like this, Harland. Most of the fellows in the squad had played football before. Some of them have been at it two or three years, likely. It was new to me. Of course I'd seen fellows playing it, you know; they had a sort of a team at the school I went to back home; but it never interested me much and I never thought I'd care to try it. Well, I was pretty green when I started off and I had a lot to learn. Guess I didn't learn very well, either. Seems like I was pretty stupid about it. Mr. Cade said I didn't put my mind on it, but I don't think that was so. Guess the trouble was I didn't get real interested in it. He told me that if I worked hard this Fall I'd likely get to play next year. He tried to make an end of me, but I never got good

enough to play in any of the games. I just sat on that bench out there at the field and looked on. They keep you on the field two hours every afternoon; sometimes longer than that; and I could see I was just wasting my time. I kept saying so to Dolf Chapin, but he said I wasn't, that I was learning and that it was my duty to stick it out. So I did till last week. Then I decided I'd better quit. So I quit."

"I see," said Mart dryly. "And Johnny Cade? I suppose he had something to say, Todd."

"Yes, he said a whole lot," answered Jim soberly. "Looked once like I'd have to paste him in the jaw, the way he was talking, but I didn't because I knew he didn't mean all he said. He was sort of upset, I guess."

"Sounds to me as if you were a more valuable man than you realized," said Clem.

"No, I guess I wasn't very valuable, really. I guess these football coaches like to have their own way pretty well."

"Well," said Mart, laughing, "I'll bet you've earned the distinction of being one of the few fellows that ever *resigned* from the squad! No wonder Cade was grumpy! He's not used to that!"

There followed another lapse in the acquaintanceship. Clem and Mart caught glimpses of Jim Todd in class room and dining hall; infrequently passed him on the campus; sometimes exchanged greetings by word or sign. The Kenly Hall game came and went, bringing the football season to a disappointingly inconclusive end. Beaten the year before, Alton tried desperately to wreak vengeance, but, although her players and her game were infinitely superior to those of the preceding season, Kenly Hall, too, showed improvement, and at the final whistle the score stood just where it had stood at the end of the first half, at 7 to 7. Each team had scored one touchdown and followed it with a clean goal. Each team, too, had narrowly failed of a second score, Kenly Hall when a forward-pass over the goal-line had been tipped but not caught and Alton when a fourth down on the enemy's four-yard line had gained but one foot of the necessary two. Both touchdowns had resulted from long runs, a Kenly Hall quarter-back bringing glory to the Cherry-and-Black by a thirty-four-yard dash around the opponent's left and "Cricket" Menge, left half on the Gray-and-Gold team, evening things up a few minutes later by wrapping himself about a lateral pass and dodging and twirling his way over eleven white lines to a score.

After the first disappointment, Alton Academy, viewing the result more calmly and fairly, came to the conclusion that her gridiron warriors had gained more glory than had been thus far accorded them. Both Kenly Hall coach and captain had stated publicly that the team which had met Alton was the best eleven that had represented the Cherry-and-Black in six years, and if that was so – and certainly Alton Academy had no reason to doubt it! – then Captain Grant's team – "General' Grant's Army" the football song called it – had secured a virtual victory in spite of the score. Careful analysis of the contest added strength to that verdict, for the records showed that Alton had outrushed her opponent by thirty-two yards, gained two more first downs than her ancient enemy had secured and had had slightly the better of the kicking argument. So on Monday night there was a delayed, but intensely enthusiastic, mass meeting in the auditorium and honor was done to the heroes. Everybody spoke who had any right to, and a few who hadn't, and there was much singing and a great deal of cheering. Clem and Mart, neither of them football enthusiasts, attended the celebration, as in duty bound, and ended by cheering quite as loudly as any. The testimonial had one result that the school in general never learned of. It decided a wavering Athletic Committee in favor of renewing Coach "Johnny" Cade's contract, which terminated that Fall, for another two seasons. Prior to seven-thirty that Monday evening his last two years' record of one defeat and one tie, even when balanced against previous success, had looked more than black to the Committee. At nine o'clock it was viewing that record more leniently. And on Wednesday Coach Cade departed with a new contract in his trunk.

When Clem came back to school after Christmas he found a package awaiting him in the mail box. Opened, it revealed a long, flat box of small cubes wrapped in pink tissue paper. Investigation proved the cubes to be spruce gum. There was also a scrawling enclosure from Jim Todd. "Wishing

you a Merry Christmas,” Clem read. “This is the real thing. Hope you like it. I’m sending it to Alton because I don’t know where you are. Give some to Gray. Yours, J. T.”

Mart declared that he detested gum and wouldn’t chew the stuff on a bet, but after watching Clem’s jaws rhythmically champing for some ten minutes he perjured himself and was soon as busy as his chum. Two days later, suffering from lame jaws after almost continuous chewing during waking hours, Clem seized the box, now half empty, and consigned it to the depths of the waste basket. “The pesky stuff!” he grumbled. “First thing we know we’ll have the habit!” Mart, one hand raised in protest, recognized the wisdom of the course and observed the sacrifice in silence. During the rest of that day he chewed scraps of paper torn from the corners of note-books. However, they lacked the insidious fascination of spruce gum and he gave them up and was cured. Of course they thanked Jim heartily a few days later, when he dropped in one afternoon, offering as conclusive evidence of their appreciation the fact that the supply was exhausted. Jim promptly promised to write to his father and get him to send some more. Perhaps he forgot it, for the new supply never reached Number 15 Haylow.

It is possible that absorption in new interests was accountable for Jim’s failure to make good on that promise, for it was shortly after that that Mart brought word of the Maine Society. Neither he nor Clem was eligible to membership, but that didn’t detract from their interest in the Society which, as Mart had heard it from Sam Newson, had been started by Jim Todd and already, while still less than a fortnight old, had a membership of nine. The school already possessed a Southern Club and a Western Society, but a social organization restricted to residents of a single state in attendance at Alton was something new and, like most innovations, it came in for some ridicule. The notice board in Academy Hall fairly blossomed with calls for members of similar societies. Some one named Henry Clay Calhoun, which may or may not have been a cognomen assumed for the occasion, invited other residents of South Carolina to meet in Number 14 Borden to effect the organization of “The South Carolina Society of Alton Academy, Devoted to the Abolishment of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution and to a Campaign of Education and Enlightenment among the Beknighted Citizens of Northern States.” As Borden Hall was restricted to freshmen, the authenticity of the invitation was questionable. The same was true of a summons to resident Hawaiians, while a document phrased in pidgin English and summoning all Chinese students at Alton to meet in the school laundry and enter their names on the roster of “The Chinese Tong” was even more palpably insincere. But ridicule seemed just what the Maine Society required, for a fortnight later it changed its name to the Maine-and-Vermont Society and increased its membership to thirty-one. A fellow named Tupper became president of the reorganized club and James Todd was secretary and treasurer. Meetings were held weekly in the rooms of various members at first, and then, securing faculty recognition, the Society was assigned the use of a room on the top floor of Academy Hall.

By invitation of Jim Todd, Clem attended one of the open meetings held monthly and was well entertained. The sight of Jim slowly elongating himself from behind the secretary’s table to read the previous minutes was alone well worth the effort of climbing two flights of stairs to Clem. Jim was very earnest and recited the doings of the last meeting in tones that imbued them with a vast importance. “Moved and seconded,” read Jim weightily, “that the Secretary be and hereby is empowered to contract for a sufficient supply of letter paper, appropriately printed with the Society’s name and emblem, and a sufficient supply of envelopes likewise so printed, the total cost of the same not to exceed seven dollars, and the same to be paid for out of the funds of the Society. So voted.” There were light refreshments later, and afterwards several members spoke informally – often embarrassedly – on matters of interest to citizens of the affiliated states. The best of the number was undoubtedly the secretary and treasurer. Jim was far more self-possessed than of yore and he spoke in an easy conversational style that pleased his hearers mightily. What he had to tell wasn’t much; just a somewhat rambling account of a visit to a logging camp; but he made it interesting and displayed a humorous perception that Clem, for one, had never suspected him of. On the whole, Clem enjoyed

the evening and was quite sincere when he said as much to Jim on their way back to Haylow. When they parted in the corridor, Clem said:

“You haven’t been in to see us, Todd, for a long time. We’re getting out of touch with events, Mart and I. Better drop in some time and cheer us up.”

Jim looked as if he suspected the other of joshing. He was never absolutely certain about Clem’s ingenuousness. “Well,” he answered, “I’d been around before only I knew you were pretty busy with hockey and – and all like that.”

“Oh, hockey doesn’t take all my time,” said Clem. “For instance, I don’t play much after supper.”

“Oh, well, I meant that being captain of the team you’d likely be pretty busy one way and another. I’ll be dropping in some evening soon, though, if you say so.”

“Wish you would. Good night!”

Seeking Number 15 and a bored Mart, who had refused the invitation to the Maine-and-Vermont Society with scathing remarks, Clem marveled at the perfectly idiotic way in which he persisted in fostering the acquaintance of Jim Todd. He didn’t really care a hang about the queer chap, of course, and – But hold on! Was that quite true? Didn’t he rather like Jim, if the truth had to be told? Well, yes, he sort of guessed he did. There was something about Jim Todd that appealed to him. Maybe – and he grinned as he flung open the door of Number 15 – it was just Todd’s quality of being “different”!

CHAPTER III ON THE ICE

A few days later Clem, smashing into the boards of the outdoor rink, after a valiant effort to hook the puck from Landorf, of the scrub six, almost bumped heads with Jim Todd. It was a nippingly cold February afternoon, and Jim made one of the small audience that stamped about on chilled feet and watched the progress of the practice game. Jim, though, appeared less conscious of the cold than most of the others. He had on the old gray woolen sweater, and a cloth cap set inadequately on the back of his streaky brown locks. About him were overcoats – even one or two of fur – and unfastened overshoes rattled their buckles as their wearers kicked the wooden barrier or stamped about on the hard-trodden snow to encourage circulation. Jim wore a pair of woolen socks of a dubious shade of tan and low shoes that were ostensibly black. And he didn't prance about a bit. Once in a while he did rub his long bony hands together, but the action seemed an indication of interest in the hockey game rather than in the temperature. As a matter of fact, this was Jim's first glimpse of such a contest, and he was, for Jim Todd, quite excited over it.

Between the halves Clem skated over to him. "Aren't you frozen?" he asked wonderingly.

"Me? No." Jim shook his head slowly. "It's right cold, though, ain't it? A whole lot colder than we have it in Maine, I guess. Say, what's that thing made of you're hitting around on the ice?"

"Rubber. Haven't you ever played hockey?"

"No. When I was a kid we used to whack a block of wood around with sticks, but it wasn't much like this hockey. Looks like you've got almost as many rules as there are in football. You're a pretty nice skater, ain't you?"

"Not as good as some of the fellows," replied Clem. "You skate, of course."

Jim nodded. "That's 'bout the only thing I can do real well," he answered. "Don't believe I could get around the way you do, though; dodge and turn so quick and all like that. I ain't so bad at skating fast, but I've got to have plenty of room."

"Better go into the races Saturday morning," suggested Clem. "What's your distance?"

"Distance?"

"Yes, what are you best at? Half-mile? Mile? Two miles?"

"Why, I don't know. I've skated in a lot of races, you might say, but we didn't ever measure them. We'd race, generally, from the old boat-house to the inlet; on Lower Pond, you know. Guess that's about three-quarters of a mile; more or less."

"Why don't you enter for Saturday, then?" asked Clem. "You ought to be able to do the mile if you've been doing the three-quarters, Todd."

"Well, I don't know. Would you? Does it cost anything?"

"Not a cent," laughed Clem. "There's a list of the events over on the notice board in the gym. Better pick out a couple and get your name down."

"Well – Gosh, though, I can't! I didn't bring my skates. I sort of had a notion there wasn't much skating down here. I guess there wouldn't be time to send for them, either, to-day being Tuesday."

Clem leaned over the barrier and viewed Jim's shoes. "No, I guess not, but I think Mart's skates will fit you. Drop in later and we'll see. He doesn't use them much."

"Maybe he wouldn't like me to have them," responded Jim doubtfully. "Anyway, I ain't skated since last winter, Harland, and I guess I wouldn't be much good. Much obliged to you, but maybe I'd better not."

"Well, if you change your mind – " Clem hurried away to try some shots at goal before the whistle blew again.

Just before supper-time, however, Jim wandered into Number 15. He announced that he guessed he'd take part in those races if it was all right about the skates. "There's a two-mile race down, I see, and I guess I'd like to try that."

"Two miles? Thought you'd been doing three-quarters," said Clem, while Mart dug his skates out of the closet.

"Yes, but sometimes I got licked, and I've got a sort of notion I can do better at a longer distance. Maybe I'll try for the mile, too. I guess there's a lot of pretty good skaters going into it, eh?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Clem, "but you'll have a good time. You don't mind getting beaten, do you?"

Jim frowned slightly. "Why, yes, I guess I do," he replied. "Every fellow does, don't he?"

"Well, I meant to say you didn't mind much. Of course no fellow wants to take a defeat, but he has to do it just the same sometimes, you know. And there's a whole lot in taking it the right way."

"The right way?" inquired Jim.

"Why, yes, Todd. Look here, are you joshing me? You know what I mean, confound you!"

"Well, I don't know as I do," said Jim doubtfully. "I don't get mad when I'm licked, if that's what you mean. Leastways, I don't let on I'm mad. But it don't make me feel any too good to get beat!"

"I suppose your trouble is that you've never been beaten often enough to get used to it, then," answered Clem. "Getting mad doesn't do any good, you crazy goof. You want to smile and make believe you like it."

"What for?"

"Oh, for the love of Liberty," wailed Clem, "take this fellow off me, Mart! He's worse than a Philadelphia lawyer!"

Mart's return with the skates provided a diversion. They were a size too small, but after a long and admiring appraisal of them Jim declared that they would do. "I never saw a pair just like these before," he confided admiringly. "What they made of, Gray?"

"Aluminum, mostly. Light, aren't they? Like them?"

"Gosh, yes, but I don't know if I can do much with them. They don't weigh more'n a third what mine do. I'm going to try them, just the same. I'm much obliged to you."

"You're welcome. Just see that you win a race with them. We'll go down and root for you, Todd."

"I might win the two-mile race," replied Jim, "if I get so I can use these right. I'll try 'em tomorrow."

They didn't see Jim again until the morning of the races. It was a corking day, that Saturday, with a wealth of winter sunshine flooding the world and only the mildest of northerly breezes blowing down the river. The weather and the list of events ought to have brought out a larger representation of the student body, but as a matter of fact by far the larger portion of those who had assembled at ten o'clock were contestants. Clem, yielding to the solicitations of the Committee, had entered for three races at the last moment, and it wasn't until he had won the 220-yard senior event in hollow fashion from a field of more than a score of adversaries and been narrowly beaten in the quarter-mile race that he encountered Jim.

Jim had discarded his beloved gray sweater and was the cynosure of all eyes in a mackinaw coat of green and black plaid. The green was extremely green and the plaid was a very large one, and Jim presented an almost thrilling appearance. Under the mackinaw, his lean body was attired very simply in a white running shirt, and Clem addressed him sternly.

"Want to catch pneumonia and croak?" he demanded. "Don't you know you can't skate with that state's prison offense on and that if you take it off you'll freeze stiff? Where were you when they handed brains out, Todd?"

Jim grinned. "Hello," he replied. "That was a nice licking you gave all those other fellows. And, say, if you'd got going quicker in that other race you'd have made it, easy."

Clem was looking attentively at the mackinaw. Now he felt of it. "Say, that's some coat, son. Where'd you get it?"

"Back home."

"I'll bet it's warm. I never saw one made of as good stuff as that is. Any more like it where it came from?"

Jim chuckled. "I'm going to write pop to send down a couple dozen of them," he said. "You're about the tenth fellow that's asked me that so far. I could sell a lot of 'em if I had 'em."

"Joking aside, though, can I get one, Todd?"

"Sure. Pop sells them. I'll give you the address if you want to send for one. I've given it to a lot of fellows already."

"Oh, well, if the whole school's going to come out in them I guess I'll pass," said Clem regretfully. "I suppose those are what the lumbermen wear, eh?"

Jim nodded. "Lots of folks wear them. They're mighty good coats. Only six dollars, too. Better have one. Maybe pop'll give me a commission."

"Six dollars! I believe you're trying to make a dollar rake-off on each one! Say, what are you down for, Todd?"

"Down for? Oh, the mile and two miles. You?"

"Just the half. I'll get licked, too. See you later. But, honest, Todd, you oughtn't to skate two miles in just that cotton shirt, you know."

"Warm enough. It ain't real cold to-day. Hope you win."

But Clem didn't, making rather a sorry showing in fact.

There was an obstacle race for the younger chaps next, an event that provided plenty of amusement for entrants and spectators alike, and then the contestants for the mile were called. This event was a popular one, it appeared, for sixteen youths of all ages and from all classes answered. A group of freshmen, about twenty in all, cheered lustily and unflaggingly for their favorite, a small, slim, capable appearing boy named Woodside. Jim towered over most of the lot, although his bare brown head didn't top that of Newt Young, guard on the football team and a senior entrant. The seniors were represented by several others, but their hopes were pinned on Newt. The bunch sped away at the crack of a pistol and were soon well spread out.

Jim didn't have much hope of capturing that race, and certainly no one who watched him could have censured him. Jim's skating was far from graceful. He didn't suggest the flight of a bird, for instance. Observing Jim, you were reminded chiefly of a windmill that had somehow got loose and was blowing down the ice, blowing fast, to be sure, but wasting a deal of motion. Jim's arms did strange antics, seeming never to duplicate a single movement that was once made. And he appeared to have more than the usual number of joints in his long, thin body. He bent everywhere; at knees, waist, shoulders, neck, elbows and wrists; and some other places, too, unless sight deceived the onlookers. But at the quarter distance he was still among the first half-dozen, and when the turn was made those at the finish couldn't determine for some moments whether he or young Woodside led.

It promised to be a close finish, in any case, for behind the two leaders sped Newt Young, showing lots of reserve, and, not yet out of the race, four others followed closely. But Jim began to fall back after the race was three-fourths over, and for a hundred yards Woodside loomed as the winner, while his enthusiastic classmates howled ecstatically. Then, however, Young edged past Jim and set off after the freshman and for the final fifty yards it was nip and tuck to the line. Young won by a bare three feet, with Woodside second and Jim a poor third.

"Well, feel mad, do you?" asked Clem as he and Mart sought Jim.

Jim scowled and then grinned sheepishly. "I could have won if I'd had my own skates," he muttered. "These are all right, only I ain't used to them. Bet you I could beat that big fellow if I had my own skates."

"Newt Young?" asked Mart. "Well, Newt's a pretty good lad, they say."

“I could beat him,” reasserted Jim doggedly. “He gave me a jab in the nose, too.”

“What? Newt did?” Clem was incredulous. “I didn’t see it. Where was it?”

“Playing football, I mean,” answered Jim. “He was on the first squad when I was playing. He gave me a good one one day, and I don’t guess it was any accident, neither.”

“Ah,” murmured Clem sadly, “I fear yours is a vindictive nature, Todd. I am disappointed in you.”

Jim observed him doubtfully. Then he said “Huh!” Finally he grinned. “Well, he didn’t have any cause to hit me,” he added, “and I sort of wanted to beat him.”

“Maybe he’s down for the two miles,” suggested Mart cheerfully. “Do you know?”

Jim didn’t know, but Clem did. “He is,” declared the latter. “So go ahead and wreak vengeance, Todd. You have my blessing. And I guess they’re about ready for you, too.”

“Gosh, I wish I had my own skates,” muttered Jim wistfully.

“No alibis, Todd,” said Clem sternly. “Do your duty.”

CHAPTER IV

CLEM GETS A LETTER

There were only five entries for the two-mile race, all senior and junior class fellows. The course was twice around the half-mile flag, which made for slower time but enabled the audience to keep the skaters in sight. The five started briskly from the mark, but this event called for less speed than had the one-mile race, and none of the contestants seemed especially anxious to set the pace. It was, finally, Newt Young who took the lead, with a junior named Peele next and Jim Todd third. That order held to the turn and all the way back to the line. Some one clocked Young at three minutes and eighteen seconds, but in view of the final figures that timing may have been wrong. The line was well strung out when it turned again toward the distant flag, with the first three skaters at four-yard intervals and the last two close together a hundred feet back. Not until the figures had grown small in the distance once more did the order change. Then the spectators saw Jim Todd pass Peele and fall in close behind the leader. That was a signal for triumphant cheers from a small coterie of devoted sons of the Pine Tree State, to whose voices Clem and Mart added theirs. Such triumph was, however, short-lived, for when Jim, still threshing his long arms about, took the turn around the flag he tried to make it too short and the watchers had a confused vision of the white-shirted youth going over and over, with legs and arms whirling, far across the distant surface.

“That,” observed Clem dryly, “lets our Mr. Todd out of it.”

The capsized one made a really astounding recovery and was on his blades again almost before the spectators had sensed the catastrophe, but Peele had passed him by that time, and Young was well away on his last dash. The other two contestants, while still grimly pursuing, were already out of the result. The half-dozen “Maniacs,” as Clem dubbed them not very originally, refused to own defeat for their favorite and continued to howl imploringly for Jim to “Come on and win it!” It is doubtful if Jim heard that demand, for he was still a long way off and there was plenty of other shouting beside that of the Maine contingent, but it did look as if he had, quite of his own accord and without prompting, made up his stubborn mind to do that very thing! He went after Peele desperately and gradually closed the distance. Then, while the growing excitement of the onlookers became every instant more vocal, he edged past his classmate and steadily widened the ice between them. Doubtless the fast-flying Young looked horribly like the victor to Jim just then; he surely looked so to those at the line; and probably the best that Jim hoped for was a close finish. In any event, Jim came hard, desperately, arms flying all ways at once, a wild, many-jointed figure that seemed somehow to fairly eat up distance.

At the quarter-mile he was undoubtedly gaining on Young, and public sympathy, ever tending toward the under dog, veered from the senior suddenly and surprisingly, and the loyal sons of Maine found their hoarse ravings drowned under a greater volume of cheers for Jim Todd. “Come on, Todd! You can beat him!” “Skate, Skinny Boy! Come on! Come on!” “You’ve got him, Todd! Hit it up! Hit it up!” Even Mart, who was a most reticent youth when it came to public vocal demonstrations, appeared to be trying very hard to climb Clem’s back and yelling: “*Todd! Todd! Todd! Todd!*” in the most piercing tones about four inches from Clem’s left ear. Clem, though, failed to comment on the phenomenon at the time, being extremely busy enticing Todd to the finish with both voice and gesture!

It was somewhere about three hundred yards short of the line that Jim realized that defeat was not necessarily to be his portion, that Newt Young’s admirable grace and form were at last lacking and that that youth was probably as tired as Jim Todd was. Jim devoutly hoped he was even more tired, although he couldn’t conceive of such a thing! Any one who has taken a header in an ice race knows that it produces a most enervating effect and, for a time at least, leaves one in a painfully breathless condition. Perhaps Jim recalled that, in his opinion, superfluous tap on the nose of some three months

previous, and perhaps the recollection of that painful indignity urged him to superhuman effort. That as may have been, the runaway windmill kept on closing the gap, slowly but inexorably.

The distance between the two dwindled from eight yards to half that many, from four yards to two, from two to one! They were almost stride for stride as they swept down on the finish line. Young, suddenly aware of the loss of his advantage, seemed at once incredulous and disheartened. There was a brief instant when he faltered, and in that instant Jim swept into the lead. Perhaps thirty yards still lay before the adversaries, and Young seized on his courage and determination again. But once in the lead Jim was not to be headed. Indeed, it seemed that until the instant of passing Young he had not shown what real speed was! The tall youth found in those last few yards some joints he had not suspected the possession of, made surprising use of them, swayed, bent, buckled and threshed down the ice with the lithe grace of a camel with a hundred-mile gale behind it, and gyrated across the finish line a good eight yards ahead of his adversary!

The sons of Maine went crazy, every one yelled and the official timekeeper proclaimed that the school record had been burst into infinitesimal fractions! As no one seemed to know what the Alton Academy record for the two miles was, the present time of six minutes and forty-one seconds was accepted as something to cheer for. So every one cheered again. And about that time Young pushed through to Jim Todd and shook hands with him, and Jim grinned and forgot to say anything about that incident on the gridiron, and every one went home.

But Jim Todd leaped into mild and momentary fame, and for some weeks was pointed out as “that long drink of water who beat Newt Young on the ice and broke the school record for the mile or two miles or something.” Perhaps his fame would have lived longer if, at about that time, Alton hadn’t played her final hockey game with Kenly Hall and smeared up the Cherry-and-Black to the tune of 7 goals to 3, a feat which, after last season’s defeat for Alton, was hailed with joy and loud acclaim and resulted later in the election of Clement Harland to succeed himself as captain of the team. Since Clem had been the first youth to get the hockey captaincy in his junior year in the history of that sport at Alton, he was now possessor of the unique distinction of being the only hockey captain ever serving two terms. Mart sniffed and said he hoped Clem wouldn’t get a swelled head over it, but that he probably would and so wouldn’t be fit to live with much longer!

Whether Clem was fit to live with or wasn’t, it strangely happened that Mart never had an opportunity to reach a decision in the matter, for after Spring recess Mart came back to Alton with a vast distaste for exertion and a couple of degrees of temperature that he hadn’t had when he went away. A day later he went to the infirmary and there he stayed until well into May with a case of typhoid that seemed to give much satisfaction to the doctor in charge but that failed to please Mart’s parents to any noticeable degree. It was a strange, washed-out looking Mart who rolled away one morning in an automobile for the station on his way home, and while his smile was recognizable by Clem the rest of him seemed strange and alien. Mart managed a joke before the car started off, but it was such a weak, puerile effort that Clem found it easier to cry than laugh over.

During the rest of the term Clem saw more of Jim Todd than ever, for Jim had been sincerely concerned about Mart and had offered all sorts of well-meant but impossible services during the illness, and Clem had liked the kindness and thoughtfulness shown. Besides, Clem felt a bit lonesome after Mart’s departure, and Jim was handy. On one or two occasions Clem even climbed to the upper floor and endured the presence of Bradley Judson for the sake of Jim. Judson, who shared the sloping-ceilinged room with Jim, was no treat, either, according to Clem!

At home, Mart wrote an occasional brief letter. He said he was getting along finely, but the letters didn’t sound so. Jim, however, who, it turned out, had seen typhoid fever before, reassured Clem. Typhoid, declared Jim, left you pretty low in your mind and weak in your body, and it took a long while for some folks to get back where they had been. So Clem took comfort. And then June arrived suddenly, and the school year was over.

Toward the end of July, Clem, who was leading a life of blissful ease at the Harland summer home in the Berkshires, received a letter from Jim. He didn't know it was from Jim until he had looked at the bottom of the second sheet, for the writing was strange to him and the inscription on the envelope – "Middle Carry Camps, Blaisdell's Mills, Me." – failed to suggest the elongated Mr. Todd. Clem tucked his tennis racket under his arm, seated himself on the lower step of the porch and, seeking the beginning of the missive, wondered what on earth Jim was writing about. He wouldn't have been much more surprised had the letter been from the President and summoning him to Washington to confer on the Tariff! He hadn't seen or heard from Jim since June, and, since life had been full of a number of things, hadn't thought of him more than a dozen times. And now Jim was writing him a two-page letter in queer up-and-down characters and faded ink on the cheap stationery of a Maine sporting camp!

"Friend Harland (Clem read): I guess you'll be surprised to get a letter from me and will wonder what in tuck I am writing about. I just heard last week that Mart Gray's folks have taken him to Europe and that he will not be back to school this next year. I'm right sorry he don't pick up faster, but that's the way it is with typhoid lots of times. What I'm writing about is whether you have made any arrangement with any other fellow to room in with you. You see, Harland, it is like this. I wasn't very well fixed where I was last year. Judson is all right, I guess, only I don't cotton to him much. And I was thinking that perhaps if you didn't have any fellow in view to room in with you now that Gray won't be back, perhaps you wouldn't mind me. Of course, you may have some other in mind. I guess likely you have, but I thought there wouldn't be any harm in asking.

"I'm right easy to get along with and I'm neat about the place. I guess that's about all I can say for myself, but you know me well enough to know that we would likely get along pretty well together if you thought well of the notion. Anyway, I'd like you to answer this when you get time and let me know. It will be all right just the same if you don't like the notion or have made other arrangements. I just thought I'd take a chance.

"I'm up here at this place guiding. I'm just a local guide. I'm having a right good time and the pay is pretty fair. There are about seventy folks here this month and lots of women and children. Mostly I look after the women and kids, take them out in the boats or canoes and fishing. There's good fishing here all right, and if you ever want to catch some good bass you come to this camp some time. I guess you wouldn't be able to come up for a spell this summer. I would show you where you could catch them up to three pounds and no joking. The regular guides here are a fine lot of fellows, and we have some pretty good times. They eat you well, too, here. I'd like for you to come on up if you could, if only for a week. I would guarantee you to catch more fish here in a week than you would most anywhere else in a month. Well, let me hear from you, please, pretty soon, because whatever way you say I'm going to see if I can't make a change this fall. I hope you are having a pleasant summer. Yours sincerely, James H. Todd."

Clem smiled when he had finished the letter. Then he frowned. It was going to be rather awkward. How could he tell Jim that he didn't want him for a room-mate without hurting the chap's feelings? "It will be all right just the same if you don't like the notion or have made other arrangements." Clem reread the sentence and smiled wryly. It was all well enough for Jim Todd to say that, but Clem knew very well that it wouldn't be "just the same." The difficulty was that he hadn't made other arrangements. He might tell Jim that he had, but that would be a lie, and Clem didn't like lies. Besides, Jim would find out he had lied, and be a lot more hurt than if he had been told

the unflattering truth! Clem wished mightily that he could have foreseen this situation and written to Mr. Wharton, the school secretary, as soon as the tidings of Mart's withdrawal had come. Wharton would have arranged things for him in a minute. Instead, though, he had kept putting the matter off, and now this had happened. Gosh!

Clem recalled the fantastic figure that had wandered into Number 15 that afternoon. If the fellow would only dress less like a – a backwoodsman – it would be something. Then Clem recalled the fact that toward the end of the Spring term Jim had looked a great deal more normal as to attire. Clem sighed perplexedly. He liked Jim, too, he reflected. There were lots of nice traits in the fellow. In fact, after Mart had gone home he had preferred Jim's society to that of most of the other chaps he knew in school; and he knew a good many, too. Then what was wrong with having Jim for a roommate? Clem pondered that for some time. "Raw" appeared to be the most damaging charge he could bring against the applicant, and that didn't seem to him an altogether sufficient indictment. Clem had never suspected himself of being a snob, but just now the possibility occurred to him abruptly and unpleasantly. To get away from the idea he reread Jim's letter, and this time he read as much between the lines as in them.

It had taken courage to write that letter, he told himself. He would wager that Jim had put it off more than once and had made more than one false start. There was a humility all through it that was almost pathetic when one remembered that the writer wasn't much under six feet in height! Yes, and he wasn't so small other ways, Clem reflected. Considering that he had entered Alton without knowing a soul there, and had burst smack into the junior year, too, Jim had done pretty well. He was no pill, even if he did wear queer things and could be held accountable for the epidemic of loud-plaid mackinaws that had raged violently throughout the school in the late Winter! He had flivvered at football, to be sure, but he had won momentary fame as a skater, and he had organized the Maine-and-Vermont Club. That last feat proved pretty conclusively, thought Clem, that the fellow had something in him. After all, then, the worst you could say of him was that he was – Clem searched diligently for the word he wanted and found it – uncouth!

His thoughts went back to the afternoon when Jim Todd had first edged into view and to Mart's almost impassioned utterances just previous thereto. Clem smiled. Mart had been hankering for new types and then Jim had walked in quite as if he had been awaiting his cue off-stage! Clem's smile, though, was caused by the recollection that Mart hadn't been nearly so enthusiastic about "new blood" in the concrete – meaning Jim Todd – as he had been in "new blood" in the abstract! Mart had tolerated Jim, but had never derived much pleasure from the acquaintanceship. Old Mart was a heap more conservative than he had thought himself!

Then, thinking of Mart, Clem remembered how perfectly corking Jim had been during Mart's illness. If he hadn't done a great deal to help it was only because there had been so little he could do. He had always been ready, always eager, always sympathetic. Yes, and there were those two days when poor old Mart had been so beastly sick, and Clem had worried himself miserable, or would have if Jim hadn't sort of stuck around and kept telling him that folks could be awfully ill with typhoid and yet pull out all hunky; that he'd seen it more'n once. Why, come to think of it, there had been three or four days when Jim had been with him half the time! How had he done it? He must have missed class more than once, and as for studying – well, he just couldn't have studied!

Clem got up very suddenly, stuffed Jim's letter in a pocket of his white flannels and stared savagely at an inoffensive palm in a gray stone jar. But though he looked at the palm he didn't seem to be addressing it when he spoke, for what he said was: "Clem, you're a low-lived yellow pup! Get it?"

CHAPTER V

A NEW TERM BEGINS

Clem returned to school the day before the beginning of the Fall term to find Alton looking sun-smitten and feeling exceedingly hot. The air, after the fresh, sweet breezes of the Berkshires, seemed stale and stifling, although when the cab had borne him past the business section of the town and residences surrounded by lawns and gardens and shaded by trees had taken the place of brick blocks there was a perceptible change for the better. It had been a dry summer and the campus showed it as Clem was hurried up Meadow street. The trees looked droopy and the grass parched. The buildings lined across the brow of the campus had a deserted appearance, with only here and there a window open to the faint stir of air. He almost wished he had waited until to-morrow.

The cab swerved to the right, proceeded a short distance along the gravel and stopped with a sudden setting of squeaking brakes in front of the first building. Clem helped the driver upstairs with the trunk, their feet echoing hollowly in the empty corridors. Number 15 was hot and close, and Clem sent the two windows banging up even before he paid the cabman. When the latter had gone clattering down again Clem removed his jacket and looked speculatively about him. The old room looked sort of homelike, after all, he concluded. He was glad that Mart had decided to leave his furnishings and pictures for the present. Jim Todd's possessions up in Number 29, as Clem recalled them, were few and more useful than ornamental! Of course, Clem could have spread his own pictures and things about a bit more, but they'd probably have looked sort of thin. He opened the door of Mart's closet and the drawers of his chiffonier and sighed as he saw what a deal of truck there was to be packed. However, he had the rest of the afternoon and most of the morning for his task. He routed a packing-case of Mart's from the basement store-room, tugged it up to the room and started to work.

At five o'clock he had made the disconcerting discovery that Mart's clothing and books and small possessions, which had seemed to bulk so large before, wouldn't fill the big box more than three-quarters full, and had thrown himself into a chair to consider the fact and cool off when footsteps sounded below the window and then came nearer up the stairs. Then a voice sounded.

"You up there, Clem?"

"Yes! Come on up!"

"Saw your window open," panted Lowell Woodruff as he came in, looking very warm, "and thought you must be up here. How are you?" The two shook hands, and Lowell subsided on the window-seat. "What's brought you back so early?"

Clem pointed to the packing-case. "Mart's not coming back this fall, and I've got the job of getting his stuff packed up and shipped home to him."

"Oh! Yes, I heard he was off to the Continong, lucky brute! What price a winter on the Riviera, eh? Some guys get it soft! Who's coming in here with you?"

"A chap named Todd. You know him, I guess. He's in our class."

"Jim Todd? Sure I know him! And I'd like to meet up with the silly ass, too. He got notice to report for early practice, and he hasn't shown hide nor hair."

"Football?" Clem laughed. "I don't believe you'll catch him, Woodie. Didn't you know he tried it last year and resigned?"

"Crazy nut!" said Lowell disgustedly. "Sure, I knew it, but that's got nothing to do with this year. Listen, that guy ought to be able to play football, Clem. He was all right for a fellow who didn't know anything about it, but he didn't get handled right, see? He's queer. Stubborn, too, sort of. And Dolf Chapin wouldn't see it. You know Dolf. Thinks every one's got to dance when he fiddles. Todd got discouraged and told Dolf so and Dolf laughed at him and told him to quit his kidding. Bet you I could have kept Todd going and made him like it."

“Why didn’t you?” asked Clem.

“What chance? You know Dolf. Nice guy and all that, but no one else must say a word when he’s around. An assistant coach here hasn’t any say about anything. All he does is run errands and pick up things that the players throw down. I could see that Todd was getting tired and – ”

“You really think he could play?” asked Clem incredulously.

“Jim Todd? Sure he could! Why not? Put twenty pounds on him – ”

“How would you do it?”

“Feed him up, of course. Pshaw, fellows like him don’t know what to eat. Three weeks at training table would put the tallow on him so you wouldn’t know him!”

“Wasn’t he at table last Fall?”

“No. He would have been if he’d stuck a few days longer, I guess, but there were six or eight fellows who didn’t come to the table until after the Hillsport game. That was another of Dolf’s fool notions.”

“How many fellows have you got here now?”

“Fourteen. Billy Frost didn’t show up; missed a steamer or something; and a couple more failed us. Your friend Todd was one. He didn’t even write and tell us to chase ourselves, drat him! And we need another tackle like thunder.”

“Tackle!” Clem whistled. Then he chuckled. “Gosh, Woodie, I can’t see Jim Todd playing tackle! How’d you happen to send him a call, anyway? Thought you only had the old players back for this early season stunt.”

“We needed tackles, like I’m telling you, and both Johnny and I liked Todd’s looks last season, and there weren’t many fellows for the position. Doggone it, Clem, you don’t realize that we lost most of the team last June!”

“How come? Billy Frost, Charley Levering, Fingal, Whittier – ”

“Oh, sure! And ‘Pep’ Kinsey and ‘Rolls’ Roice; but outside of Billy and Gus Fingal and Pep Kinsey they’re all new men, aren’t they? Sure, they played against Kenly, but that don’t make ’em veterans! We’ve got to build a whole new team – pretty near, Clem. That’s why I want all the fellows I can get who happen to know a football from a chocolate sundae, and that’s why I’d like to see this here Jim Long-legged Todd and tell him what I think of him!”

“Stick around until to-morrow and you’ll get a chance. But I don’t believe you’ll dent him any. I guess he’s through with football, if he ever began.”

“Can’t help that, old son. We’ve got to have him; him and two or three others who quit last year for one reason or another; usually on account of trouble with the office. I’m gunning for ’em. Say, Clem, you might help a bit, you know.”

“How?”

“Well, you and Todd are sort of thick, I suppose. He’d listen to you, wouldn’t he?”

“Maybe. Meaning you want me to talk him around to going back? Any inducements?”

“How do you mean inducements?” asked Lowell suspiciously.

“Well, a banana royal at The Mirror, for instikance.”

“Sure! Just the same, it’s Johnny who ought to pay for it. It isn’t my funeral whether any one plays or doesn’t play, is it?”

“Well, you’re manager, aren’t you?” laughed Clem. “What’s the manager for if not to do the dirty work and foot the bills? Besides, you’ll work that banana royal into the expense account somehow!”

“A fat chance!” scoffed Lowell. “Why, you can’t buy a pair of shoe-laces without showing a voucher for it! Oh, well, I’ll stand for your drink.”

“No, I’ll let you off, Woodie. But don’t bank too much on seeing Todd out there. I’ll do what I can, but when you said he was a nut you spoke a mouthful. By the way, who’s your trusty lieutenant this year?”

“A fellow named Barr, Johnny Barr. Know him? Not a bad sort, Johnny. There’s likely to be some confusion, though. Some day I’ll yell ‘Johnny’ and Johnny Cade will think I’m getting fresh and crown me!”

“I hope I’m there,” laughed Clem. “Where are you eating to-night?”

“Anywhere you say, if you’re host.”

“Nothing doing. I’m talking Dutch. How about the Beanery?”

“All right. What time? I’m going to get under a shower before I’m ten minutes older. It was as hot as Tophet on that field to-day!”

“Say half-past six. I’ll meet you in front of Upton.”

“You will not. I’m in Lykes this year. Got the room Spence Halliday had; Number 9; hot stuff!”

“No! Who’s with you? Billy Frost?”

“No, ‘Hick’ Powers. Come and see our magnificence. Should think you’d have changed, Clem.”

“What for? You’ve got nothing in your dive the Lykes of this!”

“Oh, good *night!* I’m off! Six-thirty, eh? If I’m not there, step inside and yell. So long!”

“Wait a minute! Listen, Woodie. What would you do with this junk? There’s only enough stuff to fill that case about three-quarters full, and if I ship it like that it’ll be an awful mess when it arrives, I guess. What’s the answer?”

“Stick in some of your own things.”

“No, but really! No joking, Woodie. What would – ”

“Have a heart! Have a heart!” Lowell waved his hands protestingly at the doorway. “Boy, I’ve got *problems!* Don’t pester me with trifles like that!”

The football manager was off, taking the stairs four at a time. Clem went to the window and leaned over the sill. When Lowell emerged from the doorway below he hailed him.

“Oh, Woodie!”

“Yeah, what you want?” Lowell peered up blinkingly through the sunlight.

“Listen, Woodie,” went on Clem earnestly. “Haven’t you got half a dozen old footballs over at the gym that you can’t use?”

“Old foot – Say, what’s your trouble? What do you want ’em for?”

“To fill up this box,” jeered Clem. “Run along, sonny!”

Clem didn’t pass a very restful night. For one thing, Number 15 Haylow was hot and stuffy. Then, too, Clem and Lowell Woodruff and two other fellows had sought to mitigate the heat of the evening by partaking of many and various concoctions of ice cream and syrups, and his stomach had faintly protested for some time. He awoke in the morning, scandalously late, from what seemed to have been a night-long succession of unpleasant dreams. But a bath and breakfast set him right, and afterwards he completed the packing of Mart’s belongings. By rummaging about in the store-room he collected enough pieces of corrugated straw-board and excelsior and old newspapers to fill the top of the packing-case after a fashion, and he hammered the lid down with vast relief, addressed it with a paper spill dipped in the ink bottle and pushed it into the corridor. A visit to the express office completed his responsibilities, and, since it was then only a little after ten, he returned to school and took the path that led, between Academy and Upton Hall, and past the gymnasium, to the athletic field.

Morning practice was already in full swing when he reached the gridiron, and the small squad of perspiring youths were throwing and catching, punting and chasing half a dozen pigskins about the field. Clem greeted the trainer, whose real name was Jakin but who was never called anything but Jake, was introduced by Lowell to Johnny Barr, the assistant manager, and exchanged long-distance greetings with several of the players. Then he found a seat on the edge of the green wheelbarrow in which Peter, Jake’s underling, trundled the football paraphernalia back and forth from the gymnasium and looked on. It wasn’t a vastly interesting scene. Clem, who, while he thoroughly enjoyed watching a football contest, had never felt any urge to play the game, wasn’t able to get any thrill from watching

practice. He amused himself identifying some of the candidates, not such an easy task when old gray jerseys, ancient khaki pants and disreputable stockings comprised the attire of each and every one and effectually disguised individuality. There, however, was Gus Fingal, the captain, tall, with hair the color of new rope; and Charley Levering, taller and lighter and as black of head as a burnt match; and Pep Kinsey, a solid chunk of a youth slated for quarter-back position. And the big, square fellow was, of course, Hick Powers, and the long-legged chap farther down the field who was trying drop-kicks none too successfully was Steve Whittier. The others Clem couldn't place until Lowell came to his assistance. Lowell pointed out Roland Roice – it was fated that he should be known as 'Rolls'! – Sawyer, Crumb, Cheswick, two or three others, but Clem wasn't greatly interested. Later, Coach Cade came off the field and shook hands. Johnny, as he was called by the fellows, though not to his face, was perspiring freely, and his face was the color of a ripe tomato. The coach was a short man, perhaps twenty-eight years of age, with a broad, solid body, a head of thick, bristle-like black hair and two sharp eyes set wide apart. Clem reflected, not for the first time, that Johnny Cade must have been a bad man to say "Whoa" to on a football field in his playing days! He had a regular fighting chin under that smiling mouth of his. Just now, having exchanged greetings with Clem, he was mopping his face with the sleeve of a tattered jersey.

"Hot, isn't it?" he asked. "We've had nearly a week of it here. Mean weather for football work. We usually get it about like this every Fall, though. Sometimes I doubt that this pays very well; this before-season practice. I don't know but that we'd get along just as well without it. But as long as the other fellow does it I suppose we've got to. You look well, Harland." Then his smile deepened. "Lucky for you, though, you're not in my gang. You'd lose about ten pounds on a day like this!"

"I guess so," agreed Clem. "Fact is, Mr. Cade, I've been pretty lazy this summer. Played some tennis and a few games of golf, and that's about all."

"Tennis? Seems to me tennis ought to have kept you harder than you look."

"Well, it wasn't very strenuous, you see. Mixed doubles usually."

"He can't keep away from the girls, Coach," interpolated Lowell, shaking his head sadly. "By the way, Clem here is rooming with that Todd guy that didn't R. S. V. P. to our invitation, and I told him he'd be held accountable for Todd's appearance on this here field not later than one day hence."

"That so? Good idea. We want all the promising material we can get, Harland."

"You think Todd is promising, then, sir?"

"Why, yes, I'd say so. He gave us a mean deal last year, and I ought to refuse to have anything more to do with him, but I can't afford to indulge my personal tastes. Todd looked to me like good material last fall, and I told him that if he would buckle down and learn the game I could pretty nearly promise him a job this year. But he got tired of it and quit in the middle of the season. An odd chap. Stubborn, too. He got my goat for fair, and I said some harsh things to him, but he didn't seem to mind much. About all I could get him to say was 'I guess I'd rather quit.'"

"Well, as I told Woodie, Coach, I'll speak to him, but I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't see it."

"Huh!" said Lowell. "He's got to see it! I'll make his life a burden to him until he does! You know me, Clem."

"Yes, indeed, Woodie, I know what a nuisance you can make of yourself. Go to it, old son."

Mr. Cade chuckled at Lowell's look of outrage and said: "Well, I wouldn't bother with him too much. If he doesn't want to come out after Harland's talked with him I guess we'll be better off without him. After all, a man's got to have some liking for football before he can play it well."

Clem, Lowell and Hick Powers went to luncheon together after practice was over and then repaired to Lowell's room in Lykes and lollied about for an hour or so, by which time the summer-long peacefulness of the school was at an end. Taxi-cabs sped, honking, up Meadow street and swirled into the drive that led along in front of the dormitories, voices awoke echoes in the corridors, feet clattered on the stairs, trunks banged and dust floated in at the window before which the three boys, divested of

coats and collars, lounged. “The clans gather,” murmured Lowell. “Another year of beastly grinding begins. Ah, woe is me!”

Hick Powers, big, homely and good-natured, chuckled deeply. “Hear him, Clem. The old four-flusher! Of all the snaps, he’s got it. Four courses, mind you!”

“How do you get that way?” demanded Lowell indignantly. “I’m taking six the first half-year!”

“Yeah, four required and two snaps! Bible History or – or Eskimo Literature, or something! Gee, it doesn’t take much to get you guys through your senior year!”

“But think how we worked to get there!” laughed Clem. “You’re junior, aren’t you, Hick?”

“Sure! Finest class in school! First in war, first in peace, first – ”

“First at table,” ended Lowell. “What time is it?”

“Twelve after two,” answered Clem. “Guess I’d better mosey along and see if Jim Todd’s arrived.”

“Oh, don’t go,” protested Lowell. “We’re just beginning to like you. What time’s he due?”

“I don’t know. Maybe he won’t get in until late. I suppose it takes quite a while to get here from Maine.”

“Sure. Two or three days. You do the first thousand miles on snowshoes. Then you take a dog-sled at the trading post – ”

“You’re a nut,” laughed Clem. “I’m sorry for you, Hick. How do you think you’re going to get through nearly nine months with him?”

“Oh, he won’t get funny with me,” answered Hick comfortably. “I’ll give him a paddling every now and then. I’ll make a new man of him by Spring.”

“You, you big flat tire!” responded Lowell. “It would take three like you to paddle me! If it wasn’t so hot I’d box your ears for making a crack like that right in front of visitors!”

Clem’s progress from Lykes to Haylow was retarded by encounters with several acquaintances, and once, having passed the corner of his own building, he spent ten minutes with his arms on the window-sill of a lower-floor room talking to the inmates of it. But he reached his corridor eventually and found the door of Number 15 ajar. As he had closed it behind him in the morning he reached the conclusion that Jim had arrived, and when he had thrust it farther inward and crossed the threshold he decided that the conclusion was correct. Then, as the occupant of the room straightened up from the business of unpacking a suit-case opened on the window-seat, he was in doubt for an instant. If this was Jim, what had happened to him?

CHAPTER VI

JIM REPORTS

After they had shaken hands, Clem took a good look at his new room-mate. The change in Jim's appearance was due to two things, he decided. In the first place, Jim was dressed differently. He wore trousers of a grayish brown, a white negligee shirt with a small blue stripe, a semi-soft collar and a neatly tied dark-blue four-in-hand. The shoes were brown Oxfords and evidently new. The coat that matched the trousers was laid over the back of a chair. That suit, Clem reflected, had probably cost very little, but it fitted extremely well and looked well, too. Then Jim had filled out remarkably. He was still a long way from stout, but there was flesh enough now on his tall frame to take away the lanky look that had been his most striking feature last year. He seemed to hold himself straighter, too, as though he had become accustomed to his height, and to move with far less of awkwardness.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" asked Clem.

Jim stared questioningly. Apparently he was not aware of any change, and Clem explained. "Well, you look twenty pounds heavier, Jim; maybe more; and –" But he stopped there. To approve his present attire would be tantamount to a criticism of his former.

"Yes, I guess I am heavier," replied Jim. "I got mighty good food up at Blaisdell's, and a heap of it; and then I was outdoors most of the time. Right healthy sort of life, I guess. Didn't work hard, either; not really *work*."

"I suppose it was pretty good fun," mused Clem. "I'd liked to have got up there for a few days, but it didn't seem possible."

"Wish you had. I'd have shown you some real fishing. Like to fish, Harland?"

"N-no, I don't believe I do. Maybe because I've never done much. But it sounded pretty good, what you wrote, and if father hadn't arranged a motor trip for the last part of the summer I think I'd have gone up there for three or four days."

"Guess you thought that was pretty cheeky, that letter of mine," said Jim consciously.

"Not a bit," Clem assured him heartily. If he had, he had forgotten it now. "Awfully glad to have you, Jim."

"I hope you mean that." Jim laughed sheepishly. "I tried hard to get that letter back after I'd posted it, but it happened that the fellow who carried the mail out got started half an hour earlier that morning, and I was too late."

"Glad you were," said Clem, and meant it. "Hope you don't mind having Mart's things left around. He thinks now he will come back next year and finish out."

Jim looked about the room and shook his head. "Mighty nice," he said. "I've got a few things upstairs that I'll have to move out, but they ain't scarcely suitable for here: there's a cushion and a couple of pictures and a sort of a thing for books and two, three little things besides."

"Bring them down and we'll look them over," said Clem. "What you don't want to use can go in your trunk when you send it down to the store-room. Don't believe we need any more cushions, though." He thought he knew which of the cushions in Number 29 was Jim's! "Too much in a place is worse than too little, eh?"

"I suppose 'tis," Jim agreed. "This room's right pretty now, Harland, and I guess those things of mine wouldn't better it none."

"You'll have to stop calling me 'Harland' sooner or later," said Clem, "so you might as well start now, Jim."

Jim nodded. "I was trying to work 'round to it," he answered. "Guess I'll go up and get those things of mine out of 29."

"I'll give you a hand," said Clem.

It was not until late that evening that Clem found an opportunity to broach the subject of football. “By the way,” he said, “Lowell Woodruff was in yesterday. He’s football manager, you know. Said he’d sent you a call for early practice and that you hadn’t made a yip.”

“Why, that’s right,” replied Jim. “I found a letter from him when I got home three days ago. You see, after I left Blaisdell’s I went over Moose River way with another fellow for a little fishing. Got some whopping good trout, too. So I didn’t get back to Four Lakes until Monday. Then I didn’t know if I’d ought to answer the letter or not. He didn’t say to.”

“No, I fancy he expected you’d show up. Well, there’s no harm done, I guess. Be all right if you show up to-morrow afternoon.” Clem spoke with studied carelessness and stooped to unlace a shoe.

“Show up?” asked Jim. “Where do you mean?”

“On the field. For practice. You’re going to play, of course.” This was more an assertion than a question.

“No,” said Jim, “I tried it last fall and quit. It takes a lot of a fellow’s time, and then I ain’t – I’m not much good at it.”

“Well, Jim, you’ll have a lot more time this year than you had last, you know. And as for being good at it, why, Johnny Cade said only this morning that you looked like promising stuff. Better think it over.”

“You mean Mr. Cade is looking for me to play?”

“Of course he is. You see, the team lost a good many of their best players last June and Johnny’s pretty anxious to get hold of all the material he can. I gathered from what Woodie said that they are looking to you to fit in as a tackle.”

“Tackle? He’s the fellow plays next to the end, ain’t he? Well, I don’t see what he’d want me back again for, after the way he laid me out last year.” Jim chuckled. “Gosh, he ’most tore the hide off me, Clem!”

“Well, if you ask me, it was sort of cheeky, throwing him down in the middle of the season, Jim, and I can’t say I blame him for getting a bit waxy about it. However, he’s all over that. He isn’t holding anything against you; I’ll swear to that; and if you go out you’ll get treated right. Johnny and Woodie both believe in you as a football player, Jim.”

“If they do,” laughed Jim in a puzzled way, “they’ve got more faith than I have. Why, honest, Clem, I don’t know much about the game, even after what they showed me last fall, and I can’t say that I’m keen about it, either. I always thought playing games was supposed to be fun, but I call football mighty hard work!”

“What of it? Aren’t afraid of hard work, are you? You know, Jim, a fellow has a certain amount of – of responsibility toward his school. I mean it’s his duty to do what he can for it, don’t you see? Now, if you can play football – ”

“But I can’t, Clem.”

“You don’t know. Johnny Cade says you can. Johnny’s a football authority and ought to know.”

Jim was silent a moment. Then he asked, almost plaintively: “You want I should play, don’t you?”

“Why, no, Jim. That is – well, I want you to do what you want to do. Of course, if you think – ”

“Yes, but you think I ought to,” Jim persisted. “That’s so, ain’t it?”

“I think,” responded Clem judicially, “that as long as Johnny Cade wants you, and as long as you have no good reason for not playing, you ought to try. I don’t want to influence you – ”

Clem became aware of Jim’s broad grin and ran down. Then: “What you laughing at, confound you?” he asked.

“Wasn’t laughing,” chuckled Jim. “Just smiling at the way you don’t want to influence me.”

“Well, suppose I do?” asked Clem, smiling too. “It’s for the good of the football team, Jim. And, if you must have the whole truth, I promised Woodie I’d talk to you. And I have. And now it’s up to you. You do just as you please. Guess you know best, anyway.”

“Well, maybe I haven’t got any good reason for not playing this year, or trying to,” mused Jim, enveloping himself in an enormous nightshirt. “I don’t think I’ll ever make a good football player, but if those folks want I should try, and you want I should – ”

“Hang it, Jim, don’t drag me into it! I’d feel to blame every time you got a bloody nose!”

“ – I don’t mind doing it,” concluded Jim. “Last year it didn’t seem like I was really needed out there. Maybe this year it will be different. Maybe Mr. Cade can make me into a tackle. If he can he’s welcome. Maybe after I’ve been at it a while I’ll get to like it. Maybe – ”

“Maybe you’ll put out that light and go to bed,” said Clem. “Of course you’ll like it. You’ll be crazy about it after a week or two, or a month or two, or – ”

“Well, if I got so I could really play,” said Jim musingly, as the light went out, “maybe I would. You can’t tell.”

The next afternoon, having resurrected the football togs he had worn the season before, Jim went dutifully over to the field and stood around amongst a steadily growing gathering of old and new candidates. He found several fellows that he knew well enough to talk to, but, having arrived early, much of his time was spent in looking on. He observed the coming of Peter, preceded by a wheelbarrow laden high with necessities of the game, the subsequent appearance of Manager Woodruff and Assistant Manager Barr, the latter apparently weighted down with the cares of all the world, and then the arrival of Coach Cade, in company with Captain Gus Fingal. By that time fully sixty candidates were on hand and balls were beginning to hurtle around. Formalities were dispensed with to-day. Mr. Cade clapped his hands briskly and announced: “Give your names to Mr. Woodruff or Mr. Barr, fellows, and hustle it up. Men reporting for the first time will start to work on the other gridiron. Last-year fellows report to Captain Fingal here. Let’s get going, Mr. Manager!”

Jim gave his name and other data to Johnny Barr and went across to the second team field. No one seemed interested in his presence there, and he stood around a while longer. Eventually the new candidates stopped coming, and Latham, a substitute quarter-back of last season, took them in charge. Jim went through just such a program as had engaged him a year ago. The afternoon, while not so hot as yesterday, was far too warm for comfort, and the work was a whole lot like drudgery. He caught balls and passed them, chased them and fell on them, awkwardly rolling around the turf, made frantic and generally unsuccessful grabs at them as Latham sent them bouncing away, and then, after a few minutes of rest, started all over again. At four-thirty he trotted two laps of the field, keeping, by injunction, close to the edge of the cinder track.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.