

Barbour Ralph Henry

Quarter-Back Bates



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Ralph Henry Barbour

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CHAPTER I

THE DEPARTURE OF A HERO

It cannot be truthfully said that Dick Bates was overwhelmingly surprised when he reached the railroad station that September morning and found fully a score of his schoolmates assembled there. Wally Nourse had let the cat out of the bag the day before. Wally was one of those well-meaning but too talkative youths such as we have all met. But Dick played the game perfectly this morning, descending from the carriage – Mr. Bates was one of the very few persons left in Leonardville who could afford an automobile and still drove horses – with an expression of questioning surprise. He realized that too much surprise would suggest that he knew the assemblage was there to do him honour; and if, as some said, Dick was conceited, at least he was always careful not to seem so.

Mr. Bates handed the lines to Hogan, the coachman, who had ridden in the back seat surrounded by Dick's luggage, and followed his son to the platform with a satisfied smile on his seamed, good-humoured countenance. It pleased him that this

younger son of his should be popular and sought after. To a certain extent he accepted it as a compliment to himself. Dick was already surrounded by the little throng of high school boys and girls – for the gentle sex was well represented, too – and his father heard him telling them in that pleasant, rather deep voice of his how unsuspected and undeserved it all was. Mr. Bates wasn't deceived, however. Dick had confided to him on the way from the house that there might be a few of the fellows there to see him off. Instead, he chuckled to himself. "You can't beat him at the diplomatic stuff," he thought proudly. Then his smile faded. "Wonder if he isn't a little *too* good at it!" Then Doris Ferguson had spied him and was clinging to his arm and telling him how mean and horrible he was to let Dick go away and leave them, and the other girls, seven in all, were chiming in, and everyone was talking at once. And that pleased Mr. Bates, too, for he liked Doris and, having no daughters of his own, wished he had a girl just like her. He patted her hand and beamed down at her from his six-foot height.

"Now don't you take on so, young lady. Just you remember you've still got me. Course, I can't play one of those half-portion banjos like Dick can, but I'm just as nice as he is other ways!"

Sumner White had drawn Dick apart. Sumner was this year's football captain, and the other boys, watching and trying to appear not to be, felt that words of weight and wisdom were being exchanged over there by the baggage-room door, and wouldn't have interrupted for worlds. What Sumner was saying just then

may have contained wisdom, but certainly wasn't very weighty.

"If you run across any real good plays or wrinkles, Dick, I wish you'd put me on, eh? I guess they play pretty near college football at Parkinson, and you know how it is here. If Murphy ever had a new idea he'd drop dead! Of course I wouldn't give anything away. You can trust me to keep mum, old chap."

"Why, yes, I will, Sum, if I can. But I may not get near the team, you know. I guess they have a raft of corking good players at Parkinson, and – "

"Oh, pickles!" jeered Sumner. "I guess they won't have so many good quarters that you'll be passed up! Bet you anything you'll be playing on the Parkinson team before you've been there a week! Gee, I sort of wish you weren't going, Dick. It's leaving us in a beast of a hole. Say, honest, do you think Rogers could ever learn?"

"I think Sam's the best we – the best you've got, Sum. All he needs is a whole lot of work. Of course you can try Littleton if you like, but you know my opinion of him."

"Ye-es, I know. But Sam's so blamed dumb! Gee, you have to use a sledge to knock anything into – There's your train, I think. She whistled down by the crossing. Well, say, Dick old scout, I sure wish you the best of luck and everything. You're going to make us all mighty proud of you, or I miss my guess! We'll all be rooting for you, you know that. Well, guess the others'll want to say good-bye. Wish you'd drop me a line some time, eh? I'll write, too, when I get a chance. But you know how it's going to

be this fall, with a lot of new fellows to break in and Murphy away more'n half the time, and – ”

“Sure, Sum, I know, but you'll get by all right. I wish I could be here when you play Norristown, but I suppose I'll be busy myself. So long!”

After that there was much confusion. Wade Jennings shoved a package tied with blue and white ribbon, the high school colours, into Dick's hands and tried to make the presentation speech he had been practising for two days. But everyone talked at once, the train came thundering in, and his stammers were drowned in the tumult. Dick had to shake hands all around, darting across the platform at the last moment to say good-bye to Hogan, and then listening to his father's final instructions as to tickets and changing at Philadelphia. A grinning porter took charge of his luggage and Dick followed him up the car steps and from the platform smilingly surveyed the laughing crowd below. Afterwards it came to him that Wally Nourse had been the only one who had looked really sorry, that the others were merely merry and excited! Of course he excepted his father. Poor old dad had really looked quite down at the mouth when, pursued by the high school cheer, the train had pulled out. Tommy Nutting, true to the last to his rôle of school jester, had blown kisses from the summit of a baggage truck, and Doris Ferguson had pretended to wipe tears from her eyes. The rest was a confused memory.

Dick found his seat in the parlour car and watched the frayed

and tattered hem of Leonardville disappear: the brick-yards, the carpet factory, the blocks of monotonous, square, lead-hued houses of the operatives, the tumble-down quarter known as Povertyville, and then, at last, the open country still green and smiling. His last glimpse was of the slender steeple of the Baptist church, white above the old elms around it. He changed his straw hat for a light-weight cap and opened a magazine he had tossed into his bag at the last moment. Then, however, his eyes fell on the ribboned package and he picked it up eagerly. The next moment he remembered his neighbours up and down the aisle and so he pretended to suppress a yawn as he struggled with the entwined ribbons. When the covering was off he found a pair of silver-backed military brushes hidden amidst much rustling white tissue and a folded sheet of paper. The brushes weren't half bad, and although he already had a pair, he made up his mind to use them. The message read: "To Richard Corliss Bates from his friends and fellow-members of the L. H. S. M. C." Then followed some thirty names, the complete roster of the High School Musical Club, and, in a lower corner, in Wade Jennings' uncertain writing, the further message: "There wasn't time to have them marked, but they'll do it the first time you come home."

Dick was pleased in a complacent way. The brushes were nicer, in better taste than he had expected they would be. Of course he had known they were coming: trust Wally for that! But even if Wally hadn't talked, Dick would have expected a gift of

some sort. He was the sort who got gifts, not through any effort of his, but because folks liked him and seemed to want to do things for him. He never went out of his way to gain popularity. He didn't have to. But he enjoyed it thoroughly, and, having known it for some time, had become to regard it as his right. Today, the silver brushes pleased him not because of their value, which, after all, wasn't great, but because they stood as a further tribute to his popularity.

Dick was seventeen, the right height for his age, slender in a well-muscled, athletic way, and undeniably good-looking. His features were regular, with a rather high forehead and a well-cut straight nose. His eyes were brown, a warm brown that held a suggestion of red, and matched his hair. He had a fair complexion with plenty of healthy colour in the cheeks. It was one of the few sorrows of his life that he didn't tan readily, that he had to go through a beastly period of sunburn and peeling skin before he could attain a decent shade of brown. He seemed unaware of his personal attractions, whether he was or not, and his smile, which was not the least of them, won where mere good looks failed. He always stood high in his class, for he learned easily. He had a gift for music and could play any instrument at least passably after a surprisingly short acquaintance. He had a pleasant speaking voice and sang an excellent tenor on the school Glee Club. But it was perhaps in the less polite pursuits that he excelled. He had a record of ten and two-fifths for the hundred yards and had done the two-twenty under twenty-four. He was a fair high-jumper,

usually certain of third place in the Dual Meet. In the water he was brother to a fish. He had played baseball one season not at all badly and could fill in at basket ball if needed. But, when all is said, Dick's line was football. He had played two years on the High School Team at quarter-back. Last year he had been offered the captaincy without a dissenting voice and had refused it, announcing, what he had kept a secret until then, that he was leaving at the end of the school year, and nominating Sumner White. That Sumner was promptly elected was a further proof of Dick's popularity, for ordinarily Sumner would scarcely have been thought of. As a football player Dick was really brilliant. He had a collection of fourteen epistles, which he was not averse to showing to close friends, from as many preparatory schools and smaller colleges urging him to consider their advantages to a person of his scholastic attainments. Parkinson School, however, was not represented in that collection, perhaps because Parkinson was too far away for his fame to have reached it. Dick had chosen Parkinson for the completion of his preparation for college only because his brother Stuart had graduated from there some five years before. Stuart had talked of Parkinson so much that Dick felt that he knew the school and that he was certain to like it. He might have entered two years ago, but had chosen to remain at the high school until he could go to the preparatory school with a fair chance of making the football team. He believed now that the time had arrived. Although he had belittled his chances in conversation with Sumner White,

secretly Dick entertained few doubts of his ability to make the Parkinson team.

He was entering the Third Class and had been assigned a room in Sohmer Hall. Brother Stuart had advised Sohmer, since it was the newest of the dormitory buildings, and Dick had made application the year before. To his regret, he had not been able to get a room to himself, but the fact didn't trouble him greatly. In fact he recognised certain advantages accruing from a roommate. Who that person was to be he had not yet learned.

His train reached Philadelphia at a few minutes before eleven and he had just time to buy a morning paper before the New York Express left. He didn't waste much time on the front page of the journal, soon turning to the football and athletic news. A hair-breadth connection in New York put him on the last lap of his journey, and, after a deliberative meal in the diner and the perusal of one story in the magazine, it was time to gather his luggage together. The train slid into Warne at three-fifty, and Dick, not a little excited under his appearance of perfect calm, alighted.

CHAPTER II

“WASHINGTON P. QUIGGLE”

Stuart had instructed him so thoroughly that Dick knew just which way to turn in order to find a conveyance to carry him to the school, but Stuart had spoken of carriages and Dick found nothing but chugging “flivvers” manned by eager and noisy youths to whom he hesitated to entrust his life. Automobiles, he presumed, had arrived since Stuart’s time. Dick remained so long in doubt that, almost before he knew it, all but one of the throbbing taxies had found their loads and gone rattling off over the cobbles. He made his way to the remaining conveyance quickly then, but not so quickly as to reach it first. A boy a year or so older already had a hand on the door when Dick arrived.

“Goss, Eddie,” Dick heard the boy say. “And don’t spare the horses!”

But Eddie, who Dick had earlier decided was the least attractive of the half-dozen drivers, was not losing any chances.

“Yes, sir! Parkinson School? Step right in. The gentleman inside won’t mind. What building, sir?”

“Sohmer,” answered Dick. And then, to the occupant: “Mind if I go along?” he asked. “This seems to be the only taxi left.”

“Not a bit. The more the merrier! Besides,” he continued as the car shot away from the platform with a jerk, wheeled

suddenly to the left and dashed headlong over the cobbles, “it makes for economy. They put the fare up last spring. It would have cost me a half if I’d gone alone. By the way, are you in a great hurry?”

“Why, no,” answered Dick.

“Well, I am.” He leaned toward the open window in front. “Take me to Goss first, Eddie,” he directed.

He was a tall, rather thin and very long-legged youth with a nose that matched the other specifications, and a pair of blue-grey eyes that, in spite of their owner’s grave and serious expression, seemed to hold a twinkle of amusement or perhaps of mischief. He had placed a very battered suit-case before him on the floor of the car and now put his feet on it, settled to the small of his back and turned a look of polite inquiry on Dick.

“My name’s Quiggle,” he said, “Washington P. Quiggle.” He made a feeble motion toward a pocket. “I haven’t a card with me, I fear. I have, believe me, no desire to thrust my acquaintance on you, but since Fate has thrown us together like this – ” He paused apologetically.

“That’s all right,” said Dick. “Very glad to meet you. My name is Bates.” He smiled. Rather to his surprise Washington Quiggle didn’t smile back. Instead, he put his head a bit on one side and seemed to regard Dick speculatively.

“Showing the teeth slightly,” he murmured. At least, that’s what Dick thought he said, but as there was no sense in the remark, perhaps he was mistaken.

“I beg pardon?”

“Oh, did I speak?” asked Quiggle. “A lamentable habit of mine, Mr. Bates, unconsciously giving utterance to my thoughts. A habit inherited from my grandfather on my mother’s side. Most annoying at times and likely to lead to an erroneous impression of my mentality. And speaking of my grandfather, a most worthy and respected citizen in spite of the misfortune that overtook him in his later years: I refer, of course, to the loss of his mind, accompanied, or should I say superseded, by homicidal mania; speaking of him, then, suppose I relieve myself of my portion of the expenses of this placid journey, thus.” He dug a hand into a trousers pocket and produced a twenty-five cent piece which he handed to Dick. “It will save time and – I was about to say money – and trouble if you will settle with Edward for us both. I thank you.”

“Of course,” murmured Dick. By now he was rather hoping that Goss Hall would be reached before his companion’s perfectly evident insanity took a violent turn! For there was no doubt in Dick’s mind but that Mr. Washington P. Quiggle was what in the everyday language of Leonardville was known as a “nut.” Quiggle had closed his eyes and appeared to be on the verge of slumber, and after a moment’s concerned observation of him Dick turned his gaze to the town through which the car was speeding. The cobbles had given place to asphalt and while Quiggle’s choice of the word “placid” was not entirely justified, at least the car was running much more quietly and

far more smoothly. There were some decent looking shops on each side of the street and a fairly imposing office building occupied one corner of the street into which the taxi suddenly and disconcertingly turned. The lurch may have brought momentary consciousness back to Quiggle, for his eyes opened and closed and he remarked quite distinctly:

“Hard a lee! Man the water-butt! Aye, aye, sir!”

A pleasant wide thoroughfare opened to view right and left at the end of a block, and Dick caught sight of attractive houses set back from the street and lawns and gardens between. Then, without diminishing its twenty-five-miles-an-hour speed, the taxi dashed between two stone gate posts and scurried up a gravelled road bisecting a wide expanse of level turf. Trees grew on each side, but between them Dick had occasional glimpses of the school buildings which, for the most part, were spaced along the further side of the campus. Parkinson Hall he recognised readily from the picture in the school catalogue, a white marble edifice surmounted by a glassed dome, but which was Sohmer he wasn't certain. Having crossed the width of the campus, the taxi swerved perilously to the right in front of Parkinson and dashed on until, with a sudden and unexpected application of the brakes, the driver brought it to a tottering stand-still before the entrance of a brick building. The jar aroused Quiggle and he sat up.

“Ah! Home again as we perceive! Back to the classic shades of our dear old Alma Mater!” he exclaimed as he opened the door on his side by the pressure of one bony knee against the

handle and seized his bag. “Mr. Bates, I sincerely trust that we shall meet again. Should you care to pursue the acquaintance so – so – dare I say – fortunately brought about, you have but to inquire of any resident of this palatial dwelling in order to learn of my place of abode. I’d tell you the number of my room were it not that, owing to an inherited weakness of memory, I cannot at the moment recall it. Eddie, the gentleman within will pay your outrageous charge.”

“Yeah, I know, but – ”

“Edward,” interrupted Quiggle sternly, “the gentleman has my fare and will deliver it to you with his own. Drive on!”

After a moment of indecision and muttering, Edward drove on. Looking back through the rear window of the car, Dick saw Quiggle wave grandly, beneficently ere, bag in hand, he disappeared into Goss.

There was another turn, again to the right, and once more the car stopped. “Here you are, sir,” announced the driver. “Sohmer Hall. You’ll excuse me if I don’t take your bag in for you, but we ain’t allowed to leave the car.”

“That’s all right,” said Dick, emerging. “Here you are.” He held forth a half-dollar. The driver observed it coldly and made no effort to take it. “Quit your kiddin’,” he said.

“Well, that’s all you’ll get,” replied Dick warmly. “That’s the legal fare.”

“It is, eh? Say, where do you get that stuff? Listen, kid. The fare’s fifty cents a person, seventy-five for two. Get me?”

“What! Why, that other fellow said it was – Anyway, he gave me a quarter for his share of it!”

The driver nodded wearily. “Sure he would! That’s him all over. You’re lucky he didn’t stick you for the whole racket. Come across with another quarter, young feller!”

Grudgingly, Dick did so. “If you knew Quiggle was that sort –” he began aggrievedly.

“Who?” asked the driver, a grin growing about his mouth.

“Quiggle. The fellow you left at Goss Hall. I say, if you knew –”

“His name ain’t Quiggle,” jeered the driver. “Gee, that’s a peach! Quiggle! What do you know about that?”

“What is his name then?” demanded Dick haughtily.

“His name’s – Well, it ought to be Slippery Simpson, but it ain’t!”

Whereupon there was a deafening grinding of gears, a snort, and the “flivver” swung about on two wheels and went charging off.

Dick looked after it disgustedly and then, taking up his suitcase, mounted the steps of Sohmer.

“I’ll Quiggle him when I catch him!” he muttered. “Fresh chump!”

In consequence of the episode, Dick reached his room on the second floor decidedly out of sorts. He didn’t mind being cheated out of twelve or thirteen cents, but it disgruntled him to be made a fool of. He wasn’t used to it. At home no one would have though

of attempting such a silly trick on him. He experienced, for the first time since leaving Leonardville, a qualm of apprehension. If Quiggle, or whatever his silly name really was, was a fair sample of the fellows he was to meet at Parkinson, the outlook for being treated with the respect that he was accustomed to was not at all satisfactory. Unconsciously he had journeyed to Warne under the impression that his appearance at school would be hailed with, if not excited acclaim, at least with measurable satisfaction. And here the first fellow he had run across had played a perfectly rotten joke on him! Dick's dignity was considerably ruffled.

Number 14 proved to be a corner study, but not on the front. It wasn't a bad room, Dick decided a bit patronisingly, and the view from the windows was satisfactory. On one side he looked across a bit of the campus and over to the wide street that was lined with gardens and lawns: Faculty Row it was called, although Dick didn't know it then. From the other window he saw a tree-shaded, asphalt-paved road and one or two old-fashioned white dwellings beyond, and a corner of a square brick building set at a little distance just inside the grounds. That, unless he was mistaken, was the Administration Building, and he must go there shortly and register.

Dick turned to the alcove bedroom divided from the study by curtains. There were two single beds there, two dressers and two chairs, and a single window gave light. Also, on one of the beds was an open suit-case, its contents tumbling over onto the white counterpane. One battered end showed the initials "S. G."

Dick wondered if the S stood for Sam. Approaching footsteps in the corridor turned his eyes toward the door, but the steps stopped at a room across the way. There followed the sound of a bag dropped to the floor and then the opposite door banged shut. Dick, back in the study, viewed it without enthusiasm. It was smaller than he liked and the furniture, while there was plenty of it – two small study tables, each under its own side-light, what he mentally dubbed a “near-leather” couch, two easy-chairs and two straight-backed chairs – was very evidently far from new. There was a faded blue carpet-rug on the floor and a short window-seat occupied the embrasure that held the end window. The original colour-scheme had been brown and blue, but the deep tan cartridge paper had faded, as had the alcove curtains and the rug. Here and there, on the walls, a square or oblong of a deeper shade showed where a picture had hung.

Dick had left the hall door ajar and now he was aware of much noise and bustle throughout the building. Doors in the various corridors opened and shut, voices called, someone further along the hall was singing, while, outside, a taxi chugged before the entrance. Dick put his hat on and went out, passing several new arrivals on the way and exchanging with them swiftly appraising glances. The Administration Building stood only a few rods away and Dick’s business was soon attended to, for only a half-dozen or so were before him. Having paid his term bill and inscribed his name on a card that was handed him, he was given a booklet containing the school regulations and general information, a

receipt for his money and a ruled card on which to schedule his recitations. Beside the door was a bulletin board and he paused to read some of the notices posted there. There was a reception to new students that evening at the Principal's residence, a half-year course in geometrical drawing would be conducted by Mr. McCreedy for First and Second Class students and those wishing to sign on should notify him by Saturday, Mr. Nolan would not be able to see students in his advisory capacity until Thursday, subscriptions to *The Leader* could be left at the office here or at the room of the publication, and so on. But the notice that interested Dick most ran as follows:

“Candidates for the First Football Team should report on the field, dressed to play, not later than Wednesday. Attention is called to the school regulation requiring the candidate to pass a satisfactory physical examination before joining the squad.

“Stearns Whipple, Mgr.”

Outside, Dick pulled the booklet from his pocket and sought information regarding physical examinations. He found a whole page on the subject. It was necessary, it appeared, to go to the Physical Director's office in the gymnasium and make application for an appointment. Students failing to keep appointments promptly were required to make new ones. There was much more, but that was sufficient for the present, and Dick made his way back along the road to the gymnasium. Inside, he had to take his place in a line of nearly a dozen boys, and progress

toward the wicket, behind which a youth not much older than Dick supplied information or made out appointment cards, was slow. Eventually, though, Dick reached the window, made known his wants and was given a slip of pasteboard which informed him that the Physical Director would see him at five-fifteen on Wednesday. That was the day after tomorrow. It looked to Dick as if he could not report for football until he had been passed by the Physical Director and could not be passed by the director until it was too late to report for football! Perhaps, however, that notice in the Administration Building didn't mean quite what it said. He would ask someone when he found the chance.

With an hour remaining before supper time and nothing better to do, he wandered across to where a score of fellows were trotting about the gridiron or kicking and catching at the further end of it. That first uninterrupted sight of Parkinson Field greatly increased his respect for the school, and he paused at a corner of the big grand stand and admired. Nearly twelve acres of level turf stretched before him. There were three gridirons, that of the First Team enclosed by a quarter-mile track, as well as several baseball diamonds and numerous tennis courts, both dirt and grass. A handful of onlookers were scattered over the stand and another handful stood along the side-line. A stout, round-faced man in an old sweater and a pair of frayed trousers had "Trainer" written all over him, and since at the moment he was occupied only in juggling a football from one hand to the other, Dick decided to seek information of him.

“My name’s Bates,” announced Dick, “and I’m going to try for the team, but I understand that I’ve got to take my physical examination first. Is that correct?”

Billy Goode viewed him critically before he answered. Rather to Dick’s surprise the trainer seemed not at all impressed by what he saw. “You can report as soon as you like,” he replied at last, “but you can’t play until you’ve been o. k.’d, my friend. What’s your name?”

“Bates,” answered Dick. He had already given it once, but perhaps the other hadn’t caught it. “I’m from Leonardville High.”

“Uh-huh. Played, have you?”

“Yes.” It seemed to Dick that any live, wide-awake football trainer should have been aware of the fact. “Yes, I’ve played quite a little.”

“Uh-huh. Well, you see the manager; he’s around here somewhere, or he was; he’ll look after you. Chandler! That’ll do for today. Jog the track once and go on in.” Billy Goode turned away to meet the remonstrances of a big, heavily-built youth who had been catching punts and returning them a little further along the field, leaving Dick a trifle ruffled. This was not just the sort of reception he had expected. Of course, it was understandable that the Philadelphia papers didn’t penetrate to Warne, Massachusetts, in which case the trainer wouldn’t have read of him, but it did seem that a fellow who had received offers from fourteen schools and colleges should have been heard of even in this corner of the world! Dick put the trainer down as a

person of a low order of mentality.

He went into the stand and sat down there and watched the practice. Evidently most of the fellows at work were last year players, for they handled the ball in a knowing way that precluded their being beginners. No one who looked anything like a coach was on hand, but a dark-haired fellow of eighteen, perhaps, who appeared in command, was probably the captain. And a short, stocky, important-looking youth who had discarded his jacket and was wandering around in a very blue silk shirt was just as probably the manager. Dick didn't seek him, for there would be plenty of time to do that tomorrow. At intervals the trainer summoned one of the candidates and sent him off, usually prescribing a round of the running track first. Dick was glad he did not have to swallow that medicine today, for the weather was extremely warm and humid. He thought that the candidates averaged both heavier and older than he had expected, and he wondered if by any chance his lack of weight would be against him. One of the quarter-backs out there, chasing a squad about in signal drill, was, however, no bigger than he, and possibly no older. Dick guessed he needn't trouble about lack of weight. Quarters didn't have to be big in order to make good. Presently the practice ended and he followed the squad toward the gymnasium and then went back to Sohmer and climbed the slate stairway to the second floor.

He remembered having closed the door of Number 14 on going out, and since it now stood wide open it was fair to assume

that the unknown "S. G." had returned, and Dick entered the study eager, in spite of his seeming indifference, to find out what Fate, in the shape of the school office, had assigned to him as a room-mate.

CHAPTER III

ROOM-MATES

The appearance of the study seemed to have been changed in his absence, and Dick's second glance showed that the change was in the shape of several pictures on the wall, some books on one of the study tables and a large packing case in the centre of the floor from which emerged the corner of a brilliant blue cushion and the lower half of a boy. While Dick looked the rest of the youth emerged slowly until at last, somewhat flushed of face, he stood entirely revealed, clutching triumphantly a pair of battered running shoes. At that moment his eyes fell on Dick and a surprised and very pleasant smile came to his face. He tossed the shoes to the floor, dusted his hands by a simple expedient of rubbing them on his trousers, and nodded, stepping around a corner of the big box.

"Hello!" he said. "I suppose you're Bates. My name's Gard."

He held out a hand and Dick took it as he answered: "Yes. Glad to meet you. We're in here together, I take it."

Gard nodded. "Yes. I got here this noon and helped myself to a desk, but I'm not particular which I have. Same about the beds. We can toss up, if you like."

"It doesn't matter to me," Dick replied. "Suppose you take the first choice of a desk and I'll take the bed I want. That suit?"

“Sure.” Gard was looking at Dick with frank interest, leaning against the packing case, his arms, on which he had rolled up the sleeves of a good-looking shirt, folded. “Yes, that’s fair enough. I took that desk because it happened to be nearest the box, and I’ll keep it.”

Dick laid his hat down and seated himself on the window-seat.

“It’s smaller than I thought it would be,” he said, looking about the study.

“Oh, big enough, isn’t it? It is one of the small ones, though. Some of the rooms on the front are corkers, Bates. I couldn’t afford one of those, though, and this is a lot better than the room I had last year in Goss.”

“Then you – you’re not a new fellow?”

Gard shook his head. “This is my second year. I’m in the Third Class. Are you?”

“Yes. I think I could have passed for the Fourth, but I guess I’d had to work mighty hard to keep up, and I want to play football, you see. So – ”

“Of course! There’s no sense rushing through things too much, Bates. If you’d gone into the Fourth you’d have been through just when you were beginning to like the school. You will like it, I’m sure.”

“I expect to. I had a brother here five or six years ago, and he’s always cracked it up high.”

“That so?” Gard pulled the blue cushion from the box and tossed it across the room. “Put that behind you. Guess I’ll leave

the rest of this truck until after supper.” He seated himself in one of the easy chairs and stretched a pair of rather long legs across the carpet. “Let’s get acquainted,” he added, smiling.

Dick liked that smile and answered it. But for a moment neither followed the suggestion. Gard was looking critically at the pictures he had hung, and Dick had a good chance to size him up. His room-mate was a bit taller than Dick, with rather a loose-jointed way of moving. He didn’t look exactly thin, but there certainly wasn’t any excess flesh about him. The running shoes suggested that he was a track athlete, and Dick surmised that he was a good one. You couldn’t call Gard handsome; perhaps he wasn’t even good-looking in the general acceptance of the word; but Dick liked his face none the less. The forehead was high and the lightish hair of a rather indeterminate shade of brown was brushed straight back from it. That happened to be a style of wearing the hair that Dick had always objected to, but he had to own that the fashion suited Gard very well. It emphasised the lean length of the face and added to the sharp, hawk-like appearance produced by a curved beak of a nose, thin and pointed, and the narrow jaws. But if Gard reminded Dick of a hawk, it was a gentle and kindly one, for the mouth was good-natured and the eyes, darkly grey, were soft and honest. Gard wore good clothes with no suggestion of extravagance. In age he was fully seventeen, perhaps a year more. He moved his gaze from the wall and it met Dick’s. Involuntarily both boys smiled. Then each began to speak at once, stopped simultaneously and laughed.

“You say it,” said Gard.

“I was going to ask if you were a runner.”

“I’m a hurdler. I’ve tried the sprints, but I’m only as good as a dozen others. Sometimes I ‘double’ in the broad-jump if we need the points. You look as if you might be fast on the track, Bates. By the way, what’s the rest of your name?”

“Richard C. The C’s for Corliss.”

“That means Dick, doesn’t it?”

“Surely,” laughed the other.

“All right. Mine’s Stanley; usually abbreviated to Stan. Have you ever done any running, Dick?”

“Yes, I’ve done some sprinting. What’s the hundred-yards record here?”

“A fifth. It hasn’t been bettered in years.”

“That’s a fifth better than I can do.”

“Same here. I tried often enough, too, but I only did it once, and that was in practice, with a hard wind at my back. You play football, you said?”

“Yes, do you?”

Stanley shook his head. “Too strenuous for me. I like baseball pretty well, but it interferes with track work. Guess we’re going to have a corking good eleven this year, and I hope you’ll make it, Dick.”

“Thanks. I may. The fellows look a bit older and bigger than I expected they would, though.”

“Well, they say you have a good deal of fun on the Second

Team, if you don't make the first. And next year you'll probably be a lot heavier. I don't know many of the football crowd, or I'd take you around and introduce you. I wonder if Blash would do you any good."

"Who is he?"

"Wallace Blashington's his full name. He plays tackle on the team; right, I think. He might be a good fellow for you to know if – " Stanley's voice trailed into silence.

"If what?" prompted Dick.

"Well, Blash is a queer customer. He's really a corking chap, but doesn't take to many fellows. That's no insult to you, Dick. He – he's just funny that way. And he's the sort that won't do a thing if he thinks you're trying to pull his leg. Blash hated me – well, no, he didn't hate me; he didn't take the trouble to do that; but he certainly had no use for me the first of last year. We get along all right now, though."

"What happened? To make him change his mind, I mean."

"That was sort of funny." Stanley smiled reminiscently. "We had some scrub skating races last winter on the river and Blash and I were entered in the two-mile event. There were about twenty starters altogether, but we had them shaken at the beginning of the last lap and Blash and I hung on to each other all the way up the river to the finish. I just managed to nose him out at the line, and he was a bit peeved, I guess. He didn't let on, but he was. So, a little while later, when we were watching the other events, he came over where I was and said: 'I believe

I could beat you another time, Gard.’ ‘Well, perhaps you could,’ I answered. ‘Maybe you’ll have a chance to find out.’ I wasn’t cross, but I thought it was a bit unnecessary, if you see what I mean. ‘Wouldn’t care to try it now, I suppose?’ he said. I told him I was tired out, but I’d race him if he liked as soon as the programme was finished. ‘Oh, never mind the rest of it,’ he said. ‘We’re both through. Say we skate down the river a ways and settle the question by ourselves.’ So we did. We went about a mile down, beyond the flag, and Blash said we’d skate a mile down and a mile back, and that we’d turn at the old coal wharf. So we went off together, Blash trying to make me set the pace. But I wouldn’t and so we lagged along abreast for half a mile or so. Then Blash laughed and spurred and I went after him and we had it nip and tuck all the way to the wharf. Coming back there was a wind blowing down on us and we had harder work. Blash was a half-dozen yards ahead and when we came to a turn in the river he stayed along the bank, thinking he’d be more out of the wind. That seemed good sense and I hugged in close behind him. Then, first thing I knew, the ice went crack, and down went Blash. I managed to swerve out and get by, but of course I had to go back and see if he was all right.

“He was about ten feet from shore, flapping around in a little squarish hole he’d made for himself. I asked him if he could break the ice and get ashore and he said he couldn’t, that it was too thick to break with his hands. So I laid down on the ice and crawled over to him, and he got hold of my hands and I had him

pretty nearly out when the crazy ice broke again and we were both in there! In fact, I went down so far that I came up under the ice and Blash had to pull me out to the hole. By that time we were both laughing so we could hardly keep our heads out. The water was just over our depth and the ice was too hard to break with our hands, and we didn't have anything else until I thought of using a skate. That meant getting boot and all off, and Blash sort of held me up while I tried to untie the laces and everything. We were getting pretty stiff with the cold by then, Blash especially, but I finally managed to get one boot off and began hacking at the ice with the skate blade. It was slow work until I had chopped off about a yard. Then we got our toes on the bottom and after that it was easy and we crawled out. I wanted to beat it back to school as fast as I could, but Blash said that we'd catch cold and have pneumonia and die. He said the best thing to do was light a fire. Of course, I thought he was joking, but he pulled out one of those patent water-proof match-safes and if you'll believe it the matches were perfectly dry!

“But the awful thing was that there were only two matches there! However, we got a lot of wood together and some dry marsh grass and twigs, and all this and that, and I kept the wind off, and we made the second match do the trick. In about two minutes we had a dandy hot fire going, took off our outer things and hung them around and we sat there with our backs to the mud bank and steamed. I don't believe any fire ever felt as good as that one did, Dick! Well, that's all of it. Just before dark, we

started back and we never told anyone about falling into the river for months afterwards. We never found out which is the best two-mile skater, but we did a lot of chinning and got to know each other, and since then Blash and I have been quite pally.”

“Quite an adventure,” said Dick. “It’s a wonder you didn’t catch cold, though.”

Stanley laughed. “We did! For a week we were both sneezing and snuffling horribly. Tell you what, Dick. If you haven’t got anything better to do, we might go over and see Blash after supper. I guess this truck can wait until tomorrow. Only don’t say anything about football to him. If you do he will think I brought you over on purpose, so as to – well, you see what I mean.”

“Yes, I see. He might think I was swiping,” Dick laughed. “But, look here, Stan, what could he do, anyway? A fellow has got to make his own way, hasn’t he?”

“Why, yes, I suppose so. But it does help – somehow – to know the crowd if you’re going in for football. At least, it does with making the track team. I don’t mean that there’s favouritism, but – oh, I suppose if you happen to know a fellow and know that he’s all right, you just naturally take a bit more interest in him. That’s the way I figure it out, anyway.”

“Yes, but suppose this fellow Blash – er – ”

“Blashington. Quite a mouthful, isn’t it?”

“Suppose he asks me if I play football? Then what?”

“Oh, just say you do and change the subject. By Jupiter, Dick, it’s ten after six! Let’s beat it over and get some supper. Say, if

you see the steward tonight maybe you can get at my table, if you'd like to. Tell him you've got friends there. It's Number 9. You can sit there tonight, anyway, for Eaton's not back yet, and you can have his place. Know where the lavatory is? Got any towels? Here, take one of mine. Your trunk won't get up until morning, probably. They have so many of them that they can't begin to handle them all today. If you need anything let me know and I'll dig it out of the box for you."

"I've got everything I want in my bag, I think. Much obliged just the same, Stan."

Five minutes later the new friends closed the door of Number 14 and made their way along The Front, as the brick walk leading from side to side of the campus was called. Stanley named the buildings for Dick as they went along: the gymnasium, then Goss Hall, Parkinson, Williams and Alumni. Their journey ended there, but there was still another dormitory nearby, Leonard, and, beyond that, the residence of the Principal. Dick nodded, but it was food he was thinking of just then.

CHAPTER IV

BLASHINGTON

“Of course,” said Stanley, “you can go to ‘Jud’s’ reception if you’d rather, but you’ll have a poor time. You just shake hands with Jud and a bunch of the faculty and Mrs. Jud and stand around until you get tired and go home again.”

“Jud being Doctor Lane?” asked Dick.

“Right! The idea is that you’re to become acquainted with the other fellows and the instructors, but the old boys fight shy of it and the new boys just stand and look at each other, and the faculty always forgets your name the next morning.”

“Well, it doesn’t sound exciting,” acknowledged Dick, “and I’m for cutting it out unless it’s required.”

“It isn’t, it’s elective,” laughed Stanley. “We’ll blow over to Blash’s room presently. He may not be there, but we can try.”

They had finished supper and were strolling along the walk toward the west gate. Windows were open in the dormitories and from the nearer ones came the sound of voices and laughter. Occasionally someone hailed Stanley and they stopped for a moment while the latter held conversation. There were groups of fellows on the turf along The Front, for the evening was warm and still. A bluish haze softened the twilight distances and somewhere toward the centre of the town a church bell

was ringing. It was all very peaceful and homey, and Dick felt no regrets for Leonardville. At the gate which led onto the junction of Linden and Apple Streets they paused a moment. A belated arrival climbed tiredly out of a decrepit taxi in front of Williams and staggered up the steps bearing suit-case and golf-bag. Along the streets and less frequently across the campus the lights gathered brightness in the deepening twilight, although westward the sky was still faintly aglow.

“Where does Blashington room?” asked Dick as they turned their steps back the way they had come.

“Goss,” answered Stanley. “He rooms with Sid Crocker, this year’s baseball captain.”

“Goss?” Recollection came to Dick. “I wonder if you know a fellow named Quiggle – no, that’s not his name. I don’t know what his name is, but he rooms in Goss. He’s a tall, lanky chap with a long nose.”

“Where’d you meet him?” asked Stanley, interestedly.

Dick recounted the incident and, since he didn’t happen to look at Stanley’s countenance while doing so, was not aware of the smile that trembled about the hearer’s lips. “He’s going to pay me the rest of that money when I find him,” ended Dick resolutely. “I thought maybe you’d know who he is.”

“Well, the description isn’t very – er – whatyoucallit, Dick,” replied the other gravely. “I dare say the fellow was just having a joke with you.”

“I dare say, but he was too fresh. I felt like an awful fool when

the taxi driver called me down for offering him half a dollar instead of seventy-five cents. Well, I suppose I'll run across him pretty soon."

"Oh, you will," Stanley assured him almost eagerly "You're absolutely certain to, Dick!"

"What's the joke?"

"Joke?"

"Yes, what are you snickering about?"

"Oh, that? I – I thought I wanted to sneeze. It's sort of dusty this evening."

"I hadn't noticed it," said Dick suspiciously. But Stanley's countenance was quite devoid of amusement, and he accepted the explanation. In front of Goss, Stanley backed off onto the grass and looked up to one of the third floor windows.

"There's a light in his room," he announced. "Somebody's in, anyhow. Let's go up."

So, Stanley leading the way, they climbed the two flights of worn stairs, for Goss didn't boast slate and iron stairways, and traversed a length of corridor to where the portal of Number 27 stood partly open. Stanley thumped a couple of times on the door and entered. Someone within said, "Come in, Stan," and Dick, following his friend, saw a rather short, stockily-made youth stretched on the window-seat at the end of the room. "Excuse me if I don't rise," continued the boy. "I happened to look out a minute ago and saw you rubbering up here." He shook hands with Stanley and then, seeing Dick for the first time, muttered

something, and swung his feet to the floor.

“Shake hands with Bates, Sid,” said Stanley. “Dick, this is Mr. Crocker, well-known in athletic circles as a shot-putter of much promise.”

“Shut up,” grumbled Crocker. “Glad to meet you,” he added to Dick. “Sit down, you chaps, if you can find anything to sit on. Blash has got his things all over the shop. Bring up that chair for your friend, Stan. You can sit here, and I’ll put my feet on you. Pardon me if I return to a recumbent position, will you? I’m very weary.”

“Where’s Blash?” asked Stanley. “Gone over to Jud’s, I suppose.”

“Not exactly. He’s down the hall somewhere. He suggested tossing up to see whether he or I should unpack the bags, and he lost. So, of course, he remembered that he had to see a fellow and beat it. He will be back in a few minutes, I guess. This is a fair sample of the way in which he meets his obligations, gentlemen. I’m ashamed of him.”

Sid Crocker sighed, stretched, and deposited his feet in Stanley’s lap. He was a nice looking boy of apparently eighteen years, with light hair and a round, much tanned face. He seemed unnecessarily serious of countenance, Dick thought, but afterwards he found that Sid’s expression of gravity was no indication of mood. Sid caught Dick’s gaze and was reminded of his duties as host.

“I guess I didn’t quite get your name,” he said, politely.

“Bates,” said Stanley. “We’re together over in Sohmer. This is his first year.”

“Bates?” echoed Sid. “Bates! Where have I – Ah! I remember.” He sank back against the cushions again, closing his eyes as though in deep thought. Dick determined to be modest, but it was flattering to find that someone here had heard of him. He waited for Crocker to proceed, and so did Stanley, but instead Sid wriggled off the window-seat. “Just excuse me a minute, will you?” He crossed to a chiffonier, opened a drawer and fumbled within. “Just remembered something. Fellow downstairs wanted me to lend him – er – ” Whatever it was the fellow downstairs required they didn’t learn, for Sid removed something from drawer to pocket and made for the corridor. “While I’m about it,” he added from the doorway, “I’ll find Blash and fetch him back.” Dick got the impression that he was seeking to convey to Stanley more than his words expressed, for he stared very hard at that youth as he spoke and continued to stare for an instant longer before he disappeared.

“Rather a jolly old room,” said Stanley, when they were alone. “These old places fix up nicely, I think.”

Dick agreed. Personally he didn’t care for the idea of sleeping and living in the same room, but the low studding, and the deep window embrasure and the scarred, dark-painted woodwork were somehow very homelike. The walls held dozens of pictures of all sorts: photographs, posters, engravings, etchings, a veritable hodge-podge. Amongst them were strange trophies,

too: part of a wooden board bearing the strange legend "TE WAY S PASSING" in two lines, evidently half of a sign that had been sawed in two; a fencing mask; a canoe paddle with a weird landscape painted on the broad end; a cluster of spoons and forks tied together with a brown-and-white ribbon; several tennis rackets; a lacrosse stick; a battered baseball adorned with letters and figures and tacked to the moulding by its torn covering; several faded or tattered pennants, one bearing a big blue K which Dick presumed stood for the rival school of Kenwood. Between the two narrow beds was a good-sized study table littered with books and clothing and odds and ends awaiting Blashington's return. Two chiffoniers and three chairs about completed the furnishings. The beds held bags, partly unpacked, and two steamer trunks blocked the passages between beds and table.

"Blash has had this room four years," mused Stanley. "Says he would be homesick if he went anywhere else. The joke about Sid's shot putting, by the way, is that he tried it last fall and Blash got a cannonball that weighed about thirty pounds, and worked it off on him. Sid almost killed himself trying to putt it more than twelve feet. Then he noticed that Blash and the others were using another shot, and got onto the joke. Here they come."

With Sydney Crocker was a tall, thin fellow who, to Dick's utter amazement, wore a long and drooping black moustache. Perhaps the gorgeous luxuriance of that moustache was a surprise to Stanley as well, for Dick noted that the latter stared at it

fascinatedly for a long moment ere he greeted its wearer. Even then he seemed to find difficulty in speaking. Perhaps the dust was annoying him again. Dick awaited an introduction while the thought that there was something wrong with that moustache, grew from a mere suspicion into a certainty. In the first place, no fellow of Blashington's age could grow such a thing. In the second place he wouldn't be allowed to wear it in a preparatory school. In the third place it was much too good to be true; too long, too black, too – Why, of course, it was a false one stuck on! Dick smiled knowingly as Blashington stepped over a trunk and held out a bony hand.

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. Bates,” said Blashington, heartily. “Any friend of Stan's is mine to the extent of ten dollars. Sit down, everyone. Dear me, you haven't got these things put away yet, Sid. So sorry to have you chaps find the room in such a mess. I don't know what Sid's been doing, I'm sure.” Blashington chatted on, but Dick noted that there was a distinct air of restraint about the others. Indeed, Stanley appeared to be actually suffering from restraint, for his face was very flushed, and the low sounds that came from him spoke of deep pain.

“You are a new-comer, I understand, Bates,” Blashington continued, smiling amiably behind that ridiculous moustache. “I hope you will like us and spend a pleasant and profitable year in these classic shades.”

He said more, but Dick wasn't listening now. “Classic shades!” Where had he heard that expression recently, and who had used

it? Then memory came to his aid and he knew! His face stiffened and his cheeks paled. Blashington, reading the symptoms aright, paused in his rhetorical meanderings and laughed.

“Bates is on, Stan,” he said. “I see the warm light of recollection creeping over his face. Further attempts at disguise are futile, not to say idle. The clock strikes twelve. Unmask!” Blashington pulled the moustache from his face and tossed it to the table. “Excuse the little jest, Bates. It was Sid’s thought. Like most of his ideas, it didn’t work.”

Stanley and Sid were laughing enjoyably, but Dick couldn’t find any humour in the trick. He remained silent, while Sid gasped: “Gee, Blash, you did look an awful ass with that thing on!”

“Did I? Well, I seem to have offended Bates. He doesn’t look as though he thought I was a bit funny.”

“I don’t,” said Dick, stiffly. “Either now or this afternoon.”

“Oh, come, Dick!” protested Stan. “Take a joke, won’t you?”

“Dry up, Stan,” said Blashington. “Bates has a right to feel peeved if he likes to. Look here, Bates, I’m sorry I offended you. When you know me better you’ll understand that I didn’t mean to. Will that do for an apology?”

“I think the whole thing is awfully silly,” replied Dick coldly, “but it’s of no consequence: not enough to talk about.”

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence. Then Stanley said hurriedly: “That’s all right then! You mustn’t mind Blash, Dick: nobody does.”

Blash, whose expression of deep contrition Dick had thought suspiciously emphatic, chuckled. "I thank you, Stan, for them few kind words. Well, now that the *entente cordial* has been restored, how are you and everything? Have a good summer?"

"Oh, yes, bully. Did you?"

"I had a busy one, anyway. I'll tell you about it some time. I suppose you've heard that Pat isn't coming back this year?"

"No! Why? What's the matter?"

"Gaines told me that he had a letter from Pat about two weeks ago, saying that his father had lost a lot of money and that he was going to work; Pat, I mean, not his father: although it is likely that Mr. Patterson will work, too. It sounds reasonable, eh? I'm awfully sorry. Pat was a dandy chap. Besides, he's going to leave a big hole to be filled."

"That's right," agreed Sid Crocker. "Patterson was a corking quarter-back. And he would have played on the nine next spring, I'll bet. He swung a mean bat on the Second last year, and would have made a mighty good fielder for us, I guess. Who will get his place, Blash?"

"Stone. Gus isn't bad, but Pat came pretty close to being a marvel. We're talking about our last year's quarter-back, Bates. Do you care for football?"

Dick felt Stanley's anxious look on him as he answered: "Yes, I like football, thanks."

"Do you play?"

"I have played – some."

“That’s good. We need talent this year, and you look as if you might be clever.” Dick knew, however, that Blash was only being polite.

“Do you play baseball?” asked Sid.

“N – No, not much. Of course I have played it, but I’m not good enough.” His manner was still stiff, and he made no effort to remain in the conversation. The others chatted on for some time longer, Stanley frequently seeking to get Dick to talk, but not succeeding, and then the visitors took their departure.

“Drop in again, Bates,” said Blash. “If there’s anything I can do to help, let me know.”

Dick thanked him non-committingly. Outside Stanley shook his head. He was smiling, but Dick knew that he wasn’t pleased. “I guess that didn’t get us much, Dick,” he said.

Dick frowned. “Well, I can’t help it!” he said defensively. “He makes me tired. Anyway, if I can’t get along in football without his help, I’m quite willing to stay out of it.”

“Oh, that won’t make much difference, I suppose. I only thought that if Blash took to you – ”

“Well, he didn’t: any more than I took to him.”

“I suppose I ought to have told you he was the fellow you rode up from the station with, but I didn’t realise that you were really so peeved with him. It’s sort of too bad you couldn’t have taken it as a joke, Dick.”

“I’m sorry,” answered the other haughtily. “I won’t trouble you to introduce me to any more of your friends, Gard.”

“Well, don’t be waxy,” said Stan, good-naturedly. “There’s no harm done. You may like Blash better when you get to know him, and – ”

“I don’t think so. And it doesn’t matter, does it?”

“N – No, except that it’s always nicer to like fellows than not to. You get more out of – out of life, Dick. Well, never mind Blash. Want to go over to Jud’s for a few minutes? It isn’t too late.”

“I don’t know. Yes, I guess I will, but you needn’t bother unless you want to.”

“Oh, I’ll come along. We don’t have to stay. Hope there’ll be some eats, though.”

When they had turned back and were retracing their steps along The Front, Dick broke a silence of several minutes’ duration.

“Anyway,” he said a trifle resentfully, “I noticed one thing.”

“What’s that?” inquired Stanley.

“Blashington took mighty good care not to say anything about that twelve cents he owes me!”

CHAPTER V

“RUSTY”

Two busy days followed for Dick. Stanley was a great help, however, and getting settled into his stride was accomplished fairly easily. There was his adviser to see and his courses to arrange: he was required to take seven courses, one of them elective. For the latter he chose General History, not so much because he felt a hankering for such knowledge as the course afforded as because it entailed but two recitations a week. You see, he had to arrange so as not to have studies interfere too much with football! However, there seemed no danger of his not having enough school work, for, with History, his grand total was twenty-nine hours.

He passed his physical examination with flying colours and on Wednesday set to work with the football candidates. Of these there was a startling number, he thought. The field that afternoon was so thickly sprinkled with fellows of all sizes, shapes and degrees of experience that there was scarcely room to move about. Dick found himself simply one of many, doomed to go through with the usual routine of the beginner. At first he felt somewhat impatient and even peeved, but presently he decided to view the thing as a joke. They would very soon see that he belonged in an advanced squad, he thought, and meanwhile it

wouldn't do him any harm to practice the kindergarten stuff with the rookies.

The coach didn't appear until Thursday, and when he came, Dick didn't altogether approve of him. In the first place, Dick considered him too old: he looked to be every day of thirty-four or five. In the second place, Coach Driscoll lacked the good-natured, free-and-easy manner that Dick's experience had associated with football instructors. He wasn't bad looking, and he had very evidently kept himself in good physical trim, but, being so old, he would, Dick decided, be horribly behind the times and out-of-date. "Tod" Driscoll was a Parkinson graduate and a Yale man. At Yale, he had established an enviable reputation as a football player. He had been coaching at Parkinson for five years, Dick learned, and with success, for in that time the Brown-and-White had thrice triumphed over the Blue of Kenwood. And he was popular in spite of the fact that he was a very strict disciplinarian.

Dick found Captain Bob Peters more to his liking. Peters was a homely, tow-haired, snub-nosed chap built like a Greek athlete, with a smiling countenance and a clear, creamy-brown skin against which his grey-blue eyes looked startlingly bright. He was cheerful and light-hearted and yet could be very intense and very earnest on occasions. He played at right end on the team. Dick didn't have any dealings with Captain Peters at this period, however, for a youth named Warden appeared to have control of his fortunes. Warden was a dark-complexioned, earnest fellow

who never said an unnecessary word to the squad of beginners over whom he had been placed, and who worked very hard and conscientiously every minute. Dick thought he took himself and his duty a bit too seriously, but couldn't help liking and respecting him.

Dick was rather surprised at the extremely earnest and business-like way in which football practice was conducted. There was so much system and everyone was so serious! Even the manager and his hard-working assistant appeared to have no thought in life beyond that of turning out a successful football team. Billy Goode, the trainer, alone seemed to be unaffected by the contagion of effort. Billy even found time for a laugh and a joke.

Naturally, Dick was especially interested in the quarter-back candidates. He got one of the fellows to point out Gus Stone to him, and was relieved to find that Stone didn't look very wonderful. He was rather short and perhaps a bit heavier than the position demanded, although doubtless a week of work would remove some of the weight. There was also Cardin, a slighter and younger boy who had played the position on the Second Team last year. And there were a dozen others, Dick amongst them, who had declared their preference for the quarter-back job.

He saw Wallace Blashington now and then on the field or in the gymnasium, and Blash always spoke, but there was no further meeting until the following Saturday. By that time Dick had settled down into the routine of school life, and had decided that

he was going to like Parkinson immensely and Stanley Gard even more. Dick had grown rather used to having other fellows wait on him, run his errands and make life easy for him in general. He had never consciously asked such service, but had received it as a tribute to popularity. But he was not getting it now. If he had expected Stanley to wait on him – and he didn't know whether he had or not, but probably had! – he was doomed to disappointment. Stanley was the best-hearted chap in the world, but if one of Dick's shoes had got away from him and taken up a temporary abode under Stanley's bed, it was Dick who fished it out. Only once had Dick asked a service. Then, seated at his study desk, he had lightly suggested that Stanley should hand him a book that was lying on the radiator top near the window. Stanley was seated in a chair somewhat nearer the radiator than Dick, but there was no sound of movement and after a second Dick looked around inquiringly. Stanley was still seated and there was a quizzical grin on his countenance. After a somewhat blank stare, Dick arose and got the book. As he sat down again he said sarcastically: "Much obliged, Stan."

Stanley chuckled. "Dick, you've been sort of spoiled, haven't you?" he said.

"Spoiled? What do you mean? Just because I asked you –"

"You're one of those fellows who expect others to do things for 'em, and get away with it. Wish I knew the secret. But it isn't good for you, Dick. You must learn to run your own errands, and whitewash your own fences. Any time you break a leg, I'll fetch

and carry for you, but while you're able to get about – nothing doing! In fact, seeing that I'm an older resident of this place, I'm not certain you shouldn't be fagging for me!"

"Oh, go to the dickens," muttered Dick. "You make me tired." Then, after a moment, he added: "Maybe that was cheeky, Stan. I'm sorry. Guess I've had it too easy."

"That's all right, son. It's just as well to know where we stand, though. Any other little thing I can do for you?"

"Yes, you can close your silly mouth," was the answer.

By Saturday Dick felt almost like an old boy. His courses promised to be only mildly difficult, and the instructors seemed a very decent lot, notably "Old Addicks" who knew so much of ancient languages that he looked like an elderly, benignant Greek philosopher, and Mr. McCreedy, who taught mathematics. Through Stanley he met a great many of the fellows, and he picked up a few acquaintances himself. Of these latter, one was "Rusty" Crozier. He was a Fourth Class fellow who preferred to live in the town, and occupied two comfortable rooms in a house on Maple Street, just below the school. He was a jolly, light-hearted chap with a perpetual smile and hair of that peculiar shade of red that we associate with rusted iron: hence his nickname. Dick met him in classroom. "Rusty" borrowed Dick's fountain pen for a minute. After class they came together in the corridor and walked a little way along The Front. That began it. When Dick asked Stanley if he knew Crozier, Stanley nodded.

"Everyone knows Rusty," he said. "But if you want to tread

the straight and narrow, Dick, keep away from him.”

“What do you mean? Isn’t he – all right?”

“Oh, yes, Rusty’s all right. That is, there’s nothing vicious about him. In fact, he’s a very decent, very clean fellow. But he’s gifted with a talent for discovering trouble. And a talent for squirming out of it! If he wasn’t he’d have left Parkinson long ago. I’d say that Rusty’s trouble was an over-developed sense of humor.”

“I rather liked him,” mused Dick.

“You would. So do I. Everyone likes Rusty. But wise guys say him nay when he suggests one of his innocent amusements. It was Rusty who closed traffic on Main Street in the middle of a busy Saturday one day last year, only faculty doesn’t know it.”

“Did what?” asked Dick.

“He borrowed two carpenter’s horses and a sign and placed ’em across the middle of Main Street, near School, about one o’clock one day last spring. He found the sign somewhere, I don’t know where. It said ‘Street Closed by Order of Selectmen.’ Then he went over and stood in Wiley’s drug store and watched the fun. It was almost an hour before they discovered that it was a hoax. The paper was full of it, and the selectmen made an awful rumpus, but everyone else thought it was a pretty good joke.”

“And he wasn’t found out!”

“No. At least a score of people must have seen him set the barrier up, but no two of them agreed as to what he looked like. Some said he was a labourer in blue overalls, and others said he

was a tall man with whiskers, and so on. That's just one of Rusty's innocent ways of amusing himself."

"But doesn't he ever get caught?" asked Dick incredulously.

"Oh, yes, heaps of times, but he always manages somehow to show that he was actuated by good intentions or that circumstances worked against him. Like the time he dropped the parlour match heads all over the floor in Room G and every time anyone put his foot down, one of the things went *pop!* He showed Jud the hole in his pocket where the things had fallen out. If it hadn't been for the hole, he claimed, it wouldn't have happened. He got off with a month's probation, I think."

Dick laughed. "He must be a cut-up! Well, I'll keep away from him when he feels frolicsome."

"Trouble is," said Stanley, "you never can tell when Rusty is going to spring something." He smiled and then chuckled. "Three or four of us walked over to Princeville two years ago to the circus. It was one of those little one-ring affairs, you know, with a mangey camel, and a moth-eaten lion and a troop of trained dogs. It was rather fun. Rusty was one of us, and he was as quiet as a mouse until near the end. Then he began flicking peanuts at the ring master. We tried to stop him, but he wouldn't quit. Every time the ring master turned his back, Rusty would land a peanut on him, and the crowd got to laughing and gave it away. So they hustled us all out, and we didn't see the performing dogs. Has he asked you over to his room at Spooner's?"

"Yes," said Dick, suspiciously. "Is there any trick in that?"

“Oh, no,” answered Stanley, smilingly. “He has very jolly quarters. If you like we’ll go over together some evening.”

“All right. Only I don’t like that catfish grin of yours. I suppose he has a trick staircase that folds up and lets you down in a heap or something?”

“No. Rusty’s fun is pretty harmless. We’ll wander over there tonight if you like.”

“Well, but I’m going to keep my eyes open just the same,” Dick laughed “You’re too anxious to go along, Stan!”

That afternoon Dick found a letter in the rack downstairs. It bore the Warne postmark, and was addressed to him in a very dashing hand: “Richard C. Bates, Esq., Sohmer Hall, Parkinson School, Town.” Wondering, Dick opened the envelope. Within was an oblong of pasteboard punched with three holes of varying sizes. In one of the holes was an ancient looking cent so badly corroded that it was hard to read the lettering. Dick’s thoughts naturally fell on Rusty Crozier, although what the joke meant, he couldn’t make out. But he smiled and dropped the coin in a waistcoat pocket, and presently forgot about it. Returning from football practice at five, however, he found another missive awaiting him. The envelope was different and the writing different, but there was just such another coin-card within and in the card was a second penny. This one was bright enough, but it had been badly bent. Dick, puzzled, added the second coin to the first, resolved to find out the meaning of the prank that evening.

He and Stanley went across the campus and down Maple Street about eight. Spooner's was a large, square house standing almost flush with the sidewalk. Like many of the residences thereabouts, its upper floors were tenanted by students unable or disinclined to secure rooms on the campus. Stanley pulled open a squeaky screen door and entered. At the foot of the staircase, he paused and lifted his voice.

"Oh, Rusty!" he shouted. "Rusty-y-y!"

Somewhere above a door opened and a voice answered.

"A-a-ay! Come up!"

Stanley led the way again up two flights, and then to a door at the front of the house. Oddly enough, it was closed tightly, which fact, since it had been opened a moment before, struck Dick as peculiar. Stanley knocked and a voice called "Come in!" Somehow Stanley managed to get behind Dick, and it was Dick who turned the knob and pressed the door inward. The next instant he was precipitated into a glare of light. The knob had jerked itself out of his hand, and something – he supposed at the moment the something to have been Stanley – had banged against his heels and pushed him violently into the room. He stopped to find himself asprawl over an armchair with a placard bearing the word WELCOME a few inches from his nose.

"Good evening," said Rusty amiably from across the room.

"Hello," gasped Dick. Then he looked back at the door for Stanley. Stanley was not there. But at the instant the door opened again and Stanley appeared. He was grinning broadly, but Dick

was too much interested in the door to see it. The door was not opening like any door Dick had ever seen. In the first place it was turning on pivots at top and bottom, half of it coming in, and half of it going out, so that the aperture for entrance was scarcely wider than Stanley. In the second place, Stanley was holding hard to that knob and being fairly dragged through, for above the sill and below the lintel was a coiled spring that, so soon as the knob was turned, swung the door swiftly on its axis from left to right. Dick stared in surprise.

“Just a little idea of my own, Bates,” said Rusty, coming forward and removing the placard from the back of the chair to a place on the wall. “Have a chair.”

Dick looked from the proffered chair to Rusty and then to Stanley and shook his head. “No, thanks,” he muttered. “I’ll stand!”

However, Stanley assured him on oath that the chair was quite safe and wouldn’t double up under him and he consented to try it, although not without anxiety. But he was up again a moment later, demanding to be shown the working of the amazing door.

“Quite simple,” laughed Rusty. “First I unlock it, thus. Then I stand clear of it. Then the unsuspecting visitor outside turns the knob.” He turned it from the inside, stepping quickly out of the way, and the door leaped open, swung once around and stopped as the latch snapped again into its socket. “That’s all there is to it. I place the cushioned chair here to receive the caller and place the ‘Welcome’ sign where he will be sure to see it. Most all the fellows

know about it now, though, and I have to rely on newcomers like you, Bates, for a bit of fun.” He locked the portal again.

“Well, but – but suppose you want to go out?” asked Dick.

“I go out the other door.” Rusty indicated the adjoining bedroom. “In fact,” he added with a twinkle, “I seldom use this entrance myself. I keep it locked until I am expecting a distinguished visitor.”

“Still, I don’t see how you knew I was with Stan,” Dick objected.

“You’ll have to ask Stan about that,” laughed Rusty.

“I told him,” explained Stanley, grinning.

“Oh! Then that’s why you were so anxious to come with me.”

Dick fixed his room-mate with an accusing eye. “All right. I’ll get even with you, old son, if it takes my last – if it takes my last two pennies!” He looked quickly at Rusty, but there was nothing to show that the latter had grasped the allusion. “Maybe,” continued Dick, “you’d like to see them.” He fished the two cents from his pocket and held them forth. Stanley viewed them interestedly and so did Rusty.

“What’s the idea?” asked the former. “Do you mean that you’re down to those? Stony broke, Dick?”

Rusty’s innocent, uncomprehending expression remained and Dick began to think his suspicions wrong. “No, those are just – just pocket-pieces,” he answered flatly.

“Wouldn’t be very useful to you in a pinch,” observed his host.

“Well, find seats, fellows. Hope you didn’t mind the reception,

Bates. But I guess you didn't. You look like a fellow who can take a joke."

"No, I didn't mind," said Dick. "Guess I was too surprised to mind!" He looked about the room. "This is pretty comfortable, Crozier."

"Not bad. I've had these rooms ever since my first year. Got two nice windows in front and one on the side there, and two more in the bedroom. Mrs. Spooner is a corking old soul, and doesn't mind a bit of noise now and then."

Stanley chuckled, and when Dick looked across inquiringly he explained. "Mrs. Spooner's as deaf as a haddock, Dick. If she wasn't she couldn't live in the same house with Rusty!"

"Run away! I'm not noisy. Sometimes my guests are, but I do all I can to restrain them. Haynes gives me more trouble than Mrs. S. He has the room under this on the floor below, Bates, and insists on studying at the times I feel playful. There are four other fellows in the house and you couldn't pry any of us loose. You chaps can have your dormitory rooms. I don't want them, thanks."

"Do you take your meals here?" Dick inquired.

"No, Mrs. S. doesn't give meals. She used to, but that was before my time. I eat around. Usually at 'The Eggery.' Sometimes at Thacher's. Stan says you're out for the football team. Going to make it all right?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I'm going to try to. Do you – are you –"

“No, I’m not athletic, Bates. My favourite sport is mumblepeg. Besides, my studies prevent. Oh, shut up, Stan! Let me make a good impression on Bates, can’t you? What time is it, anyway? Look here, let’s go to the movies. What do you say?”

“Not for me,” answered Stanley. “I’ve got to beat it back and do some work tonight. Besides, the last time – ”

“Oh, that!” laughed Rusty. “Wasn’t it silly? Such a fuss about so little, eh?”

“Oh, yes, very little!” Stanley turned to Dick. “He and Blash stretched a rope across the aisle and tied it to the arms of the seats ahead of them. Being fairly dark, some confusion ensued!”

“During which, if I remember correctly, you and Joe and Blash sneaked out. Just shows what a guilty conscience will do, Bates. I remained, secure in my innocence, and saw the show through.”

“Yes, you rotter!” said Stan indignantly. “You put the blame on us, and every time I go there now the doorman looks at me unkindly.”

“Well, you were out of the way and I wasn’t. Besides, I wanted to see the rest of the picture.”

“Rusty, if you got your deserts,” said Stanley, feelingly, “you’d be shot at sunrise. Well, I must beat it. Coming along, Dick?”

Dick went, in spite of Rusty’s pleas. They left by way of the bedroom and Dick watched the hall door very, very carefully. It proved to be a perfectly normal door, however. Rusty told Dick to call again and held conversation with them over the banister

until they had reached the street door, while from a second floor room came howls of “Shut up, Rusty! Shu-u-ut u-u-up!”

“It’s only Haynes,” called Rusty reassuringly. “Don’t mind the poor fish. Come again, fellows! Good night!”

In the letter rack in Sohmer was another envelope addressed to Dick and within was a third penny.

CHAPTER VI

DICK MAKES AN ENEMY

That was on Friday. The next afternoon Parkinson played her first game, with Mapleton School. Mapleton had started the Parkinson schedule for several years, invariably providing just the amount of fight desired, and today was no exception to the established rule. Four ten-minute periods were played and Parkinson managed to run up seventeen points. It was a slow and uninteresting game from the spectators' standpoint, and the afternoon was scorchingly hot for the last of September. "Babe" Upton, who weighed well over a hundred and eighty and played centre, affirmed afterwards that he could feel himself melting away like a candle. Indeed, although none of the team was allowed to remain in the contest for more than two periods, there were many who found it hard medicine. Dick, who as a member of the squad was supposed to look on and learn, watched the game from the Parkinson bench and sweltered uncomplainingly for the better part of an hour and a half. Naturally enough, his interest concentrated itself on Stone and, later, Cardin, the quarter-backs. He secretly thought that Cardin, with sufficient instruction, could be developed into a better quarter than Gus Stone, for Cardin was a quick, gingery youngster who drove his team hard, while Stone, although more experienced and heavier,

had a tendency to go to sleep on his feet, and the plays always dragged just when they should have been run off at top speed. A third candidate, a thin ramrod of a youth, was tried out for a few minutes just at the end of the game. A neighbour told Dick that his name was Pryne, adding facetiously that it ought to be Prune. Pryne had scant opportunity to show whether he deserved the latter appellation, however.

When Mapleton had gone away and the stands had practically emptied, the members of the squad who had taken no part in the game were called out for an hour's work. Coach Driscoll did not remain, and the job fell to Harry Warden, who because of a weak ankle had been out of his place at left half on the team that afternoon. By some chance the running of one of the three makeshift teams fell to Dick, and, with a few of the candidates who had failed to get placed on the squads following, he started off. The simplest sort of plays were being taught, straight line bucks and runs, outside ends and a rudimentary set of signals was used. At first the men moved hardly faster than a walk. Then, having presumably learned their duties, they were allowed to trot. It seemed to Dick that he was burdened with the stupidest aggregation on the field, and one of the backs, a shock-haired, long-nosed youth named Halden, outdid them all. No matter how many times Halden was walked through a play, the instant speed was called for he forgot all he had learned. Finally, after he had "gummed up" a simple two-man attack on left guard for the third time, Dick's exasperation found voice.

“You! Eight half! What good do you think you are? You’re supposed to go in there and clear out that hole, and instead of that you let the runner ahead of you and then walk all over his heels! Can’t you understand that play? Don’t you get the signal, or what’s your trouble?”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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