

**RALPH
BARBOUR**

RIGHT END
EMERSON

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«Public Domain»

Barbour R.

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Ralph Henry Barbour

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CHAPTER I

A TIP TO THE WAITER

A very gaudy red automobile whirled up the circling drive that led to the white-pillared portico of the big hotel at Pine Harbor, announced its approach with a wheezy groan of the horn and came to a sudden stop before the steps, a stop so disconcerting to the extreme right-hand occupant of the single seat that he narrowly escaped a head-on collision with the wind-shield. Taking advantage of the impetus that had unseated him, he flung his legs over the door and alighted on the well-kept gravel.

“This car may be sort of cranky when it comes to *going*, Mac,” he said, “but she sure can *stop!*”

“Well, she got you here,” chuckled Harley McLeod. “Give the kid a hand with the suit-cases, Jimmy. Pile out, Stan, and I’ll take Matilda around to the garage and give her some oats. You fellows register, and tell the guy at the desk that we want one room and no bath; tell him we had a bath last week. Don’t let him soak you, either. We’ve got four more days of this foreign travel before we get home, and the old sock’s mighty near empty. Something about twelve dollars for the crowd will be pretty near right.”

“Fine,” agreed the third member of the trio, sarcastically, viewing as he spoke the long front of the building and its general air of hauteur and expensiveness. “Twelve dollars apiece is likely to be closer to it. If you want economy, Mac, why the dickens do you pick out the swellest joints on the route?”

“Well,” answered McLeod, glancing rearward to see if the suit-cases had been wrested from their place, “we don’t seem to have much luck that way, and that’s a fact. Gee, that place last night pretty nigh ruined me! You do your best, anyway. All clear, Jimmy? Let go their heads! Back in a minute!” The small red car leaped forward impetuously, dashed down the drive to the road, swerved precipitately to the right and was lost to sight – if not to hearing – beyond a hedge. Stanley Hassell joined Jimmy Austen and together they followed a small uniformed youth, laden with three suit-cases, up the steps, across the wide porch and into the hotel.

It was Stanley who took the pen from the politely extended hand of the clerk and inscribed the names of his party on the register. After each name he added “N. Y. City.” This was less truthful than convenient, for although he and Harley McLeod lived in widely separate sections of that far-stretching metropolis, Jimmy hailed from Elizabeth, New Jersey. But, as Stanley had explained soon after the beginning of their two-weeks tour in Mac’s disguised flivver, “Elizabeth, N. J.” was too long to write. Besides, he added, it wouldn’t be long before Elizabeth became a part of New York, anyway, and there was no harm in anticipating.

“We’d like a room for three,” announced Stanley when he had put down the last dot. “With single beds, if possible, and without a bath. As reasonable a room as you have, please.”

The clerk, a carefully attired gentleman, frowned hopelessly. “I’m afraid we haven’t a room with three single beds,” he said, as he consulted a book. “I can give you a nice large room on the front of the house, however. That has a double bed in it, and I can have a cot put in also. I’m afraid that’s the best – ”

“What’s the price of it?” interrupted Stanley anxiously.

“How long are you staying?”

“Just overnight.”

“Eight dollars, in that case.”

“For the bunch?” inquired Jimmy eagerly.

The clerk shook his head and smiled again, this time commiseratingly. “Eight dollars a day apiece,” he said in his nicely modulated tones. “Our regular price, gentlemen.”

It was Stanley’s turn to do a little head-shaking. “Look here,” he confided earnestly, “you’ve got us wrong. We weren’t thinking of *buying* the room; we just want to *rent* it. Now, what about a room on the *back* of the house? Something about fifteen dollars for the three of us? We aren’t crazy about the view, anyway; besides, we couldn’t see much at night, could we? You just take another peep into the old book there and talk reasonable!”

The gentleman seemed inclined to be haughty for a moment, but Stanley’s smile was captivating and he went back to the book good-naturedly enough. “There’s a room on the third floor,” he announced at last. “It’s rather small, but perhaps it will do. The rate is sixteen-fifty.”

Stanley mused a moment, mentally dividing sixteen dollars and fifty cents by three, and then nodded. “All right,” he agreed. “Guess that’ll have to do.”

“Front! Show the gentlemen to 87!”

“Say,” broke in Jimmy with very evident anxiety, “that includes meals, doesn’t it?”

This time the clerk smiled quite humanly. “Certainly,” he replied. “We are on the American Plan.”

“Idiot!” breathed Stanley as they turned away.

“That’s all right,” replied Jimmy doggedly. “It’s just as well to be sure. Look at the time they held us up for seven dollars apiece and then we found we had to pay extra to eat!”

“That was in a city, you chump,” reminded Stanley. They bade the boy with the luggage wait a minute, but Harley McLeod came hurrying in just then and they began the ascent of the stairs. Harley showed a wrathful countenance.

“Those robbers want three dollars for the car!” he sputtered.

“Three dollars for the car?” echoed Jimmy. “Let ’em have it, I say. It’s worth five, maybe, but three dollars is three dollars, and the room’s costing us sixteen-fifty – ”

“*What!*” exclaimed Harley, standing stock-still on the landing. “Sixteen *dollars?*”

“And fifty cents,” confirmed Jimmy cheerfully. “The fifty cents is for the food.”

Harley McLeod stared darkly at Stanley. “You’re a swell little bargainer, you are! Why, that’s five and a half apiece!”

“Well, what of it?” asked Stanley huffily. “We had to pay six and a half last night, didn’t we? Say, if you don’t like the way I do it, why don’t you do it yourself? If you think you can get better terms – ”

“That includes the meals, Mac,” interrupted Jimmy soothingly. “I asked the Duke of Argyle, and he said so.”

“Oh, shut up,” begged Harley. “Gosh, these summer hotels are regular robber dens! All right, I’ve still got a few sous left, and when I’m broke I’ll borrow from Jimmy. Say, where is this room? On the roof?”

“Third floor, sir,” answered the bell-boy. “Nice and cool up here.”

“Ought to be if altitude has anything to do with temperature,” agreed Harley with sarcasm. “What time’s dinner, son?”

“Seven, sir, and runs to eight-thirty.”

“And it’s only a bit after five,” groaned Jimmy. “I’ll tell you one thing, fellows, right now, and that’s this: When the Earl of Buckminster down there charged me five-fifty he committed a fatal error. If I don’t eat five-fifty worth of food at dinner to-night you fellows can throw me in the ocean!”

“Not so horrid,” commented Stanley as they strode after the boy into the apartment. “Small, but sufficient, eh?”

“Do they think we’re going to sleep three in a bed?” demanded Harley, aghast.

“They’re going to put in a cot for you,” said Jimmy comfortingly.

“For me!” Harley viewed him coldly. “How do you attain that condition, Jimmy? What’s the matter with your sleeping on the cot?”

Jimmy shook his head. “I don’t rest well on the things,” he answered. “Maybe Stan had better –”

“We’ll draw lots,” said Stanley. He tossed a dime to the grinning bell-boy and then pulled three strands from the tattered fringe of the straw matting rug. “Short piece gets the cot. Help yourself, Mac.”

Stanley himself fell heir to the shortest straw and good-naturedly accepted his fate. “I’m the smallest, anyway,” he said. “Let’s wash up and look the place over. Any one for a swim?”

“I’d like a swim,” said Jimmy, “but it always gives me a fierce appetite, and I’m hungry enough right now to chew nails! Let’s sit on the porch and look wealthy. You don’t get so hungry if you sit still.”

Some two hours later the three boys were conducted across a large dining-room by an awe-inspiring head-waiter and seated at a table set for four. Jimmy looked approvingly at the crowded menu and passed it across to Harley. “Let’s not be choosey,” he suggested. “Let’s start right at the top and take things as they come.”

“Well, we can’t eat three kinds of soup,” said Harley.

“I could,” Jimmy replied. “But I’m going to have some clams first. Which soup is the fillingest?”

A boy of about their own age, which is to say seventeen or eighteen, began pouring water into the glasses, which led Jimmy to observe for the first time that the waiters were all masculine and youthful, though most of them were older than their own attendant. Just then Harley’s foot collided painfully with Jimmy’s ankle and the latter emitted a loud howl of anguish that attracted the disapproving curiosity of the neighboring diners.

“Shut up, you idiot!” whispered Stanley severely.

“That’s all right,” returned Jimmy aggrievedly, rubbing the injured ankle under the table, “but he pretty near killed me with that big hoof of his! Gee, Mac, what’s the prodigious conception?”

“Sorry,” muttered Harley, his eyes on the menu. “Do we all want clams? All right, clams for three, then.” This latter to the waiter at his elbow.

“Will you order your soup and fish now, please?” asked the waiter. “It saves time.”

“Sure. Let’s see. I’ll have the cream of celery. What’s yours, Stan?”

“Same, I guess.”

“Oxen tails for me,” said Jimmy. “And a large portion of that bluing fish.”

The waiter took himself off and Harley leaned toward Jimmy with a scowl. “Didn’t you see who that was, you dumb-bell?”

“See who what was?” asked Jimmy, glancing around blankly.

“The waiter, of course.”

“No, who was he? Charlie Chaplin?”

“Emerson, one of our fellows. You know him. A junior, I think.”

Jimmy shook his head. “I don’t know any Emerson, Mac. You mean the chap that’s waiting on us is an Alton fellow?”

“Sure! What did you think I kicked you for?”

“I thought you just wanted to show your love for me. What’s he doing here?”

“Waiting on table,” replied Stanley. “Haven’t you any eyes?”

“Yes, but I mean – Well, it seems a funny thing for an Alton fellow, doesn’t it?”

“Guess all these waiters are students,” returned Stanley. “College men, a lot of them. I suppose Emerson needs the money.”

“Well, yes, he would,” agreed Jimmy readily, “if he’s staying at this joint. I must have a look at him. I dare say I know him by sight. What’s he do?”

Harley shrugged. “Nothing much, I guess. Seems to me, though, he was playing on the second team last fall.”

“Football?”

Harley nodded, and Stanley confirmed him. “Yes, he’s been on the second a couple of years. You’ll remember him when you see him, Jimmy, for you must have played with him year before last.”

“Well, if he isn’t any faster on the field than he is here,” Jimmy grumbled, “it’s no wonder he’s never made the first. Do you fellows know him? I didn’t notice any warm hand-clasps!”

“Oh, I know him to nod to,” replied Harley, “but you don’t exactly expect to find your school fellows waiting on table in a public hotel. I dare say he doesn’t want to be recognized. Anyway, he didn’t speak to me.”

“Suppose he thought it was up to you to signal first,” said Jimmy. “After all, Mac, waiting in a summer hotel isn’t much different from waiting at college, and lots of corking chaps have done that. Here he is now, I guess. Making good time through a broken field, too! Just missed a tackle then! If that other fellow had got him it would have been good-by, clams! Yes, I’ve seen him lots of times, but I never knew his name.”

While the waiter placed the orders on the table Jimmy observed him. He was a well-made boy, slim yet muscular, a fact not entirely hidden by the ill-fitting waiter’s jacket that he wore. He had brown eyes, rather quiet seeming eyes, and brown hair that was very carefully brushed away from his forehead, and a fairly short nose. On the whole, Jimmy decided, Emerson, so far as his appearance went, was a credit to Alton Academy. That he had recognized the trio was very evident to the observer, and that he had no intention of making use of his slight acquaintance with Harley was equally evident. He spoke only when addressed and then carefully avoided the speaker’s eyes. Jimmy didn’t know whether Emerson felt any embarrassment, but he somehow wished that the impressive head waiter had seated them elsewhere. It was rather jarring to be served in this fashion by a chap you were likely to meet on the Green a week or so hence!

But Jimmy soon forgot that, for he was extremely hungry, the food was excellent, the waiter, in spite of having two other tables to serve, attended to their wants in quite professional fashion and the dinner passed off pleasantly and expeditiously. Toward the last of it Stanley presented a problem to them. “Say, fellows, how about tips?” he asked.

Harley frowned. “I was wondering,” he said. “Of course these fellows must take tips. I’ll bet the hotel doesn’t pay them much. But, just the same, it sort of goes against the grain, Stan.”

“Leave it till morning,” advised Jimmy. “Then we can slip a dollar under a plate when he isn’t looking.”

“A dollar!” ejaculated Harley. “Listen to the millionaire! It’s always been fifty cents for the bunch so far.”

“Oh, well, this is different,” replied Jimmy. “This guy’s one of us, you see. You can’t be a piker with one of your own School!”

And so the matter was left, and they moved from the dining-room rather ponderously and sighingly seated themselves in three rocking chairs on the broad veranda and, almost in silence, watched a huge orange-colored moon arise beyond the rim of the quiet ocean. The longest speech of the ensuing quarter of an hour was made by Jimmy. “Allowing fifty cents for breakfast and a dollar for my third of the bed to-night, I figure that I’ll be just twenty-five cents ahead of the house when we go our way!”

Later, having decided to play some pool as an aid to digestion, Jimmy paused as they passed through the lobby and fixed what he afterwards explained was an expression of triumphant gloat on the clerk behind the desk. This expression he continued until the clerk, happening to glance toward him, returned his look with one of mingled surprise and concern. Thereupon Jimmy ceased gloating and hurried after the others, who, meanwhile, had reached the billiard room just in time to secure the last pool table ahead of two disgruntled elderly plutocrats in dinner-jackets. These latter gentlemen, grumbling their displeasure, seated themselves, behind large and expensive cigars, on a leathern divan and watched the play of the trio with basilisk stares that interfered seriously with Stanley’s game. Harley and Jimmy refused to be intimidated, but after five games, all won by Harley,

they acknowledged defeat and yielded the table to the besiegers. However, it was just on nine o'clock then, and, as Stanley wisely observed, they were paying good money for that room and so might as well make use of it. At ten they were fast asleep, as was befitting those who had traveled one hundred and eight miles since morning in Matilda!

Yet it was well after nine o'clock the next day when they descended for breakfast. They were unanimous in declaring regretfully that they were not really hungry, but they managed to do fairly well with cereal, eggs, steak, hot biscuits and coffee. Their waiter again attended to them in a manner that was beyond criticism, and Jimmy acknowledged a warm admiration for his skill and dexterity. "Some garson, if you ask me," said Jimmy. "Has everything under perfect control and hasn't dropped a plate yet!"

"I feel a bit mean about not speaking to him," said Stanley. "After all, he's one of us, and we know it, and he knows we know it, and –"

"Yes, and he doesn't want us to do anything of the sort," interrupted Jimmy. "The chap's incog. Let us – let us respect his wishes, eh?"

Harley looked relieved. "Jimmy's right, I think. Besides, it isn't as if we were personal friends. We only know him by sight, as you might say. Who's got a dollar?"

Jimmy produced a crumpled bill with less hesitation than usual and curled it cunningly under his plate. Then they departed hurriedly before the waiter returned. Half an hour later Matilda jumped away on the next lap of her journey, honking asthmatically as she disappeared from sight.

Russell Emerson, clearing the dishes from the table lately occupied by his school-mates, discovered the crumpled dollar bill and frowned at it. Then the frown vanished and he shrugged his shoulders and slipped the money philosophically into his pocket.

CHAPTER II

PARTNERS CONFER

Alton Academy commenced its Fall Term on September 24th that year, and on the afternoon of the nineteenth Russell Emerson dropped from the train at Alton Station, a battered valise in hand, and, disregarding the cordial invitations of carriage and taxi drivers, set forth on foot. It appears to be a New England custom to locate the railroad station as far as possible from the center of the town, and Alton had made no departure from custom. A good half-mile intervened between station and business center, and a second half-mile between the heart of the town and Alton Academy. There had been a time when Alton and Alton Station had been two quite distinct settlements, but now the town had followed the route of the trolley and the two were slenderly connected by a line of small dwellings, small shops and, occasionally, a small factory. Russell followed the trolley tracks and, although presently a car came rattling and whisking toward him from the direction of the station, continued on foot, the valise growing heavier as the stores became more important and more prosperous in appearance. But the boy rested frequently, always before one of the little stores, and at such times the valise was set down beside him on the pavement while his gaze roved from door to window and when possible penetrated past the usually unattractive display of goods into the further dim recesses of the building. Oddly, as it would seem, his pauses were longer and his interest greater when the window was empty of goods and a placard announced the premises for rent. Indeed, on three occasions he crossed the street to peer up at and into tenantless stores, and on two occasions he jotted down memoranda on the back of an envelope ere he took up his burden and went on.

Reaching the busier and more populous part of Alton, he turned to the left, past the town's single department store, and halted under a sign which read: "Hartford House – Gentlemen Only – One Flight." Russell pushed open the door and climbed the stairs. The office was at the left of the landing, a clean, sun-filled room through whose broad windows one might look down on the traffic of the street or watch, if one cared to, the casements across the way, beyond which a tailor, a Painless Dentist and a manufacturing jeweler plied their trades. At the desk, presided over by an elderly man with abundant gray whiskers, Russell set his name down in an ink-smear register, paid the sum of seventy-five cents and was presented with a key.

"Eighteen," said the clerk wheezily. "One flight, turn to the left. Thank you."

Acting as his own bell-boy, Russell took himself and his luggage to the second floor, found the door numbered 18 and took possession of a very small, barely furnished room which had, nevertheless, the merit of cleanliness. He ran the shade up, opened the window and found himself looking down on the roof of the Imperial Steam Laundry, as a bold inscription painted on the corrugated iron roof informed him. Beyond the laundry were the brick backs of several office buildings.

"Not much of a view," murmured Russell tolerantly, "but plenty of air. Now let's see." He stripped off his coat and placed it, with a somewhat yellowed straw hat, on the narrow bed. Then, rolling up his sleeves, he poured water into the chipped basin and washed face and hands. That done, he dried on a wispy towel and opened his valise. From it he extracted a thin bundle of papers held together by an elastic band, placed a chair before the window and seated himself, lodging his feet comfortably on the ledge. For the next ten minutes he was busy looking through the contents of the bundle. That completed, he brought forth a fountain pen from a pocket and began to figure thoughtfully on the back of one of the papers.

"Eighty-eight, sixty in bank," he muttered as he set down that sum. "Check for one hundred and twenty-five. Fifteen and –" He paused and counted the contents of a small leather purse. "Fifteen and seventy-four. It'll cost me three dollars for my room here for four days and, say, four dollars for

meals. That's seven dollars. Then there'll be incidentals. Guess I'll say ten altogether. Ten, seventy-four rather. That leaves five. Now then. Naught, six, eight and one to carry, one – two hundred and eighteen dollars and sixty cents.”

He gazed for a long minute at the result of his figuring and finally shook his head. “That isn't nearly enough,” he sighed. “Maybe, though, Stick can do better than he thought he could. If he can put in two hundred more I guess we can manage.” He looked at his watch. “Ought to be here in an hour. Guess I'll go out and have a look around before he gets here.”

He put his coat on again and took his hat and sallied forth, stopping at the office long enough to leave his key and to inform the clerk that he would be back at five o'clock, in case any one should inquire for him. Then for the better part of an hour he roamed the streets in that portion of Alton which lay between the Hartford House and the Academy, specializing on the side streets but not neglecting such important arteries of traffic and avenues of trade as Meadow and West and State streets. He was back at a minute or two before five and had made himself comfortable in one of the six wooden armchairs that stood empty in a row before the windows when feet echoed on the stairway, the office door was pushed open and a very tall, very thin youth appeared. He carried a suit-case, an overcoat and an umbrella, all of which, perceiving Russell across the room, he dumped on the desk before stepping to meet him.

“Hello, Rus,” he greeted. “How long have you been here? Have you got a room? Do I bunk in with you, or –”

“You'll have to get one of your own,” replied Russell as they shook hands. “Mine's just a single one. Guess they all are. How are you, Stick? Haven't fattened up much this summer.”

“I'm very well, thanks. Wait till I register and we'll go up and have a talk. Got your letter about ten minutes before I left. Thought you were dead or something.”

In a room very similar to that assigned to Russell, the two seated themselves, George Patterson on the bed and Russell on the single chair. Stick, as he was called, was a boy of Russell's own age, which was seventeen, but looked fully a year older. He came from St. Albans, Vermont, according to the school catalogue, and the catalogue was quite infallible on such subjects, but before that Stick had lived – in fact had been born – in Toronto, and there was much more of the Canadian than the Yankee in him. He was extremely tall and extremely thin, with high cheek bones, a good deal of color, very dark brown hair that curled, gray eyes, a generous nose and a rather large mouth. You couldn't call him handsome, but he looked particularly healthy and clean and wholesome. One of the things that Russell liked most about him was his appearance of having just stepped out of a bath, and even now, after a long train journey, that appearance persisted. The two were room-mates in Upton Hall. They had been thrown together quite by accident the preceding fall and had not yet regretted the fact; which, I think, speaks well for each of them.

Stick wasn't an awfully brilliant chap. In fact, there were some who declared that he was rather a bore. But Russell was used to him, and he had long since decided that an even temper and similar attributes were preferable in a room-mate to mere conversational scintillations. Stick had rather a peculiar sense of humor, or, perhaps, lack of humor. He adored a practical joke when it was on some one else, but saw no fun in such a joke played on himself. As a fair sample of his ideal in the way of a funny story it may be stated that his favorite was a rather long and ponderous tale about a London window-washer who fell from the sixth story of a building and landed on a “bobby.” To Stick there was something irresistibly appealing to his sense of humor in the fact that the policeman was killed and the window-washer wasn't! But Stick was a fellow who wore remarkably well, and, after all, that's a fine quality in a room-mate.

“Well, I brought the money,” he announced after a few exchanges of remarks anent the past vacation.

“How much?” asked Russell anxiously.

“A hundred and twenty-five.”

“A hundred and twent – But, Stick, you said it would be a hundred and fifty at least!”

“I didn’t say it positively,” disclaimed the other. “I did think I could put in that much, Rus, but – well, I just can’t do it.” Then, after a short pause, he added in a desire to be strictly truthful: “I mean, I don’t think I ought to, Rus. Of course, it’s my money, and all that, but father doesn’t think very well of the idea, and if he needed money some time he’d expect me to let him have a little, and if I put it all into this I won’t have any left. You see, we don’t know for certain that this thing’s going to be a go. I hope it will be, for I’d hate to lose that money, but there’s nothing sure about it, is there?”

Russell shook his head. “No, nothing’s sure until it’s happened, Stick, but this thing is bound to go all right. Gee, it’s just got to!”

“Yes, I know,” Stick agreed without much enthusiasm, “but things don’t always succeed because some one says they’ve got to.”

Russell sighed. “I wish your grandmother hadn’t married a Scotsman, Stick!”

“What’s that got to do with – ”

“You’ll die a poor man, Stick, just on that account,” returned his chum gloomily. “Left to itself, the Irish in you would risk a dollar now and then, but that Scotch blood sets up a howl every time.”

“It’s all right to take a chance,” said Stick seriously, “but there’s no sense in being risky. I say, with what you have, won’t a hundred and twenty-five do?”

“It will have to,” answered Russell grimly, “if that’s all you’ll come in with. I’ve gone too far now to back down. I spent a whole day in New York, and every one was mighty decent, and I arranged for a whole raft of stuff to come down the twenty-second. The Proctor-Farnham people even offered me ninety days’ credit. You see, their goods are new in the East, Stick, and they’re making a big try to get them going. They make mighty good stuff, too, and I’m pretty certain we can sell a lot of it once we’re started. Of course we’ll have to carry the other makes, too. Some fellows won’t look at a thing unless they grew up with it! Well, anyway, they were quite enthusiastic about the scheme and would have pretty near stocked us up for nothing if I’d agreed to sell only their stuff. But that wouldn’t do. Not yet, anyhow. They offered to send a man down to arrange a window display, but I had to decline that, for I didn’t want them to know that we hadn’t even found a store yet. They might have thought I was crazy. As it was I did a good deal of bluffing, I guess, and talked as if I had about a million dollars. The other folks were a heap more haughty, although they were willing enough to let us have a fair line of samples. They don’t have to offer inducements to sell their goods, you see. Well, now about the money, Stick. I’ve got a little more than two hundred. That’s three hundred and twenty-five, about three hundred and forty, really. I’d hoped for four hundred at least. It means that we’ll have to be satisfied with a more modest store, for it’s store rent that’s going to be the principal expense for a while. I’ve been pretty well over the town, Stick. There are two places I’d love to have, but they’re both on West street and the rent would be something awful. Then there are a couple of places out on the way to the station. They’d be cheap enough, but I guess we might just as well throw our money away as locate out there. Fellows never get that far from school.”

“No, we’ve got to be somewhere around Bagdad,” replied Stick. Bagdad was the Academy name for the two blocks on West street lying nearest to the school. Here was established a small shopping district quite distinct from that further in the town, one depending largely, though by no means wholly, on the students for trade. The stores that lined both sides of the street were usually small, but, in the parlance of trade, “select.” One found neckties of a rather more “zippy” coloring here, hats with a more rakish air, shoes with more character, clothing that bordered yet did not infringe on the sporty. And, of course, the stationery store carried the sort of books and blanks and binders and pens that Alton Academy affected, while The Mirror specialized in such highly colored and ultra sweet concoctions of ice cream and syrups, fruits and nuts as are beloved of all preparatory school youths everywhere. Bagdad, in short, provided for so many of the wants of Alton students that only once in a blue moon was it necessary for them to seek further afield.

“Yes,” Russell agreed, “but I don’t believe we can find anything very close that we can afford to take. There’s one place – ”

He broke off to look thoughtfully across at Stick.

“Well?” prompted the latter.

“It’s upstairs, over The Parisian Tailors, on West street. But I don’t like the idea, Stick. You know yourself that a chap won’t climb a flight of stairs if he can find the same thing by walking a block or two further. And there’s Crocker’s store only five doors beyond. I guess that wouldn’t do.”

“Let’s go and have another look,” suggested Stick. “There must be some place we can have. We’ve got an hour before we need to eat, Rus. What do you say?”

“All right, but there’s no use going to Bagdad. We might try River street below West.”

“Huh, no fellow ever sets foot over there! I say, I’ve got it!”

“Shoot, then, Stick.”

“We’ll hire half a store from some one who doesn’t need it!”

“Why, yes, that might do,” replied Russell slowly, “but where are we going to find it?”

“I don’t know. Maybe we can’t, but it’s an idea, isn’t it? Something to work on, eh? Let’s go and have a look.”

CHAPTER III

A NEW YEAR BEGINS

The journey of the little red car came to an end in three days instead of four, for Matilda developed distressing symptoms at a place called Bradford, got vastly worse at Mystic and broke down utterly some two miles short of New London. There for the present the three travelers left her and completed the trip by rail, parting one afternoon in the Grand Central Station with assurances of a speedy reunion.

Four days later, on the twenty-second, which was a Monday, Harley McLeod and Jimmy Austen reached Alton shortly after two o'clock and at half-past three were out on the football field with some sixteen other candidates. To-morrow would bring more, but sixteen wasn't so bad for a first session, and Martin Proctor, this year's captain, was plainly elated.

"Twenty-two fellows had the call," he said to Harley and Jimmy after they had shaken hands, "and you fellows make sixteen who have shown up. That's mighty good, isn't it?"

"When's Johnny coming?" asked Harley.

"Not until Wednesday. He telephoned this morning. He expected to come to-day, but something's happened. We won't need him, anyway. We can't do much more to-day and to-morrow than get the kinks out. Oh, say, Jimmy, that reminds me. You'll have to put in a lot of time on punting this fall. Keep that in mind, will you? Practice whenever you get a chance, like a good fellow. We've got to work up a kicking department with not much to build on. And we play Lorimer in a little over three weeks!"

"How does it seem to be captain, Mart?" asked Jimmy, grinning.

Mart Proctor smiled back, shook his head and then looked suddenly grave. "Well, so far, Jimmy, being captain's been a cinch. Spring practice was short and easy, as you know. And during the summer all I've had to do is write about a dozen letters a week, read half a million clippings sent by Johnny Cade – he cuts out everything he sees that relates in the slightest way to football and piles it all on me! – and try to look stern and important; and you know that's no easy job for a merry wight like me! But since I got here yesterday afternoon I've discovered that being captain of the Alton Football Team is about the same as being President of the U. S. of A. That guy Johnson's been at me every ten minutes with a new problem, Jake's sitting over there on the wheelbarrow trying to think up a new worry – Oh, gee, here comes Johnson again now!"

Henry Johnson, the football manager, was a short, rotund and very earnest-seeming youth. His forehead, above the big spectacles that adorned his short nose, was creased into many deep furrows as he greeted Harley and Jimmy warmly but hurriedly and turned to Mart.

"Peter says he can't get the lines marked out to-morrow, Mart," he announced agitatedly. "Says he hasn't enough lime. Says he ordered it and it hasn't come, and –"

"We can get on without lines," replied Mart calmly but a trifle wearily. "Can't you find anything better than that to bother about, Hen? You ought to leave that small stuff to your helper."

The manager's frown relaxed slightly. "Tod hasn't come yet." The furrows came back. "He promised to get here to-day. He ought to be here, too. Some one's got to look after the weighing, and I don't see how I can do it, Mart. I've got that letter to get into the five o'clock mail –"

"Let the weighing go until to-morrow," said Mart. "We're all old stagers and don't need watching yet. You attend to the letter. Tod may come on the four-twenty, for that matter. Well, let's go, fellows! Oh, Brand! Brand Harmon! Take a bunch of the backs out and throw around, will you? You're in that, Jimmy. Mac, you'd better come with me and we'll try some starts. You've got six or eight pounds that you don't need, and so have I. Throw out some balls, Jake, will you?"

Jakin, the trainer, opened the mouth of the big canvas bag and trickled three scarred and battered footballs across the turf. Ned Richards, quarter-back candidate, pounced on one and slammed it hard at Paul Nichols, last season's center, and Nichols caught it against his stomach, doubled his heavy body over it and gave a high-stepping imitation of a back getting under way.

"Mawson off on a one-yard dash," he laughed.

"Shut up, Paul! Show respect to your betters!" And Mawson quickly knocked the ball from his grasp, caught it as it bounded and hurled it smartly against the back of the center rush's head.

"You're likely to break the ball if you do that," warned Ned Richards. "Hit him in the tummy instead."

There was an hour and a half of rather easy work, which, because the September afternoon was warm and still, reduced most of the candidates, veterans though most of them were, to perspiring, panting wrecks of former jauntiness. Two laps about the track at a slow jog did nothing to restore their freshness!

Harley McLeod and Jimmy Austen plodded back to the gymnasium together, Harley wiping his streaked face with one gray-clad arm. "I didn't know I was so soft," he sighed. "Bet you I dropped four pounds this afternoon, Jimmy."

"Soft living plays the dickens with a fellow," granted Jimmy. "I feel like a pulp myself. I guess if we weighed in this afternoon I'd be six pounds over. Gee, but it's good to be back again, Mac. The old field felt mighty fine underfoot, what? What's on for a week from Saturday? High School, I suppose."

"Yes. They scored on us last year, too. Remember?"

"Yes, Gil Tarver missed an easy tackle that day. I didn't get into the game. Did you?"

"No, Macon played right end. Banning scored on us, too, last fall. Maybe it's a good plan to get a couple of kicks in the shins in the early season. Wakes you up, maybe. Anyway, we came back and beat Kenly to the king's taste!"

"Hope we do it again, but I guess it's her turn this year."

"That's the wrong thought, Jimmy. Kenly ain't got no turn. Hold that, son. Say, maybe that shower isn't going to feel swell! Oh, boy!"

"Some fine moment, I'll remark! By the way, where are we eating?"

"Down town. Lawrence doesn't open until Wednesday morning. We'll get Mart and Rowly and some of the others and go to the Plaza. You can get a pretty good steak there."

"Yes," agreed Jimmy as they entered the building, "but I don't like those unclothed tables, Mac."

"Well, you don't have to eat 'em! Wonder what's at the movie theater to-night. Want to go? My treat."

"Sure! Under such unusual circumstances –"

But Harley had hurried away to his locker.

Stanley Hassell, who roomed with Jimmy in Upton Hall, arrived early on Wednesday, registered at the office, unpacked and bestowed his belongings in their accustomed places to a running fire of comment and information from Jimmy and then accompanied the latter to the field and looked on while the now greatly augmented company of football candidates went through a long practice under a hot autumn sun and the darting eyes of Coach Cade. "Johnny," as he was generally called – though not to his face – was a short, compactly-built man of some twenty-eight years with a countenance rather too large for the rest of him on which various small features were set; such features as a button-like nose, two extraordinarily sharp eyes, a somewhat large mouth and a very square chin. Mr. Cade had rather a fierce appearance, in spite of his lack of height, but this was largely owing to a great deal of thick black hair that stood up bristle-like and defeated all attempts to make it lie down. Add to these items an extremely mild and pleasant voice and you have the Alton Academy football coach as he appeared to the many new candidates that afternoon.

Recitations began on Thursday morning, and the four hundred and odd youths of various ages from twelve to nineteen who composed this year's roster took up scholastic duties again. When the

nine o'clock bell pealed in Academy Hall the dormitories began to discharge their quotas. Young gentlemen, armed for the first fray of the term with text-books and note-books and pencils and pens, set their faces toward the vine-clad and venerable Academy Hall, along the flagged walk on which the morning sunlight, dripping through the trees, cast golden pools amongst the cool shadows. From Haylow, on the left of the row, from Lykes, beside it, from Borden at the extreme right and from Upton that was next, the youths trickled into the two streams that flowed briskly toward their confluence, the entrance to the big brick recitation hall. There were all sorts and conditions of boys in that larger stream that eddied through the wide doorway; short boys and tall boys, stout boys and thin boys, boys who swaggered and boys who went with the diffidence of the stranger, boys with sunburned faces and boys with cheeks too pallid, boys in short trousers and boys in long trousers, boys with straw hats, boys with soft caps and boys with bare heads, high-spirited boys and home-sick boys, eager boys and boys whose feet lagged on the steps; all kinds, all descriptions of boys; just such a medley as is always found when the bell summons to the first recitation on a late September morning.

In a month, even in so short a time as a week, maybe, the sorts will be fewer, the difference between this boy and that less apparent. Already the influences that in the end mold all toward a certain pattern will have been felt, and Jack will have begun to model his conduct and speech and attire after those of Tom, who, impressed with the stamp of one or more years at the school, already tends toward the ultimate pattern. That pattern varies with different schools, yet it is much the same in essentials, and, on the whole, it is a good pattern, being founded on a wise discipline and builded of cleanliness of mind and healthfulness of body, of self-respect and self-control and, always, the love of fair-play.

To-day there was the genial warmth of a still New England early autumn morning over the scene. The elms and maples that bordered the streets still held their verdant leaves and the grass that grew between the graveled roads and paths that intersected the School Green was still unchanged. The Green extended along the west side of Academy street for two blocks and from that quiet thoroughfare arose at an easy grade for the width of another block to the line of brick and limestone buildings that spanned it. Yet, following the center path, one passed two structures ere the wide steps of Academy Hall were met: on the right, near River street, Memorial Hall, containing library and auditorium and a few class rooms, and on the left, close to Meadow street, and partly hidden by trees, the modest and attractive residence of the Principal, Doctor Maitland McPherson, known to the School more simply, yet quite respectfully as "Mac." Behind the main row of buildings stood two others, the Carey Gymnasium, a recently built, up-to-the-minute structure, and, to its left and directly back of Academy Hall, Lawrence, where Alton boys flocked thrice a day and performed certain rites at many long, white-draped tables. Having passed Lawrence and Carey, one passed a cluster of tennis courts and saw, spread out before him, several acres of fine turf whereon, close at hand, were set many steel-framed stands between whose tiered seats appeared the blue-gray ribbon of the running track and the gleaming white lines of the first team gridiron. To the left was the diamond, and ere the further confines of the tract stayed the wandering gaze a second baseball field and a second gridiron met the sight. Far away was a faint glint that told of the river, though the stream was hidden for most of its way by trees that, beyond its winding course, marshaled themselves into a forest and marched westward over the low hills toward the sunset.

But we have wandered far afield. Let us retrace our steps as far as Upton and climb the first flight of stairs. Half way along the corridor to the right is a door numbered 27, and under the numerals two cards are secured with thumb-tacks. These bear the following inscriptions, in the first case written, in a rather round hand, with pen and ink, in the second case imprinted by the engraver's art: Russell Wilcox Emerson – George Patterson.

Beyond the now closed door only one of the young gentlemen named is to be found. Russell, seated in front of the study table in the center of the small yet pleasant room, bends over a sheet of paper that looks very much like a bill of goods. At the top in fat black letters appears the legend:

The Proctor-Farnham Sporting Goods Company. Follows a Broadway, New York, address, and then come many typewritten lines, each ending in figures that form a column down the right-hand margin of the sheet. With pencil in hand, Russell reads, frowns and lightly checks the items, and finally, having reached the bottom of the paper, he leans back in his chair, taps the pencil against his teeth and stares dubiously across to the open window. During the last few days it has become more and more apparent that the merchant who starts in business with insufficient capital must expect anxious moments. Removing his gaze from the window, Russell opens the small drawer at the right and takes out a very new bank book. Reference to the first – and so far only – item set down therein fails, however, to lift the frown from his brow, and, sighing, he looks once more at the appalling total beneath the column of figures on the bill, shakes his head, returns the small bank book to the drawer and glances at his watch. Although the nine o'clock bell had held no summons to him, it will be different when ten o'clock comes, and it is already very close to that hour. So he places the troubling bill in the drawer, drops several other documents upon it and hides them all from sight with a slightly vindictive *bang*. But, had you been there to look over his shoulder, your gaze would doubtless have fallen on the topmost document and you would have perhaps wondered at the presence of what was at first glance a florist's bill. Then, however, looking further, you would have beheld beneath the printed inscription – “J. Warren Pulsifer, Florist, 112 West Street” – the scrawled legend:

“Received of Russell W. Emerson Twenty-two Dollars and Fifty Cents (\$22.50) for one month's rent of premises.

“*J. Warren Pulsifer.*”

CHAPTER IV

JIMMY READS THE PAPER

The Doubleay was written and edited in the sanctum in Academy Hall and printed in a small job printing shop over Garfield's grocery on State street. As school weeklies go, *The Doubleay* was a very presentable sheet. Typographical errors were only frequent enough to encourage the reader of a humorous turn of mind to a diligent perusal of the four pages; the advertising matter was attractively displayed and the editorial policy was commendably simple, being to present the news accurately and briefly. The paper was published on Thursday and distributed to subscribers and advertisers by a more or less efficient corps of six young gentlemen, usually freshmen, who received the munificent reward of half a cent per copy. The first issue of the paper this fall came out on the second Thursday of the term, and, according to custom, contained six pages instead of the usual four, the added matter consisting of the student list arranged by classes and printed on two sides of a half-sheet under the impressive legend: *The Doubleay – Supplement*.

Now, if your transom was open when the carrier reached your door you found the paper on the floor when you returned to your room, or, if it happened to flutter under a bed or into the wastebasket, you discovered it the next day or a week later or not at all, as the case might be. To-day, however, Stanley Hassell pushed it aside with the opening door when he and Jimmy returned from the gymnasium and, picking it up, tossed it to the table.

"All the news that's fit to print," he commented. "The old *Flubdub's* out again, Jimmy." Stanley intended no disrespect to the journal: he merely used the customary name for it. Jimmy sighed as he sank into a chair and reached for the paper.

"Why, I'm glad to see its cheerful face again," he murmured. "And doesn't it look familiar! I wonder if any of the old friends of my youth are missing." He was silent a minute as he turned the pages and as Stanley stretched himself on a window-seat that was four inches too short for him. "No," Jimmy went on, "they're all here: Sampson's Livery, Girtle, the Academy Tailor, Go to Smith's for Stationery, The Best Soda in the City, College Last Shoes – all the dear, familiar old friends of me youth, Stan. And here's Gookin, the Painless Dentist, still holding out a welcoming hand, and the Broadway Theater and the New York Haberdashery and – yes, here are a couple of new ones! I tell you, Stan, the old *Flubdub's* a live un! 'After the Game – Drink Merlin Ginger Ale.' Now, why should I, Stan? Seems to me it's not enough to just tell me to drink the stuff: they ought to give me a reason why – hello! Well, I'll be swiggled! Listen to this, will you? 'The Sign of the Football. R. W. Emerson and G. Patterson announce the opening of their shop at 112 West street with a full line of Athletic and Sporting Supplies and cordially solicit the patronage of their fellow students. Quality goods at New York Prices. Academy Discount. "PandF spells Best!"'"

"That's the Emerson we found waiting on table at the hotel," exclaimed Stanley interestedly. "At least, I suppose it is. I don't believe there's another Emerson in school."

"I'll soon tell you," said Jimmy, rescuing the Supplement from beside his chair. "Emerson, E., Dribble – that's a swell cognomen, if you ask me! – Dutton, Eager – none in the senior class. And none in the junior – yes, there is, 'Emerson, Russell Wilcox, Lawrence, N. Y., U. 27.'"

"That's this fellow," said Stanley. "R. W., Russell Wilcox. Any others?"

"N-no, not in the – Hold on, though. Here's another in the freshman bunch: 'Emerson, Ernest Prentice –'"

"Not him. He wouldn't be a freshie. Besides, the initials aren't right. But who's G. Patterson?"

"Seems to me I remember a Patterson," mused Jimmy. "Of course! You know him; at least by sight. Tall, thin gink; curly hair; Canadian, I think. Rooms in Upton. Wasn't he trying for baseball last spring?"

Stanley nodded. “Yes, but didn’t make it. I believe he’s a bit of a tennis shark. I remember. Maybe he and Emerson room together.”

“Right-o!” corroborated Jimmy, referring again to the list. “What do you know about them opening a store? Got their courage, what? Athletic goods, eh? Well, honest, Stan, there’s a mighty good chance for some one to handle a decent line of athletic goods here. Crocker never has what you want, or, if he has, it’s so old it falls to pieces before you can use it. Remember the glove you bought last spring?”

Stanley nodded earnestly. “Fool thing went to pieces the third time I wore it,” he grunted. “Crocker’s higher than thunder, too. He doesn’t know the War’s over yet! Wouldn’t be surprised if these fellows did pretty well, Jimmy.”

“Nor I; and I hope they do. This Emerson guy seems to have a lot of grit, or – or something. Initiative, too. Plucky chap. I liked his looks that day at Pine Harbor.” After a moment, his eyes returned to the advertisement, “Say, what do you suppose this cryptic bit means? ‘PandF spells Best.’ What’s PandF?”

“You may explore me,” replied Stanley, yawning. “Maybe a misprint for P and E, Patterson and Emerson.”

“But it’s ‘Emerson and Patterson.’ Besides, the thing’s run together, like one word.”

“It’s probably put there to make fellows curious, just as it’s made you, Jimmy. Sort of a – a – what do they call ‘em? Slogans, isn’t it? Like ‘It Floats,’ or – or –” But to save his life Stanley couldn’t think of another example, and he subsided on the pillows again with a grunt.

“Yes, but what’s ‘PandF’?” reiterated Jimmy, frowningly. “Potatoes and Farina? Pork and – and –”

“Cabbage,” suggested Stanley. “Queer how your thoughts always run toward food, Jimmy. Isn’t there anything else in the paper?”

“I guess so. Let’s see.” Jimmy turned to the first page. “‘Record Enrollment’; that’s about the number of fellows; four hundred and twenty-four, Stan: ‘estimated.’ Don’t see why they have to estimate. Maybe they didn’t have time to count ‘em, though. ‘New Courses Offered.’ Avaunt! ‘Football Situation.’ Hm, the usual twaddle. ‘Not in recent years has the Team lost so many of its first-string players by graduation.’ Guess that’s so, too. ‘Of those who started the Kenly game last Fall but three remain to serve as a nucleus about which to build this year’s Eleven; Captain Proctor, tackle, Nichols, center, and Mawson, half-back. The situation is not, though, as desperate as this fact would make it appear, as there is much excellent substitute material on hand. Rhame and McLeod, ends, Rowlandson, guard, Cravath, center, Richards, quarter-back, Harmon, Austen, Longstreth and Kruger, half-backs, and Browne and Linthicum, full-backs, have all had experience, and from them Coach Cade will doubtless be able to select a Team of no mean ability. What may develop from the new candidates is problematic, but nearly always one star appears unheralded.’ Hurrah! There’s a lot more of it, but as I don’t see my name again we’ll quit. And here’s the schedule. ‘Alton High School, Banning High School, Lorimer Academy, Hillsport School, New Falmouth High School, Mount Millard School –’ Say, look where Mount Millard comes, Stan; second game from the last!”

“Sure! Why not?”

“How come?”

“Why, you dumb-bell, didn’t they whale us last year, 19 to 0?”

“That’s so, but –”

“Well, we’ve put them down the list where we can handle them. Who’s next?”

“Oak Grove. Then Kenly. We have three games away from home.”

“All faculty will allow. Good thing, too, if you ask me.”

“I hadn’t, old dear, but I will. What’s the answer?”

“Takes too much money traveling around with the team.”

“Oh! Yes, there’s something in that. Here’s a bit about the baseball situation, but who cares about that? Let’s see, now – ”

“Read it,” commanded Stanley.

Jimmy looked across protestingly. “But it’s of absolutely no interest to any one except a few mistaken idiots who – ”

“*Read it!*”

“Oh, well!” Jimmy sighed. “Fall baseball practice, which started Monday, brought out an unusually large field of candidates. Six of last year’s creditable Team were on hand – ” Jimmy paused and sniffed. “‘Creditable!’ How do they attain that condition? ‘On hand, and practically all of the Scrub Nine. Of new men the more promising at present are Dixon, who hails from Springfield High School, and Jameson, from Earl Academy. Captain Grainger announces that daily practice will be held as long as the weather permits, and asks all those who expect to take part in baseball next Spring to report at once.’ There, there wasn’t a single mention of your name, Stan. I knew there was no call to read the piffle.”

“We’ll have a corking team this year,” mused Stanley.

“Huh, you said that last year, and look what Kenly did to you!”

“That’s all right,” replied the other warmly. “We landed seventeen out of twenty-one games and tied one – the best record in – ”

“Son, you lost to Kenly, and that’s the unforgivable sin,” interrupted Jimmy didactically.

“Oh, well,” grumbled Stanley.

“Not, of course, that baseball is a sport to be taken seriously,” continued Jimmy lightly. “We can lose at soccer and tennis and baseball and still hold our heads up; which is extremely fortunate, too. Those minor sports – ” He broke off to dodge a cushion, and then looked at his watch. “Geewhillikins, Stan! It’s after six! Move your lazy bones and let’s eat!”

Whereupon all was bustle and action in Number 4 Lykes Hall.

CHAPTER V

RUSSELL EXPLAINS

Doubtless Doctor McPherson's copy of *The Doubleay* was delivered to him absolutely on time, but the Doctor was always a busy man, and this was still very close to the beginning of the term, and so it was not until he was at ease in his very large and very old-fashioned green leather armchair that evening that he found time to scan the pages of the school weekly. This was a thing that he invariably did with much interest, for the paper echoed very clearly the pulse of the School. The Board of Editors and Managers were representative fellows and published their opinions – which were the opinions of their schoolmates – very frankly. In fact, as the Doctor recalled as he turned to the first page, there had been times when their frankness had been almost alarming; certainly embarrassing to him and the faculty! The Doctor was very thorough in all that he did, which probably accounts for the fact that, having perused and digested the news and editorial portions of the paper, he considered the advertisements, and with scarcely less interest. And, having reached one of them, he read it twice, frowning a little, and then, drawing a memorandum-pad toward him along the top of the big desk, he made three funny little characters on it, which, since the Doctor numbered a knowledge of shorthand among his other accomplishments, meant much more to him than it would have to you or me.

The direct result of those three lines and pot-hooks was the appearance the next forenoon of Russell Emerson in the school office and his prompt passage to the Principal's private sanctum beyond. This room, which Russell had never before entered – and had never pined to! – was a large, high-ceilinged chamber with cream-white walls and woodwork and three massive windows toward the Green. It was saved from coldness and austerity by the huge mahogany bookcase along the farther wall, by a soft-piled green rug occupying most of the floor space, by a big mahogany desk in the center of the rug and by the presence along two walls of some half-dozen armchairs of the same warm-toned wood. Nevertheless, the first effect of that chamber on Russell was awesome, if not alarming. Although conscious of no lapse from the straight and narrow path, he nevertheless felt most uneasy as he closed the heavy door behind him, responded to the Principal's smiling "Good morning, Emerson" and seated himself in the chair that stood beside the nearer end of the desk. Secretly curious, he sent a hurried look along the top of the shining mahogany, thinking that perhaps there would be somewhere in sight a clew to this unexpected summons. But the desk, save for some half-dozen books between handsome bronze book-ends in a distant corner, a large leather-bound writing pad under the Doctor's elbow and a combined ink-well and pen-tray beyond it, was absolutely empty. Nor did the Doctor's brown and rather sinewy hand hold anything that appeared like incriminating evidence. It held, in fact – I am referring to the hand that held anything – only a sharply-pointed yellow pencil which the Doctor, as he inquired politely as to Russell's health and, subsequently, the health of Russell's parents, slipped slowly back and forth between his fingers, alternating sharpened lead and rubber tip against one gray-trousered knee. Then he laid the pencil down on the blotting-pad, very exactly, so that it lay absolutely parallel to the rim of the pad, and came to the subject.

"I read in *The Doubleay*, Emerson, that you have opened a shop in the town – in West street, I believe – for the sale of athletic supplies."

He paused, and Russell said, "Yes, sir."

"Rather an unusual proceeding, Emerson," pursued the Doctor. "Unusual, that is to say, at this school. It may have been done elsewhere. Would you mind telling me why you have embarked in this – ah – enterprise?"

"Why," replied Russell a trifle blankly, "to make money."

"I see. But do you really need money? That is, more money than, I presume, your parents allow you?"

“Yes, sir,” answered the boy emphatically. “My tuition is paid until the end of this term, sir, but if I’m to remain here for the rest of the year I’ll have to pony up – I mean I’ll have to pay for it myself.” Russell paused, frowned a little and looked speculatively at the Principal. The latter smiled faintly and nodded.

“Yes, I would,” he said.

Russell looked a bit startled and a bit questioning.

“Tell me all about it,” explained the Doctor. “You were wondering whether you should, weren’t you?”

“Well, I – ” Russell began apologetically. Then he smiled and began anew. “You see, sir, my father isn’t very well off. I guess I oughtn’t to have come here in the first place, but I wanted to pretty badly, and father said I might as well have the best as any, and so I came. It went all right the first two years, but last spring things got sort of bad in our town. Folks got out of work and went away, and those that stayed didn’t have much money and didn’t spend much of what they had. And a good many didn’t pay their bills. So father’s business sort of ran down and we didn’t have much money.”

“What is your father’s business, Emerson?”

“He keeps a store, sir, a sort of general store. He told me away back last March that if things didn’t pick up soon there wouldn’t be much chance of my getting back here, and I tried to think of some way of making money so I could come back. I’d helped in the store a good deal and so, naturally, I thought of selling something, and I was pretty sure that athletic goods would go pretty well here, because there isn’t any one in town that makes a specialty of them, you see. Crocker, the hardware man, carries some, but he tries to shove off second-rate stuff at first-class prices, and the fellows have been stung a good deal. Then there’s another man away down town, Loring, who carries a few things, but he’s a good distance off, and his stuff is kind of second-rate, too. When the football team or the baseball team or the hockey team want supplies they send to New York for them, and that takes time and they don’t get any different goods than what we carry.”

“I see,” commented the Doctor interestedly. “And so you and Patterson, your room-mate, decided to start this shop. That was last spring, you say?”

“We didn’t exactly decide then, sir. That is, I decided to do it if I could, but I couldn’t get Stick – that’s Patterson, sir: his name’s George, but every one calls him Stick – I couldn’t get him to promise until about the middle of the summer. I’d have gone into it alone, only I didn’t have enough money, and Stick had some he’d saved and I wanted it. You see, it takes quite a lot to get a thing like this started, sir.”

The Doctor nodded gravely. “Undoubtedly,” he agreed. “And between you, you managed to get enough together to put it through, Emerson?”

Russell shook his head ruefully. “No, sir, not enough, but – well, it has to do,” he answered a bit defiantly. “Stick didn’t want to – I mean he found he couldn’t put in quite as much as he thought he could, sir, and I didn’t make quite as much during the summer as I’d expected to, and so it left us sort of short when the time came.”

“You worked during the summer, then?”

“Yes, sir, I waited on table at the Pine Harbor House. They didn’t have a very good season. Too much rain and cold weather. A lot of the fellows made less than I did, though, so I guess I oughtn’t to kick,” added Russell thoughtfully.

There was silence for a moment, and then the Doctor, having taken up his pencil again, said: “I don’t want to pry into matters that don’t concern me, Emerson, but it must have taken at least several hundred dollars to start this shop of yours. Now, just suppose that there isn’t the demand for your wares that you anticipate. What then? It’s going to whisk that money away, isn’t it? You’ve laid out most of it, I presume, on goods, you’ve had to sign a lease of the premises you occupy and you’ve paid some rent already. Have you thought what may happen? What happens every day in retail business?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Russell. “It’s a risk, I know, but it isn’t as big as you think, I guess. We didn’t have much money to start on and so we don’t stand to lose very much, even if all went, which it can’t. We’ve taken only half a store and we’ve leased it by the month. A florist has the rest of it, a man named Pulsifer. You see, we couldn’t afford to take a whole store, not where we wanted it, and so we made an offer to this florist fellow and he fell for it right away. He had more space than he needed, except around Christmas and Easter time, and he was quite keen about renting it. Then we haven’t put in a very big stock, sir. You see, there are so many things that we have to handle that we just couldn’t begin to keep them all. So we have samples of most everything and a fair line of the fall things. If we don’t happen to have what’s wanted to-day we telephone to New York for it and we get it to-morrow.”

“I see,” said the Doctor. “And of course you aren’t depending solely on the Academy trade?”

“No, sir, we’re after the High School fellows and the public generally. But we do expect to get a good deal of patronage from the Academy. In fact, sir, what I want to do ultimately is persuade the athletic teams to trade with us instead of New York!”

“Well, I endorse your courage, Emerson, and I trust you won’t be disappointed. That is – ” The Doctor stopped and frowned at the pencil. “To be frank, Emerson,” he went on, “I had some idea of persuading you to give up this scheme when I sent for you. I say persuading because there is nothing in the rules of this institution that empowers me to forbid it. The mere fact that it has never before been done doesn’t prohibit it; although it is probably the reason that there is no regulation that does! I dare say you can understand why the faculty would view such a proceeding askance, Emerson.”

Russell looked frankly puzzled and finally shook his head. “No, sir, I’m afraid I can’t,” he said.

The Doctor’s brows went up a trifle and he smiled faintly. “Really? Doesn’t it occur to you that keeping a shop might interfere somewhat with the real purpose of your presence here?”

“You mean it might keep me from studying, sir?”

“Exactly, from study and progress, which, after all, Emerson, are what you are here for.”

“Why, but don’t you see, sir,” exclaimed Russell, “that if I don’t run that store I can’t stay here? Why, I – I’m doing it just because I want to study and learn! I’m doing it so I *can*, Doctor McPherson!”

The Doctor’s golden-brown eyes lighted kindly and the creases that ran from each side of his straight nose to the corners of his rather wide mouth deepened under his smile. “Yes, I do see it, my boy,” he replied heartily. “And because I see it I’ve quite changed my course of action since you arrived. I certainly would not like to see your example followed by – well, by many of your companions, Emerson. And for that reason I trust shop-keeping won’t become the fashion here at Alton! But in your case – well, we’ll see how it works out. I sincerely hope that we shall be satisfied with the results, Emerson. And I certainly hope you will, too. In fact, I wish you the best of luck, my boy. And, while I know very little of merchandising, I’ll be very glad to give you any assistance in my power. And” – whereupon the Doctor’s eyes twinkled – “I’ll certainly patronize ‘The Sign of the Football’ in preference to the gentleman who keeps second-rate goods at first-rate prices! Good morning, Emerson.”

“Good morning, sir,” stammered Russell. “And – and thank you.”

“Not at all. And let me know how you’re getting on sometime!”

CHAPTER VI

BILLY CROCKER DROPS IN

Alton played her first game two days later, against the local High School team. The latter had suffered quite as much as the Academy from graduations, and the eleven that took the field to oppose the Gray-and-Gold knew very little football. Alton fairly ran High School off her feet in the first half, scoring three touchdowns and missing two excellent opportunities to kick goals from the field because of the Coach's instructions to play only a rushing game. Along in the third period Mr. Cade began to send in substitutes, and ere the brief contest was ended Alton had tried out just twenty-one players. There was only one score in the last half, the result of a blocked kick on Alton's thirty-two yards. High School, held for downs, had attempted a goal, but a plunge of eager Alton substitutes had borne down the defense and the ball had bounded aside from some upstretched arm to be gobbled up by Harmon and borne fleetly down the field. There was little opposition, for the nearest High School pursuer reached the final white line a good two yards behind the swift-footed left half-back. Harmon, rather tuckered, was taken out and Mawson replaced him, and it was Mawson who strove to add another point to the Academy's total of 26. But his attempt was weak and the ball never threatened the cross-bar. That was in the third period. In the fourth the playing on both sides became amusingly ragged, and fumble followed fumble and signals were mixed and the spectators fairly howled with glee at times. Twice over-eagerness was penalized under the visitor's goal and so two more probable touchdowns were averted. High School showed one brief session of determined offensive in the third quarter and, taking advantage of Crocker's sleepy game at right end, managed two long runs which, together with a rather flukey forward pass, landed the pigskin on Alton's twenty-two yards. There, however, the attack petered out and, after losing seven yards in three downs, High School faked a try-at-goal and tossed forward over the line, where the ball landed untouched on the turf.

Considered even as a first contest, the afternoon's performance wasn't encouraging from an Alton standpoint, for the line had been slow and had played high, the backs had worked every man for himself, with no semblance of team-play, and even Ned Richards' generalship had been particularly headless. Against an equally green and much lighter team, Alton had failed to show any real football. However, one swallow doesn't make a summer, nor one game a season, and so Coach Cade had little to say after the contest, and the audience, taking itself lazily away through the warm sunlit afternoon, chose to view the humorous aspects of the encounter and disregard its faults. Harley McLeod did fairly well at right end until he gave way to Billy Crocker, and Jimmy played at right half during a brief and glorious third quarter and retired with a bruised and ensanguined nose.

In the Coach's room, across Academy street from the Green, Mr. Cade and Captain Mart Proctor conferred long that evening and in the end reached the conclusion, among other less certain ones, that the task of building a team this fall was going to be a man-sized job!

Jimmy had determined that he would drop in at the Sign of the Football and look the shop over at the first opportunity. By that he meant the first occasion when he was in want of something that might reasonably be expected to be on sale there. But it didn't seem that the opportunity would come, for, with the football management supplying everything from head harness to shoe-laces, there wasn't anything he stood in need of. Nor, between the reading of the advertisement to Stanley that Thursday afternoon and the hour of eleven on the following Tuesday, did he even get as far from the Green as West street. He had heard, though, many comments on the Sign of the Football. Among his acquaintances the store was treated as something of a sensation, while Russell Emerson and his partner in the enterprise were both scoffed at and commended. The idea of an Alton student descending to shop-keeping disturbed many fastidious ones, while others thought it rather a joke – though they couldn't seem to put their finger on the point of it! – and still others declared that it

was a corking good stunt and they hoped Emerson and his pal would make it go. Jimmy lined up with the latter when the matter was discussed in his hearing, and so did Harley McLeod, as, for instance, on Monday night when a half-dozen fellows were gathered in Harley's room in Haylow. The number included Jimmy and Stanley, Ned Richards, Harley's room-mate, Billy Crocker and Cal Grainger, the Baseball Captain. It was the latter who introduced the subject when, apropos of something Ned Richards had said regarding his finances, he informed them that anything approaching financial depression wouldn't bother him hereafter as he and Brand Harmon were going to open a tea shop in the town.

"Keeping a shop is getting to be all the rage," he explained airily, "and those that get into it early are going to reap the shekels. Brand and I have got it all doped out. Some swell little joint we're going to have, too. Rose and gray is to be the – the color motif. We're going to have three kinds of tea: hot, cold and Oolong; and a full line of sandwiches and cakes. Wait till you see us swelling around there with the High School girls! Fine moments, boy, believe me!"

"Better stock up with chewing gum," suggested Ned Richards. "From what I see, I guess that's about all those High School girls ever eat!"

"You're jealous because you didn't think of it yourself," retorted Cal untroubledly.

"Hope you get more trade than those fellows who opened the sporting goods store are getting," said Billy Crocker. He was a rather large, though not heavy, youth, with black hair and thick eyebrows that met above his nose. The latter, being beak-like, gave him an unattractively parrotish look. Billy lived at home, in the town, but spent most of his evenings at the Academy. He wasn't especially popular, and fellows sometimes found themselves wondering why it was he was so frequently in evidence at such gatherings as to-night's. The explanation, however, was very simple. Billy Crocker took his welcome for granted and didn't wait for a formal invitation. Being a football player, he affected the company of the football crowd, and although many protested him as a nuisance he was allowed to tag along. "I've looked in there twenty times," continued Billy, not too truthfully, "and I've never seen any one there yet. They're a couple of nuts!"

"As a member of the Alton Academy Merchants' Association," began Cal protestingly.

"They must have some money they don't need," interrupted Ned Richards enviously. "I heard they'd put a thousand dollars into the thing."

"A thousand dollars!" scoffed Billy Crocker. "More like a hundred! Why, those fellows haven't any money, Ned. They're on their uppers. Patterson wears clothes that were made when Grant took Richmond!"

"What scandal is this?" murmured Jimmy. "Who's Grant?"

"Well, that's what I heard," replied Ned coldly. "Of course, if the gentlemen are personal friends of yours, Crocker –"

"They're not, thanks," answered Billy emphatically. "I don't –"

"They're friends of mine, though," cut in Harley. "At least, Emerson is. And I wish him luck. He's got courage, that chap. Guess it's so about his being poor, though, for we came across him two or three weeks ago waiting on table at a hotel at Pine Harbor. He was a good waiter, too."

Jimmy rather wished that Harley hadn't told that, for, while he had only admiration for the deed, he doubted that Ned and Cal and Billy Crocker would view it in the same way. However, no one looked other than faintly interested; no one, that is, save Billy Crocker. Billy laughed scornfully. "Those fellows would do anything to get a bit of money," he said. "It was Patterson who wore Irv Ross's suit up and down West street a couple of years ago, with a placard on him like a sandwich man, and all for a dollar and a half. You fellows remember."

"Yes, but it was Stacey Ross's suit, and not Irv's," said Stanley. "Girtle charged Stacey ten or twelve dollars more than he charged another chap for the same thing. Girtle said it was because the other fellow paid cash and Stacey didn't, but Stacey was mad clean through and got Patterson to put

the suit on and walk up and down in front of the store with a placard saying 'Bought at Girtle's.' Of course the clothes hung all over Patterson – ”

“That’s all ancient history, Stan,” said Harley.

“Well, what I was getting at is that, as I remember it, this fellow did it for a joke and wasn’t paid for it.”

“He certainly was paid,” exclaimed Billy. “I know!”

“He ought to have been,” remarked Ned. “Anyway, Stan, there’s no sense in arguing with Crocker about what his friends do or did. He’s in the know, aren’t you, Crocker?”

“I told you they aren’t my friends,” answered Billy gruffly. “I don’t know either of them, except by sight.”

“Then why,” asked Ned, yawning, “persist in talking about ’em?”

“I only said they wouldn’t make that store pay,” replied the other defensively. “And they won’t.”

“Say, Crocker,” inquired Jimmy, “isn’t it your father or uncle or something who runs the hardware store?”

“Father,” said Billy in a tone that suggested reticence.

“Thought so. Maybe you’re a bit prejudiced then. You folks sell the same line of stuff as Emerson and Patterson do, eh? Guess you don’t like the idea of a rival almost next door.”

“All those fellows will sell won’t affect my father any!”

“Say!” This explosive exclamation came from Stanley, who suddenly sat up very straight on Ned’s bed and fixed Billy with a baleful glare. “Say, is that your store, Crocker?”

“My father’s,” answered Billy with dignity.

“Well, say, let me tell you something then. You sell the punkest stuff that ever came out of the ark! Honest, Crocker, you do! Say, if Patterson’s clothes were made by Grant at Richmond, or whatever it was you said, the baseball gloves you take good money for were made by Mrs. Cleopatra the day she got bitten by the snake!”

“They’re just as good as you can get anywhere,” protested Billy indignantly. “Baseball gloves aren’t made as well as they used to be, since the War, and if you got a bum one you ought to have brought it back, Hassell, and – ”

“There wasn’t enough of it to bring back,” said Stanley grimly, “after the third time I put it on! And I’m blamed if I see what the War’s got to do with baseball gloves. The trouble with you folks is that you got stocked up about twenty years ago and the moths have got busy!”

The rest, with the notable exception of Billy Crocker, were laughing and chuckling at Stanley’s tirade. Billy was flushed and sulky. “We can’t help it,” he muttered, “if the sewing on a glove gives way sometimes. That’s the way they come to us, and we buy the best we can find – ”

“Listen,” said Stanley impressively. “The sewing was the only part of that glove that held together! It was the leather that was rotten, and if I – ”

“Have you still got it?” demanded Billy, goaded to desperation. “If you have, bring it to the store and I’ll see that you get another.”

“Of course I haven’t got it,” answered Stanley disgustedly. “I bought it last spring, and the last I saw of it, it was hanging over the wire netting back of the home bench, where I pitched the blamed thing!”

“Well, the next time, you bring it back,” said Billy. “We don’t want any one dissatisfied.”

“There ain’t going to be no next time,” answered Stanley significantly. He subsided on the pillows again. “No hard feelings, Crocker,” he added apologetically, “but your store certainly does carry a bum lot of athletic goods.”

There was more laughter, and Billy decided to join in, which he did with what grace he might, and the troublesome subject lapsed.

Crocker left some twenty minutes later with Cal Grainger, although the latter showed no overmastering desire for his company, and when the door was closed Stanley asked: “What do you see in that fellow, Mac?”

“How do you mean?” asked Harley. “He isn’t my pal. He comes to see Ned.”

“What?” demanded his room-mate. “Gosh, I never asked him here! I thought maybe you had. I’m not keen for him, let me tell you. I’ve hardly spoken a hundred words to him, and then only on the field, and did you hear him calling me Ned? Cheeky bounder! I was tickled to death when you pitched into him about your old glove, Stan. He was as sore as a poisoned pup!”

“*Old* glove!” exclaimed Stanley, in arms again. “It was a *new* glove, gosh ding it! And I wore it just three times and – ”

“Oh, sweet odors of Araby!” groaned Jimmy. “You’ve gone and got him started again! Listen, you fellows! I have to hear the history of that glove ten times a day, and it does seem that when I get out in society, as ’twere, I might – might – ”

“Glove?” broke in Harley gravely. “What glove is that? Did you have a glove, Stan?”

“Oh, dry up,” muttered Stanley. “I’m going home. But I’ll tell you chumps one thing,” he went on with returned animation. “Those fellows who have the new store are going to get *my* trade!”

“Ha! Their success is assured!” cried Jimmy. “Stan buys a fielder’s glove every spring, and all they’ve got to do is hold until maybe April or May – ”

“Any one been in there yet?” asked Harley.

No one had, it appeared. “I haven’t even seen the place,” said Ned. “I hear they’ve got a real jazzy sign, though; a football, you know, hanging on a whatyoucallit.”

“Sounds mighty effective,” mused Jimmy. “Just what is a whatyoucallit?”

“Oh, a – one of those things that stick out – ”

“A sore thumb?”

“ – From a wall. A crane, isn’t it?”

“I think that’s a bird,” replied Jimmy, “but I know what you mean. A – a sort of – of iron projection – ”

“Brilliant conversation, I’ll say,” interrupted Stanley. “Come on, you dumb-bell. The best place for an intellect like yours is a pillow.” He propelled Jimmy, still struggling for expression, to the door. “So long, fellows! What he means is an arm.”

“But I don’t!” wailed Jimmy as the door closed. “I don’t!”

CHAPTER VII

JIMMY GOES SHOPPING

Jimmy was very conscientiously obeying Mart Proctor's request to practice punting. As a senior who was not overburdening himself with extra courses, Jimmy had several periods of leisure between nine in the morning and three in the afternoon, and while these periods came at different hours on different days they never failed, and, as it happened, Tuesdays came very close to being full holidays for him. On those days his morning was blissfully free from the requirements of class attendance, and not until eleven-thirty did his schedule mean a thing to him. Usually there was some one on the field when Jimmy arrived who was quite willing to chase his punts and kick them back to him, and so he had already put in a good many hours of work outside the regular practice sessions. He had requisitioned a football from Jake and kept it in his room, since more often than not he went from dormitory to field without stopping at the gymnasium for a change of raiment. Casting aside his jacket, he was ready for the task, since he always affected knickerbockers. An old pair of football shoes, one having a tan lacing and the other a black, which ordinarily kicked about under his bed collecting dust, were donned before leaving the room. On Tuesdays, however, Jimmy dressed for the work and engaged the aid of some football aspirant whose hours of leisure matched his.

On this particular Tuesday, the day following the small events narrated in the preceding chapter, Jimmy, having picked up the football from where it had lodged under Stanley's bed, viewed it with disapprobation. It was a very old ball, and a very scarred and battered one. As Jimmy mentally phrased it, it had whiskers all over it, by which he meant that what may be termed the epidermis of the ball was abraded and scruffy and adorned with little – for want of a better word – hang-nails of leather which in Jimmy's opinion mitigated seriously against both distance and accuracy. Of course he couldn't expect a brand-new ball, but it did seem as if Jake might have found one less feeble and senile than this! Why, the poor thing ought to have been retired on a pension years ago! Jimmy viewed it dubiously and at last distastefully, dropping it from one hand to the other. If he had a decent ball to work with —

Well, why not? If the management wouldn't afford him one, why not buy one of his own? Why not indeed? Jimmy tossed the ancient pigskin from him, unmindful of direction or ultimate destination, pulled out the top drawer of his chiffonier and selected two bills from a number that reposed in a small box there. Then he looked at his watch. He had commandeered Neirsinger, a quarter-back candidate, for half-past nine. It was now twelve minutes after. In eighteen minutes he could get to West street, purchase a new football and – well, if not reach the field at least get within sight of it. So, stuffing the money in a pocket, he hurried forth and down the stairs and across the Green by an illegal but well-defined path that led straight to the center gate. Being like most of us a creature of habit, Jimmy's subconscious mind was leading him to Crocker's hardware store, and to Crocker's hardware store he would have gone, so, doubtless, moving Stanley to reproaches, had his eyes not caught sight of an unaccustomed object when, having traveled the block between the Green and West street, he turned to his left on the latter thoroughfare.

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