

Barbour Ralph Henry

Left Guard Gilbert



Ralph Barbour
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CHAPTER I

THE BOY FROM KANSAS

"HOLD up!"

Coach Robey, coatless, vestless, hatless, his old flannel trousers held up as by a miracle with the aid of a leather strap scarcely deserving the name of belt, pushed his way through the first squad players. The Brimfield Head Coach was a wiry, medium-sized man of about thirty, with a deeply-tanned face from which sharp blue eyes looked out under whitish lashes that were a shade lighter than his eyebrows and two shades lighter than his sandy hair. As the afternoon was excessively hot, even for the twenty-first day of September and in proximity to Long Island Sound, Mr. George Robey's countenance was bathed in perspiration and the faded blue silk shirt was plastered to his body.

"That was left half through guard-tackle, wasn't it? Then don't put the ball in your arm, St. Clair. You ought to know better than that. On plays through the line hold it against your stomach with both hands. How long do you think you'd keep that ball in your elbow after you hit the line? Someone would knock it out in about one second! Now try it again and think what you're doing. All right, Carmine. Same play."

The panting and perspiring backs crouched once more, Carmine shrilly called his signals, Thayer and Gafferty plunged against an imaginary foe as Thursby shot the ball back and St. Clair, hugging the pigskin ecstatically with wide-spread fingers, trotted through the hole, stopped, set the ball on the grass and wiped his streaming face with the torn sleeve of a maroon jersey.

"All right," said the coach. "That will do for today. In on the trot, everyone!"

The first squad, exhaling a long, deep sigh of relief as one man, set their faces toward the gymnasium and trotted slowly off, their canvas-clad legs *swish-swashing* as they met. Coach Robey walked further down the sun-baked field to where the nearer of the remaining four squads was at work.

"Oh, put some pep into it, McPhee!" called the coach as he approached. "You all look as if you were asleep! Come on now! Wake up! Jones, get up there. You're away out of position. That's better. Now then, Quarter! Hold up! What's your down?"

"Third, sir, and four to go."

"All right. Show me what you're going to do with it. Head up, Martin! Look where you're going."

"36 – 27 – 43 – 86!" grunted the quarter-back. "36 – "

"Signal!" cried Gordon, at right half.

McPhee straightened, cast a withering look at the half-back, wiped the perspiration from the end of his sun-burnt nose and repeated:

"36 – 27 – 43 – "

Gordon shifted his feet, and —

"Hold up!" barked the coach. "Gordon, don't give the play away. Shifting your feet like that makes it a cinch for the other fellow. Get your position now and hold it until the ball's passed. All right. Once more, Quarter."

"36 – 27 – 43 – 86!" wailed McPhee. "36 – 27 – "

The pigskin shot into his waiting hands, Gordon leaped forward, took it at a hand-pass and ran out behind his line, left half in advance, turned sharply in and set the ball down.

"First down!" called McPhee. "Sturges over."

"Hold up! Try a forward pass, McPhee. You're on the ten yards and it's third down. Get into this, you ends. Put some pep into it!"

"Signal! Martin back! 37 – 32 – 14 – 71 – Hep!" The backs jumped to the left one stride. "37 – 32 – "

Back flew the ball to the full-back, right end shot out and down the field across the mythical last line, the defence surged against the imaginary enemy and Martin, poising the ball at arm's length, threw over the line to Lee.

"All right," commented the coach. "That'll be all for today. Trot all the way in, fellows."

Five minutes later the field was empty of the sixty-odd boys who had reported for the second day's practice and the sun was going down behind the tree-clad hill to the west. In the gymnasium was the sound of rushing water, of many voices and of scraping benches. Mr. Robey wormed his way through the crowded locker-room to where Danny Moore, the trainer, stood in the doorway of the rubbing-room in talk with Jim Morton, this year's manager of the team. Morton was nineteen, tall, thin and benevolent looking behind a pair of rubber-rimmed spectacles.

"Did you put them on the scales, Dan?" asked the coach.

"Sure, the first, second and third, sir. Some of 'em dropped a good three pounds today. By gorry, I feel like I'd dropped that much meself!"

"It certainly is warm. Look here, Jim, is this all we get to work on? How many were out today?"

"Sixty-two, Coach. That's not bad. I suppose there'll be a few more dribble along tomorrow and the next day."

"Well, they look pretty fair, don't you think? Some of the new fellows seem to have ideas of football. All the last year fellows on hand?"

"All but Gilbert. He hasn't shown up. I don't know why, I'm sure."

"Better look him up," said the coach. "Gilbert ought to make a pretty good showing this year, and we aren't any too strong on guards."

"Gilbert rooms with Tim Otis, I think," replied Morton. "Oh, Tim! Tim Otis!"

A light-haired boy of seventeen, very straight, and very pink where an enormous bath-towel failed to cover him, wormed his way to them.

"Say, Tim, what's the matter with Gilbert?" asked Morton. "Isn't he coming out?"

Tim Otis shrugged a pair of broad, lean shoulders. "He hasn't got here yet, Morton. I don't know what's happened. He wrote me two weeks ago that he'd meet me at the station in New York yesterday for the three-fifty-eight, but he wasn't there and I haven't heard a word from him."

"Probably missed his connection," suggested Morton. "He lives out West somewhere, doesn't he?"

"Yes, Osawatomie, Kansas."

"It probably takes a good while to get away from a place with a name like that," said Mr. Robey drily. "Well, when he shows up, Otis, tell him to get a move on if he wants a place."

"Yes, sir, I will. I'm pretty certain he will be along today some time. I wouldn't be surprised if he was here now."

"All right. By the way, Otis, how do you feel at right half? Seem strange to you?"

"No, sir, I don't notice it. I did play right, you know, two years ago on the second. Seems to me it's easier to take the ball from that position, too."

"Well, don't try the fool trick your side-partner did today," said Mr. Robey, smiling. "Putting the ball under your elbow for a line plunge is a fine piece of business for a fellow who's been playing three years!"

Tim laughed. "I guess he did that because it was just practice, sir. He knows a lot better than to do it in scrimmage."

"I hope so. Well, hurry Gilbert along, will you? If he doesn't get out here inside of a few days he won't find much of a welcome, I'm afraid. I'm not going to keep positions open for anyone this year, not with the first game coming along in four days!"

"Don't you worry, Mr. Robey," replied Tim, with a chuckle and a flash of white teeth. "I'll have him out here the first day he shows up, even if I have to lug him all the way. Don't think I'll have to, though, for you couldn't keep Don from playing football unless you tied him up!"

"Nice chap," commented Morton, nodding at Tim as the latter returned to his bench. "Awfully clean-cut sort."

"A fine lad," agreed Danny Moore, and Mr. Robey nodded thoughtfully.

"I don't believe we're going to miss Kendall and Freer as much as I thought," he said after a moment. "Otis looks to me like a fellow who will stand a lot of work and grow on it. Well, I'm going to get a shower and get out of this sweat-box. As soon as you get time, Jim, I wish you'd catalogue the players the way we did last year and let me have the list. You know how Black did it, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. I'll have the list ready for you tomorrow."

"Good! Got a towel I can use, Dan? I haven't brought any yet. Thanks." The coach nodded and sought a place to disrobe. The trainer's gaze followed him until he was lost to sight beyond the throng.

"I wonder will he put it over again this year," he mused.

"Surest thing you know," asserted Morton. "Think I'm going to have the team licked the year I'm manager, Danny? Not so you'd notice it!"

"Well, between you and him," chuckled Danny, "I've no doubt you'll turn out a fine team. Say, he's the lad that can do it, though, now ain't he? Four years he's been at it, and it's fifty-fifty now, ain't it?"

"Yes, we lost the first two years and won last year and the year before. It was Andy Miller's team that started the ball rolling for us. No one could have won those first two years, anyhow, Danny. Robey had to start at the bottom and build up the whole thing. We hadn't been playing football here for several years before that. It takes a couple of years at the least to get a foundation laid. If we win this year we'll have something to boast of. No other team ever beat Claflin three times running."

"Maybe we won't either. I'm hoping we do, though. Still and all, it don't do to win too many times. You get to thinking you can't lose, d'ye see, and the first thing anyone knows you're all shot to pieces. I've seen it happen, me boy."

"Oh, I dare say, Danny, but don't let's start the losing streak until next year. I want to manage a winning team. Well, so long. See about some cooler weather tomorrow, will you?"

"I will so," replied the little trainer gravely. "I'll start arrangements to once."

Meanwhile Tim Otis, again arrayed in grey flannels and a pair of tan, rubber-soled shoes rather the worse for a hard summer, was on his way along the Row to the last of the five buildings set end to end on the brow of the hill. As he swung in between Wendell and Torrence – the gymnasium stood behind Wendell, and, save for the Cottage, as the principal's residence was called, was the only building out of alignment – he saw the entrances to dormitories and Main Hall thronged with youths who evidently preferred the coolness of outdoors to the heat of the rooms, while others were seated on the grass along the walk. It almost seemed that the entire roster of some one hundred and eighty students was before him. He answered many hails, but declined all inducements to tarry, keeping on his way past Main Hall and Hensley until Billings was reached. There he turned in and tramped to the right along the first floor corridor to the open door of Number 6, a room on the back of the building that looked out upon the tennis courts and, beyond, the football and baseball fields. From the fact that no sound came from the room, Tim decided that Don Gilbert had, after all, and in spite of what Tim called a "hunch," failed to arrive. But when he entered his mistake was instantly apparent. A maroon-coloured cushion hurtled toward him, narrowly missing the green shade of the droplight on the study table and, thanks to prompt and instinctive action on the part of Tim, sailed on, serene and unimpeded, into the corridor. Whereupon Tim uttered a savage whoop of mingled joy

and vengeance and, traversing the length of the room in four leaps, hurled himself upon the occupant of the window-seat.

CHAPTER II

IN NUMBER SIX

FOR a long minute confusion and the noise of battle reigned supreme. Then, in response to a sudden yelp of pain from Don, Tim drew off, panting and grinning. Don was extending a left hand, funereally wrapped in a black silk handkerchief, further along the window-seat and away from the scene of action.

"Hello!" said Tim. "What's the matter with that?"

"Hurt it a little," replied Don.

"Well, I supposed you had, you idiot! How? Hit it against your head?"

The other smiled in his slow fashion. "We had a sort of a wreck coming on. Out in Indiana somewhere. I got this. That's why I'm behind time."

"I'm beastly sorry, old man! I didn't notice the crêpe. Did I hurt it much!"

"No. I yelled so you wouldn't. Preparedness, you know. Safety first and so on. It isn't much. How's everything here?"

Tim seated himself at the other end of the seat, took his knees in his hands, and beamed.

"Oh, fine! Say, I'm tickled to death to see your ugly mug again, Don. You aren't a bit handsomer, are you?"

"I've been told I was. Trouble with you is, you don't recognise manly beauty when you see it."

"Oh, don't I?" Tim twirled an imaginary moustache. "I recognise it every time I look in the glass! Well, how are you aside from the bum fist?"

"Great! I've just had a séance with Josh. I tried to register and sneak by, but Brooke wouldn't have it that way. 'Er, quite so, Gilbert, quite so, but I – er – think you had better see Mr. Fernald.' So I did, and Josh read me the riot act. Thought for awhile he was going to send me home again."

"But didn't you tell him your train was wrecked?"

"Yes, but he didn't believe in it much. Thought I was romancing, I guess. Got a railway guide and showed me how I might have got here on time just the same. Maybe he's right, but I couldn't figure it out in Cincinnati. Besides, I didn't get away with much of anything besides pajamas and overcoat and shoes, and so I had to refit. That lost me the first connection and then I got held up again at Pittsburg. So here I am, the late Mr. Gilbert."

"Josh is an idiot," said Tim disgustedly. "Didn't he see your hand? How did he think you did that if you weren't in a wreck?"

"Oh, I kept that in my pocket and I guess he didn't notice it. He came around all right in the end, though. We parted friends. At least, I did."

"Well, what about that?" Tim nodded at the injured hand. "How'd you cut you, burn you?"

"Yes. Things got on fire."

"You're the most vivid descriptionist I ever listened to! Come across with the sickening details. How did it happen? I didn't see anything about it in the papers."

"Probably wasn't on the sporting page," replied Don gravely.

"Oh, dry up and blow away! Wasn't it in the papers?"

"Cincinnati papers had it. I haven't read the others. It wasn't much of a wreck really. Engineer killed, fireman scalded, about twenty passengers injured more or less. Several considerably more. Express messenger expected to pass out. Just a nice, cosy little wreck with no – no spectacular features, as you might say."

"Well, come on! How did it happen?"

"Freight train taking a siding and went to sleep at it. Our engine bumped the other engine and they both went smash. Hot coals and steam and so on got busy. It was about five in the morning. Just

getting lightish. Everyone snuggled up in bed. *Biff! Wow!* I landed out on the floor on my hands and knees. Everyone yelled. Car turned half over and sat that way. Doors got jammed. We beat it out by the windows. I was a Roman Senator with a green berth curtain wrapped about me. Afterwards I sneaked back and pulled out my shoes and overcoat. Always sleep with my shoes under my pillow, you see. Good idea, too. If I hadn't had them there I'd never have got them. Couldn't get my bag out. Car was on fire by that time. Three others, too. They saved all but the one I was in and the express and baggage cars. After awhile a wrecking train came and then a lot of us walked to a village about a mile and a half away and had breakfast and went on to Cincinnati about noon."

"Gee! But, still, you know, I don't see how you got burned."

"Well, things were pretty hot. Some of them got burned a lot worse than I did. Had to pull some of them out the windows and through the roofs. Women, too. Lucky thing our car had only two in it. Two women, I mean. Things were fairly busy for awhile."

"Must have been. The engineer was killed straight off, eh?"

"Ours was. The other one managed to jump. Firemen got off all right, too. The other fireman. Ours got caught and scalded like the dickens. Saw the engineer myself." Don frowned and shuddered. "Nasty mess he was, too, poor fellow. Let's talk about something else. I don't like to remember that engineer."

"Too bad! But, say, you were lucky, weren't you? You might have been killed, I suppose."

"Might have, maybe. Didn't come very near it, though. First wreck I ever saw and don't want to see any more. Funny thing, though, I didn't mind it at all until I was on the train going to Cincinnati. Excitement, I suppose. Then I came near keeling over, honest! What do you know about that, Timmy?"

"I guess anyone would have. How bad is your burn?"

"Not bad. Hurts a bit, though. It's the inside of the fingers and the palm. It'll be all right in a few days, I guess. Doctor chap said I'd have to have it dressed every day for awhile."

"But, Great Scott, Don, what about football?"

"I've thought of that. Nothing doing for a week or so, I guess. Rotten luck, eh?"

"Beastly! And Robey was telling me only half an hour ago to hurry you up. Said you'd have to come right out if you wanted a place. Still, when he understands what the trouble is – "

"I'll see him tonight, I guess. Who's playing guard, Tim?"

"Joe Gafferty, left; Tom Hall, right. Walton and Pryme and Lawton are all after places. Walton's been doing good work too, I think."

"All the fellows back?"

"Every last one. Remember Howard, who played sub half-back for the second last year? He's showing great form. Still, you can't tell much yet. There's to be scrimmage tomorrow. We play Thacher Saturday, you know. Sort of quick work and I don't believe we'll be anywhere near ready for them."

"Thacher's easy. We beat them 26 to 3 last year."

"Twenty-three to three."

"Twenty-six."

"Twenty-three. Bet you!"

"I don't bet, Timmy. Know I'm right, though. Anyway, Thacher's easy. Tell me the news."

"Oh, there isn't anything startling. We had the usual polite party at Josh's last night. Shook hands with the new chaps and told 'em how tickled we were to see them. Ate sandwiches and cake and lemonade and – by the way, we've got a new master; physics; Moller his name is; Caleb Moller, B.A. Quite a handsome brute and a swell dresser. Comes from Lehigh or one of those Southern colleges, I believe."

"Lehigh's in Pennsylvania, you ignoramus."

"Is it?" answered Tim untroubledly. "All right. Let it stay there. Anyhow, Caleb is some cheese."

"Where's Rollinson gone?"

"Don't know what happened to Rollo. Draper said he heard he'd gone to some whopping big prep school up in New Hampshire or somewhere."

"Or some other Southern school," suggested Don soberly.

"Dry up! And, say, get a move on. It's nearly time for eats and I'm starved."

"Timmy, I never saw the time you weren't starved. All right. I'm sort of hungry myself. Haven't had anything since about ten o'clock this morning. Ran out of money. Got here with eight cents in my pocket. That and my tuition check. I'd have cashed that if I could have and had a dinner. I was sure hungry!"

"Well, wash your dirty face and hands," said Tim, "and come along. Oh, say, Don, wait till you see the classy Norfolk suit I've got. I enticed dad into Crook's when we struck the city; told him I had to have some hankies and ties, you know. Then I steered him up against this here suit, and this here suit made a hit with him right away. If he could have got into it himself he'd have walked out in it. It's sort of green with a reddish thread wandering carelessly through it. It's some apparel, take it from me."

"Maybe I will if it fits me," responded Don.

"Will what?"

"Take it from you."

"Gee, but you're bright! Getting wrecked's put an edge on you, sonny. I'm afraid that suit wouldn't fit you, though, Don. You've grown about an inch since Spring, haven't you? You're beastly fat, too."

"I am not," denied Don, good-humouredly indignant. "I've kept in strict training all summer. What you think is fat is good hard muscle, Timmy. Feel of that arm if you don't believe it."

"Yes, quite village-blacksmithy."

"Quite *what*?"

"Village-blacksmithy. 'The muscles of his mighty arms were strong as iron bands,' or something like that. Get out of the way and let me wash up."

Don retired to his dresser and passed the brushes over his brown hair and snugged his tie up a bit. The face that looked back at him from the mirror was not, perhaps, handsome, although it by no means merited Tim's aspersions. There was a nice pair of dark brown eyes, rather slumberous looking, a nose a trifle too short for perfection and a mouth a shade too wide. But it was a good-tempered, pleasant face, on the whole, intelligent and capable and matching well the physically capable body below, a body of wide shoulders and well-knit muscles and a deep chest that might have belonged to a youth of eighteen instead of seventeen. Compared with Tim Otis, who was of the same age, Don Gilbert suffered on only two counts – quickness and vivacity. Tim, well-muscled, possessed a liveness that Don could never attain to, and moved, thought and spoke far more quickly. In height Don topped his friend by almost a full inch and was broader and bigger-boned. They were both, in spite of dissimilarity, fine, manly fellows.

Tim, wiping his hands after ablutions, turned to survey Don with a quizzical smile on his good-looking face. And, after a moment's reflective regard of his chum's broad back, he broke the silence.

"Say, Don," he asked, "glad to get back?"

Don turned, while a slow smile crept over his countenance.

"*Su-u-re*," he drawled.

CHAPTER III

AMY HOLDS FORTH

BRIMFIELD ACADEMY is at Brimfield, and Brimfield is a scant thirty miles out of New York City and some two or three miles from the Sound. It is more than possible that these facts are already known to you; if you live in the vicinity of New York they certainly are. But at the risk of being tiresome I must explain a little about the school for the benefit of those readers who are unacquainted with it. Brimfield was this Fall entering on its twenty-fifth year, a fact destined to be appropriately celebrated later on. The enrollment was one hundred and eighty students and the faculty consisted of twenty members inclusive of the principal, Mr. Joshua L. Fernald, A.M., more familiarly known as "Josh." The course covers six years, and boys may enter the First Form at the age of twelve. Being an endowed institution and well supplied with money under the terms of the will of its founder, Brimfield boasts of its fine buildings. There are four dormitories, Wendell, Torrence, Hensey and Billings, all modern, and, between Torrence and Hensey, the original Academy Building now known as Main Hall and containing the class rooms, school offices, assembly room and library. The dining hall is in Wendell, the last building on the right. Behind Wendell is the gymnasium. Occupying almost if not quite as retiring a situation at the other end of the Row, is the Cottage, Mr. Fernald's residence. Each dormitory is ruled over by a master. In Billings Mr. Daley, the instructor in modern languages, was in charge at the period of this story, and since it was necessary to receive permission before leaving the school grounds after supper, Don and Tim paused at Mr. Daley's study on the way out. Don's knock on the portal of Number 8 elicited an instant invitation to enter and a moment later he was shaking hands with the hall master, a youngish man with a pleasant countenance and a manner at once eager and embarrassed. Mr. Daley was referred to as Horace, which was his first name, and, as he shook hands, Don very nearly committed the awful mistake of calling him that! After greetings had been exchanged Don explained somewhat vaguely the reason for his tardy arrival and then requested permission to visit Coach Robey in the village after supper.

"Yes, Gilbert, but – er – be back by eight, please. I'm not sure that Mr. Robey isn't about school, however. Have you inquired?"

"No, sir, but Tim says he isn't eating in hall yet, and so – "

"Ah, in that case perhaps not. Well, be back for study hour. If you're going to supper I'll walk along with you, fellows." Mr. Daley closed his study door and they went out together and, as they trod the flags of the long walk that passed the fronts of the buildings, Mr. Daley discoursed on football with Tim while Don replied to the greetings of friends. They parted from the instructor at the dining hall door and sought their places at table, Don's arrival being greeted with acclaim by the other half-dozen occupants of the board. Once more he was obliged to give an account of himself, but this time his narrative was considered to be sadly lacking in detail and it was not until Tim had come to his assistance with a highly coloured if not exactly authentic history of the train-wreck that the audience was satisfied. Don told him he was an idiot. Tim, declining to argue the point, revenged himself by stealing a slice of Don's bread when the latter's attention was challenged by Harry Westcott at the farther end of the table.

Westcott, who was one of the editors of the school monthly, *The Review*, had developed the journalistic instinct to a high degree of late and had visions of a thrilling story in the November issue. But Don utterly refused to pose as a hero of any sort. The best Harry could get out of him was the that he had seen several persons removed from the wreck and had helped carry one to the relief train later. That wasn't much to go on, and, subsequently, Harry regretfully abandoned his plan.

After supper Don and Tim walked down to the village and Don had a few minutes of talk with the coach. Mr. Robey was sympathetic but annoyed. Although he didn't say so in so many words he

gave Don to understand that he had failed in his duty to the school and the team in allowing himself to become concerned in a train-wreck. He didn't explain just how Don could have avoided it, and Don didn't think it worth while to inquire.

"You have that hand looked after properly and regularly, Gilbert," he said, "and watch practice until you can put on togs. Losing a week or so is going to handicap you. No doubt about that. And I'm not making any promises. But you keep your eyes open and maybe there'll be a place for you when you're ready to work. It's awfully hard luck, old chap. See you tomorrow."

Don went back to school through the warm dusk slightly cast down, although he had previously realised that football would be beyond him for at least a week. It is sometimes one thing to acknowledge a fact oneself and another to hear the same fact stated by a second person. There's a certain finality about the latter that is convincing. But if Don was downcast he didn't show it to his companion. Don had a way of concealing his emotions that Tim at once admired and resented. When Tim felt blue – which was mighty seldom – he let it be known to the whole world, and when he felt gay he was just as confiding. But Don – well, as Tim often said, he was "worse than an Indian!"

After study they sallied forth again, arm in arm, and went down the Row to Torrence and climbed the stairs to Number 14. As the door was half open knocking was a needless formality – especially as the noise within would have prevented its being heard – and so Tim pushed the portal further ajar and entered, followed by Don, on a most animated scene. Eight boys were sprawled or seated around the room, while another, a thin, tall, unkempt youth with a shock of very black hair which was always falling over his eyes and being brushed aside, was standing in a small clearing between table and windows balancing a baseball bat, surmounted by two books and a glass of water, on his chin. So interested was the audience in this startling feat that the presence of the new arrivals passed unnoted until the juggler, suddenly stepping back, allowed the law of gravity to have its way for an instant. Then his right hand caught the falling bat, the two books crashed unheeded to the floor and his left hand seized the descending tumbler. Simultaneously there was a disgruntled yelp from Jim Morton and a howl of laughter from the rest of the audience. For the juggler, while he had miraculously caught the tumbler in mid-air, had not been deft enough to keep the contents intact and about half of it had gone into the football manager's face. However, everyone there except Morton applauded enthusiastically and hilariously, and Larry Jones, sweeping his offending locks aside with the careless and impatient grace of a violin virtuoso, bowed repeatedly.

"Great stuff," approved Amory Byrd, rescuing his books from the floor. "Do it again and stand nearer Jim."

"If he does it again I'm going into the hall," said Morton disgustedly, wiping his damp countenance on the edge of Clint Thayer's bedspread. "You're a punk juggler, Larry."

"All right, you do it," was the reply. Larry proffered the bat and tumbler, but Morton waved them indignantly aside.

"I don't do monkey-tricks, thanks. Gee, my collar's sopping wet!"

"Oh, that's all right," called someone. "You'll be going to bed soon. Say, Larry, do that one with the three tennis balls."

"Isn't room enough. I know a good trick with coins, though. Any fellow got two halves?"

Groans of derision were heard and at that moment someone discovered the presence of Don and Tim and Larry's audience deserted him. When the new-comers had found accommodations, such as they were, conversation switched to the all-absorbing subject of football. Most of the fellows assembled were members of the first or second teams: Larry Jones was a substitute half; Clint Thayer was first-choice left tackle; Steve Edwards, sprawled on Clint's bed, was left end and this year's captain; the short, sturdy youth in the Morris chair was Thursby, the centre; Tom Hall, broad of shoulders, was right guard; Harry Walton, slimmer and rangier, with a rather saturnine countenance, was a substitute for that position. Jim Morton was, as we know, manager, and only Amory – or "Amy"

– Byrd and Leroy Draper, the tow-headed, tip-nosed youth sharing the Morris chair with Thursby, were, in a manner of speaking, non-combatants.

But being a non-combatant didn't prevent Amy Byrd from airing his views and opinions on the subject of football, and that he was now doing. "Every year," he protested, "I have to hear the same line of talk from you chaps. It's wearying, woesomely wearying. Now, as a matter of fact, every one of you knows that we've got the average material and that we'll go ahead and turn out an average team and beat Claflin as per usual. The only chance for argument is what the score will be. You fellows like to grouse and pretend every fall that the team's shot full of holes and that the world is a dark, dreary, dismal place and that winning from Claflin is only a hectic dream. For the love of lemons, fellows, chuck the undertaker stuff and cheer up. Talk about something interesting, or, if you must talk your everlasting football, cut out the sobs!"

"Oh, dry up, Amy," said Tom Hall. "You oughtn't to be allowed to talk. Someone stuff a pillow in his mouth. No one has said we were shot full of holes, but you can't get around the fact that we've lost a lot of good players and – "

"Oh, gee, he's at it again!" wailed Amy. "Yes, Thomas darling, you've lost two fellows out of the line and two out of the backfield and there's nothing to live for and we'd better poison ourselves off before defeat and disgrace come upon us. All is lost save honour! Ah, woe is me!"

"Cut it out, Amy," begged Edwards. "You don't know anything about football, you idiot."

"Two in the line and two in the backfield is good," jeered Tim. "We've lost Blaisdell and Innes and Tyler – "

"Never was any good," interpolated Amy.

"And Roberts and Marvin – "

"Carmine's better!"

"And Kendall and Harris!" concluded Tim triumphantly.

"Never mind, Timmy, you've still got me!" replied Amy sweetly. "Gee, to hear you rave you'd think the whole team had graduated!"

"So it has, practically!"

"Ah, yes, and I heard the same dope this time last year. We'd lost Miller and Sawyer and Williams and – and Milton and a dozen or two more and there wasn't any hope for us! And all we did was to go ahead and dodder along and beat Claflin seven to nothing! Not so bad for a lifeless corpse, what?"

Steve Edwards laughed. "Well, maybe we do talk trouble a good deal about this time of year. It's natural, I guess. You lose fellows who played fine ball last year and you can't see just at first how anyone can fill their places. Someone always does, though. That's the bully part of it. I dare say we'll manage to dodder along, as Amy calls it, and rub it into old Claflin as we've been doing."

"First sensible word I've heard tonight," said Amy approvingly. "I wouldn't kick so much if I only had to hear this sort of stuff occasionally, but I'm rooming with the original crêpe-hanger! Clint sobs himself to sleep at night thinking how terribly the dear old team's shot to pieces. If I remark in my optimistic, gladsome way, 'Clint, list how sweetly the birdies sing, and observe, I prithee, the sunlight gilding yon mountain peak,' Clint turns his mournful countenance on me and chokes out something about a weak backfield! Say, I'm gladder every day of my life that I stayed sane and – "

"Stayed *what*?" exclaimed Jim Morton incredulously.

"And didn't become obsessed with football mania!"

"Where do you get the words, Amy?" sighed Clint Thayer admiringly.

"Amy's the original phonograph," commented Tim. "Only he's an improvement on anything Edison ever invented. You don't have to wind Amy up!"

"No, he's got a self-starting attachment," chuckled Draper.

"Returning to the – the original contention," continued Amy in superb disdain of the low jests, "I'll bet any one of you or the whole kit and caboodle of you that we beat Claflin again this year. Now make a noise like some money!"

"Amy, we don't bet," remarked Tom Hall. "At least, not with money. Betting money is very wrong. (Amy sniffed sarcastically.) But I'll wager a good feed for the crowd that we have a harder time beating Claflin this year than we had last. And I'll –"

"Oh, piffle! I don't care whether you have to work harder to do it or not. I say you'll do it! Hard work wouldn't hurt you, anyway. You're a lot of loafers. All any of you do is go out to the field and strike an attitude like a hero. Why –"

Cries of expostulation and threats of physical violence failed to disturb the irrepressible Amy.

"Tell you what I'll do, you piffing Greeks, I'll blow you all off to a top-hole dinner at the Inn if Claflin beats us. There's a sporting proposition for you, you undertakers' assistants!"

"Yah! What do we do if she doesn't?" exclaimed Walton.

Amy surveyed him coldly. He didn't like Harry Walton and never attempted to disguise the fact. "Why, Harry, old dear, you'll just keep right on squandering your money as usual, I suppose. But I don't want you to waste any on me. This is a one-man wager."

"No, it isn't," said Leroy Draper, "I'm in on it, Amy. I'll take half of it."

"All right, Roy. But our money's safe as safe! This bunch of grouzers won't get fat off us, old chap!"

"Say," said Walton, who had been trying to get Amy's attention for a minute, "what's the story about my squandering my money? Anybody seen you being careless with yours, Amy?"

"Not that I know of. I'm not careless with it; I'm careful. But being careful with money is different from having it glued to your skin so you have to have a surgical operation before –"

"Oh, cut it, Amy," said Tim.

"I spend my money just as freely as you do," returned Walton hotly. "You talk so much with your face –"

"Let it go at that, Harry," advised Tom Hall soothingly. "Amy's just talking."

"That's all," agreed Amy sweetly. "Just talking. You're the original little spendthrift, Harry. I'm going to write home to your folks some time and warn 'em. Hold on, you chaps, don't hurry off. The night is still in its infancy. Wait and watch it grow up. Steve! *Sit down!*"

"Thanks, I've got to be moseying along," replied Captain Edwards. "It's pretty near ten. I think it would be a rather good idea if we had a rule that football men were to be in their rooms at a quarter to ten all during the season."

"I can see that you're going to be one of these here martinets you read about," said Tim with a sigh. "Steve, remember you were young once yourself."

"He never was!" declared Amy with decision. "Steve was grown-up when he was quite young and he's never got over it. Thank the Fates I don't have to be bossed by him! Are you all leaving? Clint, count the spoons and forks! Come again, everyone. I've got lots more to say. Good-night, Don. Glad to see you back again, old sober-sides. Sorry about that fin of yours. Be careful with him, Tim. You know how it is with the dear old team. We need every man we can get. Hold on, Harry! Did you drop that quarter? Oh, I beg pardon, it's only a button. That's right, Thurs, kick the chair over if it's in your way. We don't care a bit about our furniture. For the love of lemons, Larry, don't grin like that! Think of the team, man! Remember your sorrows! Good-night!"

Half-way to Billings Don broke the silence.

"Fellows are funny, aren't they?" he murmured.

"Funny? How do you mean?" asked Tim.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Don after a thoughtful moment. "They're – they're so different, I guess."

"Who's different from who?"

"Everyone," answered Don, smothering a yawn.

Tim viewed him in the radiance of the light over the doorway with profound admiration. "Don, you're a brilliant chap! Honest, sometimes I wonder how you do it! Doesn't it hurt?"

Don only smiled.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST GAME

DON sat on the bench and watched the game with Thacher School. With him were nearly a dozen other substitutes, but they, unlike Don, were in football togs and might, in fact probably would, get into the game sooner or later. There was no such luck for Don so long as his hand remained swathed in bandages, and he was silently bewailing his luck. At his right sat Danny Moore, chin in hand and elbow in palm, viewing the contest from half-closed eyes. The trainer was small and red of hair and very freckled, and he was thoroughly Irish and, in the manner of his race, mightily proud of it. Also, he was a clever little man and a good trainer.

An attempted forward pass by the visitors grounded and the horn squawked the end of the first period. Danny turned his beady green eyes on Don. "Likely you're wishin' yourself out there with the rest of 'em, boy," he said questioningly.

Don nodded, smiled his slow smile and shook his head. "I guess I won't get into it for a week yet. Doc says this hand has got to do a lot of healing first. He has a fine time every day pulling and cutting the old skin off it. Guess he enjoys it so much he will hate to have it heal. I should think, Danny, that if I had a heavy glove, sort of padded in the palm, I might play a little."

"Sure, I'll fix you up something real nate," replied Danny readily. "Nate an' scientific, d'ye see? An' so soon as the Doc says the word you come to me an' I'll be having it ready for you."

"Will you? Thanks, Danny. That's great! I would like to get back to practice again. I'm afraid I'll be as stiff and stale as anything if I stay out much longer."

"Go easy on your eating, lad, and it'll take you no time at all to catch up with the rest of 'em. Spread this hand for me while I see the shape of it. What happened to your finger there?"

"I broke it when I was a little kid, playing baseball."

"Sure, whoever set it for you must have been cross-eyed," said the trainer, drily. "'Tis a bum job he did."

"Yes, it's a little crooked, but it works all right."

"You'd have hard work gettin' your engagement ring over that lump, I'm thinking. It's a fortunate thing you're not a girl, d'ye mind."

Don laughed. "Engagement rings go on the other hand, don't they, Danny?"

"Faith, I don't know. Bad luck to him, he's done it again!"

"Who? What?" asked Don startledly.

"Jim Morton. That's twice today he's spilled most of the water from the pail. Well, I'll have to go an' fill it, I suppose."

Danny went off to get the water bucket and the teams lined up again near the visitors' twenty-five yard line. Coach Robey had put in a somewhat patched-up team today. Captain Edwards was at left end, Clint Thayer at left tackle, Gafferty at left guard, Peters at centre, Pryme at right guard, Crewe at right tackle, Lee at right end, Carmine at quarter, St. Clair and Gordon at half and Martin at full. It was not the best line-up possible, but it was so far handling the situation fairly satisfactorily. The practice of the last two days had developed one or two strains and proved more than one of the first-choice fellows far below condition. Tim Otis was out for a day or two with a twisted knee and Tom Hall with a lame shoulder. Thursby had developed an erratic streak the day before and was nursing his chagrin further along the bench. Holt, the best right end, was in trouble with the faculty, and Rollins, full-back, had pulled a tendon in his ankle. A full team of second- and third-string players were having signal work on the practice gridiron.

In the stands a fairly good-sized gathering of onlookers was applauding listlessly at such infrequent times as the maroon-and-grey team gave it any excuse. Thus far, however, exciting episodes

had been scarce. The weather, which was enervatingly warm, affected both elevens and the playing was sluggish and far from brilliant. The Brimfield backs, with the exception of Carmine, who was always on edge, conducted themselves as if they were at a rehearsal, accepting the ball in an indifferent manner and half-heartedly plunging at the opposing line or jogging around the ends. As the first half drew to a close both goal lines were still unthreatened and from all indications would remain so for the rest of the contest. A slight thrill was developed, though, just before the second period came to an end when a Thacher half-back managed to get away outside Crewe and romped half the length of the field before he was laid low by Carmine. After that there was an exchange of punts and the teams trotted off to the gymnasium.

Don left the bench with the others, but did not follow them to the dressing room. Instead, he strolled down the running track and across to the practice field, where Tim was superintending the signal practice. Don joined him and followed the panting, perspiring players down the field. Tim's conversation was rather difficult to follow, since he continually interrupted himself to instruct or admonish the toilers.

"I feel like a slave-driver, pushing these poor chaps around in this heat. How's the game going? No score? We must be playing pretty punk, I guess. What sort of a team has – Jones, you missed your starting signal again. For the love of mud, keep your ears open! – Thacher must be as bad as we are. Who's playing in my place? Gordon? Is he doing anything? – Try them on that again, McPhee, will you? Robbins, you're supposed to block hard on that and not let your man through until the runner's got into the line. – I could have played today all right, but that idiot, Danny, wouldn't let me. My knee's perfectly all right."

"Then why do you limp?" asked Don innocently.

"Force of habit," said Tim. "What time is it?"

Don consulted his silver watch and announced a quarter to four.

"Thank goodness! That'll do, fellows. You'd better get your showers before you try to see that game. If Danny catches you over there the way you are he will just about scalp you! By the way, McPhee, you saw what I meant about that end-around play, didn't you? You can't afford to slow up the play by waiting for your end to get to you. He's got to be in position to take the pass at the right second. Otherwise they'll come through on you and stop him behind the line. There ought to be absolutely no pause between Smith's pass to you and your pass to Compton, or whoever the end is. You get the ball, turn quick, toss it to the end and fall in behind him. It ought to be almost one motion. Of course, I know you fellows were pretty well fagged today, but you don't want to let your ends think they can take their time on that play, old man, for it's got to be fast or it's no earthly good. Thus endeth the lesson. Come on, Don, and we'll go over and add the dignity of our presence to that little affair."

They reached the bench just as the two teams trotted back and Brimfield's supporters raised a faint cheer. Don imagined that there was a little more vim in the way the maroon-and-grey warriors went into the field for the second half and the results proved him right.

It was the home team's kick-off, and after Captain Edwards, in the absence of Hall, had sped the ball down to Thacher's twenty yards and a Thacher player had sped it back to the thirty, Brimfield settled down to business. Probably Coach Robey's remarks in the interim had been sufficiently caustic to get under the skin. At all events Brimfield forced Thacher to punt on third down and then almost blocked the kick. As it was, the ball hurtled out of bounds near the middle of the field and became Brimfield's on her forty-eight. Two plunges netted five yards, and then St. Clair, returning to form, ripped his way past tackle on the left and fought over two white lines before he was halted. Gordon and Martin made it first down in three tries and Carmine worked the left end for four more. Thacher stiffened then, however, and after two ineffectual plunges St. Clair punted and Brimfield caught on her goal line and ran back a dozen yards, Lee, right end, missing his tackle badly and Steve Edwards being neatly blocked off. But Thacher found the going even harder than her opponent had and in a moment she, too, was forced to punt.

This time it was St. Clair who caught and who, eluding both Thacher ends, ran straight along the side line until he was upset near the enemy's thirty-five yards. As he went down he managed to get one foot over the line and the referee paced in fifteen yards, set the ball to earth and waved toward the Thacher goal.

Martin faked a forward pass and the ball went to Gordon for a try at right tackle. Thayer and Gafferty opened a fine hole there and Gordon romped through and made eight before the Thacher secondary defence brought him down. Martin completed the distance through centre. From the twenty-four yards to the ten the ball went, progress, however, becoming slower as the attack neared the goal. On a shift that brought Thayer to the right side of the line, St. Clair got around the short end for three and Martin added two more, leaving the pigskin on the five-yard line. It was third down and Martin went back to kick. But after a moment's hesitation Carmine changed his signals and the ends stole out toward the side lines. Thacher proceeded to arrange her forces to intercept a forward pass and again Carmine switched. The ends crept back and Martin retired to the fifteen-yard line and patted the turf. Carmine knelt in front of him and eyed the goal. Then the signals came again, and with them the ball, and it was Martin who caught it and not Carmine. Two steps to the right, a quick heave, a frenzied shouting from the defenders of the goal, a confused jostling, and Captain Edwards, one foot over the line, reached his arms into the air, pulled down the hurtling pigskin, tore away from one of the enemy, lunged forward and went down under a mass of bodies, but well over the goal line.

Brimfield found her enthusiasm then, and her voice, and cheered loudly and long, only ceasing when Carmine walked out with the ball under his arm and flung himself to the turf opposite the right hand goal post. Thursby, hustled in by Coach Robey, measured distance and direction, stepped forward and, as the line of Thacher warriors swept forward with upstretched hands, swung his toe against the ball and sent it neatly across the bar.

With the score seven to nothing against her, Thacher returned to the fray with a fine determination, but, when the teams had changed places after the kick-off and the last period had begun, she speedily found that victory was not to be her portion. Mr. Robey sent in nearly a new team during that last ten minutes and the substitutes, fresh and eager, went at it hammer-and-tongs. Thacher enlisted fresh material, too, but it couldn't stop the onslaught that soon took the ball down the field to within close scoring distance of her goal. That Brimfield did not add another touchdown was only because her line, overanxious, was twice found off-side and penalised. Even then the ball went at last to within six inches of the goal line and it was only after the nimble referee had dug into the pile-up like a terrier scratching for a bone in an ash-heap that the fact was determined that Thacher had saved her bacon by the width of the ball. She kicked out of danger from behind her goal and after two plays the final whistle blew.

It was a very hot and very weary crowd of fellows who thronged the dressing room in the gymnasium five minutes later and, above the swish of water in the showers, shouted back and forth and discussed the game from as many angles as there had been participants. Possibly Brimfield had no very good reason for feeling proud of her afternoon's work, for last year she had defeated Thacher 26 to 3. That game, however, had taken place two weeks later in the season, when the Maroon-and-Grey was better off in the matter of experience, and so perhaps was not a fair comparison. At all events, Brimfield liked the way she had "come back" in that third period and liked the way in which the substitutes had behaved, and displayed a very evident inclination to pat herself on the back.

Tim, who had haled Don into the gymnasium on the way back to hall, tried his best to convince all those who would listen to him that they had played a perfectly punk game and that nothing but the veriest fluke had accounted for that score. But they called him a "sore-head" and laughed at him, and even drove him away with flicking towels, and he finally gave it up and consented to accompany Don back to Billings, limping a trifle whenever he thought no one was looking.

Don missed Tim at supper, for the training tables started that evening and Tim went off to one of them with his napkin ring and his own particular bottle of tomato catsup, leaving his chum feeling forlornly "out of it."

CHAPTER V

DON GOES TO THE SECOND

LIFE at Brimfield Academy settled down for Don into the accustomed routine. The loss of one day made no difference in the matter of lessons, for with Tim's assistance – they were both in the Fifth Form – he easily made up what had been missed. They were taking up German that year for the first time and Don found it hard going, but he managed to satisfy Mr. Daley after a fashion. Don was a fellow who studied hard because he had to. Tim could skim his lessons, make a good showing in class and remember enough of what he had gone over to appear quite erudite. Don had to get right down and grapple with things. He once said enviously, and with as near an approach to an epigram as he was capable of, that whereas Tim got his lessons by inhaling them, he, Don, had to chew them up and swallow them! But when examination time came Don's method of assimilation showed better results.

The injured hand healed with incredible slowness, but heal it did, and at last the day came when the doctor consented to let his impatient pupil put on the padded arrangement that the ingenious Danny Moore had fashioned of a discarded fielder's glove and some curled hair, and Don triumphantly reported for practice. His triumph was, however, short-lived, for Coach Robey viewed him dubiously and relegated him to the second squad, from which Mr. Boutelle was then forming his second team. "Boots" was a graduate who turned up every Fall and took charge of the second or scrub team. It was an open secret that he received no remuneration. Patriotism and sheer love of the game were the inducements that caused Mr. Boutelle to donate some two months of time and labour to the cause of turning out a second team strong enough to give the first the practice it needed. And he always succeeded. "Boutelle's Babies," as someone had facetiously termed them, could invariably be depended on to give the school eleven as hard a tussle as it wanted – and sometimes a deal harder. Boots was a bit of a driver and believed in strenuous work, but his charges liked him immensely and performed miracles of labour at his command. His greeting of Don was almost as dubious as had been Coach Robey's.

"Of course I'm glad to have you, Gilbert, but the trouble is that as soon as we've got you nicely working Mr. Robey will take you away. That's a great trick of his. He seems to think the purpose of the second team is to train players for the first. It isn't, though. He gives me what he doesn't want every year and I do my best to make a team from it, and I ought to be allowed to keep what I make. Well, never mind. You do the best you can while you're with us, Gilbert."

"Maybe he won't have me this year," said Don dejectedly. "He seems to think that being out for a couple of weeks has queered me."

"Well, you don't feel that way about it, do you?"

"No, sir, I'm perfectly all right. I've watched practice every afternoon and I've been doing a quarter to a half on the track."

"Hm. Well, you've got a little flesh that will have to come off, but it won't take long to lose it this weather. Sit down a minute." They were in front of the stand and Mr. Boutelle seated himself on the lower tier and Don followed his example. "Let me see, Gilbert. Last year you played left guard, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And if I remember aright your chief difficulty was in the matter of weight."

"I'm twelve pounds heavier this fall, sir."

"Yes, but some of that'll come off, I guess. However, that doesn't matter. You were getting along pretty well at the last of the season, I remember. Who's ahead of you on the first?"

"Well, Gafferty's got the first choice, I guess. And then there's Harry Walton."

"You can beat Walton," said Boots decisively. "Walton lacks head. He can't think things out for himself. You can. What you'll have to do this year, my boy, is speed up a little. It took you until about the middle of the season to find your pace. Remember?"

"Yes, sir, I know."

"Well, you won't stay with us long, as I've said, and so I'm not going to build you into the line, Gilbert. I've got some good-looking guard material and I can't afford to work over you and get dependent on you and then have Robey snatch you away about the middle of the fall. That won't do. But I'll tell you what we will do, Gilbert. We'll use you enough to bring you around in form slowly. You'll play left guard for awhile every day. But what I want you to really do is to help with the others. You've been at it two years now and you know how the position ought to be played and you've got hard common-sense. I'll put the guard candidates in your hands. See what you can do with them. There's a couple of likely chaps in Kirkwell and Merton, and there are two or three more after positions. You take them in charge, Gilbert, and show me what you know about coaching. What do you say?"

"Why, Mr. Boutelle, I – I don't know that I can show anyone else what to do. I can play the position myself after a fashion, but – well, I guess it's another thing to teach, isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know. It is if you go into it with the idea that it is, but don't do that. Play the position as it ought to be played, tell the others why, call them down when they make mistakes, pat them on the back when they do right. Just forget that you're trying to teach. If a fellow came to you and said: 'Gilbert, I want to play guard but I don't know how, and I wish you'd tell me how you do it,' why, you wouldn't have any trouble, would you?"

"N-no, sir, I guess not," replied Don a trifle doubtfully.

"Well, there you are. Try it, anyway. You'll get on all right. I'll be right on hand to dig the spurs in when your courage fails." Mr. Boutelle smiled. "We're going to have a dandy second team this fall, my boy. We've got nothing to build on, only a lot of green material, and that's the best part of it. I don't care how inexperienced the material is if it's willing to learn and has the usual number of arms and legs and such things and a few ounces of grey matter in the cranium. Well, here we go. Nothing today but passing and punting, I guess. Sure your hand's all right?"

"Yes, sir, thanks. I don't really need this contrivance; it's awfully clumsy; but Doc said I'd better wear it for a few days."

"Best to be on the safe side. I'll have you take one squad of these chaps, I guess, and I'll give the other to Lewis. You know the usual stuff, Gilbert. Rest 'em up now and then; they're soft and the weather's warm. But work 'em when they're working. Any fellow who soldiers gets bounced. All out, second squad!"

There wasn't anything that afternoon but the sort of drudgery that tries the enthusiasm of the tyro: passing the ball in circles, falling on it, catching it on the bound and starting. Don was surprised to discover how soft he was in spite of his daily exercise on the cinders. When the hour's practice was over he was just about as thankful as any of the puffing, perspiring youths around him. Considering it afterward, Don was unable to view the material with the enthusiasm Mr. Boutelle had displayed. To him the thirty-odd boys who had reported for the second team were a hopeless lot, barring, of course, a few, not more than four in all, who had had experience last season. In another week Mr. Robey would make a cut in the first squad and the second would find itself augmented by some ten or twelve cast-offs. But just now the second squad looked to Don to be a most unlikely lot. When he confided all this to Tim that evening the latter said:

"Don't you worry, old man. Boots will make a team out of them. Why, he could make a football team out of eleven clothing store dummies! Sometimes I think that Boots ought to be head coach instead of Robey. I've got nothing against Robey, either. He's a bit of a 'miracle man' himself, *but* for building a team out of nothing Boutelle has him both shoulders to the mat!"

"I don't believe Boots would want to coach the first," replied Don.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. He's sort of – well, he kind of likes to – Oh, I don't know."

"Very clearly explained, Donald."

"Well, Boots, if he was a soldier, would be the sort that would want to lead a charge where the odds were against him. See what I mean?"

"You mean he has a hankering for the forlorn chance business? Maybe so. That's not a bad name for the second, is it? The Forlorn Chances! I guess you've got him dead to rights, though. Boots is for the under dog every time. I guess coaching the first and having his pick of the players wouldn't make any sort of a hit with Boots. It would be too tame. Boots likes to take three discarded veterans, two crips and a handful of green youngsters and whittle them into a bunch that will make us sweat and toil to score on. And, what's more, he does it! Bet you anything, Don, this year's second will be every bit as good as last year's."

"I won't take it, because I think so myself," laughed Don. "I can't see how he's going to do it, Tim, but something tells me he will!"

"Oh, with you to coach the guards it will be no trick at all," said Tim, grinning.

Don smiled thinly. "I'll make an awful mess of it, I guess," he muttered.

"Not you, boy!" and Tim slapped him encouragingly on the back. "You'll blunder right ahead to glory, same as you always do. You'll make hard work of it and all that, but you'll get there. Don, you're exactly like the porpoise – no, the tortoise in the fable. You don't look fast, old man, but you keep on moving ahead and saying nothing and when the hares arrive you're curled up on the finish line fast asleep. Tortoises can't curl up, though, can they? And, say, what the dickens *is* a tortoise, anyway? I always get tortoises and porpoises mixed."

"A porpoise is a fish," replied Don gravely. "And a tortoise is a land turtle. But they're both anthropoids."

"Are they?" asked Tim vaguely. "All right. Here, what are you grinning at? Anthropoids nothing! An anthropoid is a monkey or – or something."

"You're an anthropoid yourself, Timmy."

"Meaning I'm a monkey?"

"Not at all. Here, look it up." And Don shoved a dictionary across the table. Tim accepted it suspiciously.

"All right," he said, "but if it's what I think it is you'll have to fight. Anthesis, anthropocosmic – Say, I'm glad you didn't call me that! Here it is. Now let's see. 'Anthropoid, somewhat like a human being in form or other characteristics'! Something like – You wait till I get you in the tank again! 'Something like a human being'! For two cents I'd lay you on the bed and spank you with that tennis racket!"

"I've got two cents that say you can't do it," replied Don.

"Well, I could if there wasn't so much of you," grumbled Tim. "Now shut up and let me stuff awhile. Horace has been eyeing me in a way I don't like lately. How's your German going?"

"Not very well. It's a silly language, I think. But I guess I'll get the hang of it after awhile. What I want to know is why they can't make their letters the way we do."

"Because they're afraid someone might be able to read the plaguy stuff. Tell you what we'll do, Don."

"What'll we do?"

"We'll go for a swim in the tank after study. Will you?"

Don winked slowly. "Not after that threat, thanks."

"I won't touch you, honest to goodness, Don! Did you learn to swim any better this Summer?"

"Where would I learn?" asked the other. "There's no place to swim out my way, unless it's the river."

"Well, don't the rivers in Kansas contain water?"

"Yes, sometimes! Winter, usually. If you'll promise not to grab me when I'm not looking I'll go. I hate the taste of that tank water, Tim."

"You ought to know how to swim, old man. Never mind, Mr. Conklin will get hold of you this Winter and beat it into you."

"I can swim now," replied Don indignantly.

"Oh, yes, you can swim like a hunk of lead! The last time I saw you try it you did five strokes and then got so elated that you nearly drowned yourself trying to cheer! I could teach you in three lessons if you'd let me."

"Much obliged, but nothing doing, Timmy. I'd as lief drown by myself as have you hold my head under water."

"That was just a joke, Don. I won't ever do it again. I wanted you to get used to the water, you see."

"I don't mind getting used to it outside, but I hate to fill up with it, Tim. It tastes very nasty. You may be a good teacher, but I don't like your methods."

"Well, we'll go and have a dip, anyway," laughed Tim. "It'll set us up and refresh us after our arduous stuffing."

"If you don't cut out the chatter there won't be any stuffing," warned Don. "It's almost half-past now. And I've got three solid pages of this rot to do. Dry up, like a good pal."

CHAPTER VI

THE SEARCH OF ADVENTURE

BY that time Brimfield had played her second game and lost it, 6 to 14, to Canterbury High School. Canterbury was not considered very formidable and Brimfield usually had little trouble with her. But this year things had gone wrong from the start of the game to the finish, wrong, that is, from Brimfield's point of view. Fumbling had been much in evidence and poor judgment even more. Carmine had worked like a Trojan at quarter-back for two periods, but had somehow failed to display his usually good generalship, and McPhee, who had taken his place at the beginning of the second half, while he ran the team well, twice dropped punts in the backfield, one of which accounted for Canterbury's second touchdown and goal. Oddly enough, it was the veterans who failed most signally to live up to expectations, and of all the veterans Tom Hall was the worst offender. Possibly Tom's shoulder still bothered him, but even that couldn't have accounted for all his shortcomings. Crewe, who played tackle beside Tom, was not a very steady man, and Tom's errors threw him off his game badly, with the result that, until Coach Robey put Pryme in for Tom in the third period, Canterbury made a lamentable number of gains at the right of the Brimfield line. Even Tim Otis, usually undisturbed by anything short of an earthquake, was affected by the playing of the others and finally had what he called a "brain-storm" in the third period, getting the signals twisted and being thrown back for an eight-yard loss. That misadventure bothered him so that he was heartily glad when Gordon was rushed in a few minutes later.

The team took the beating to heart and the school at large was disposed to indulge in sarcasm and bitterness. Only Coach Robey seemed undisturbed. He lavished no praise, you may be sure, but, on the other hand, neither did he utter any criticism after the contest was over. Instead, he laid off more than half the line-up on Monday and Tuesday, and, since the weather continued almost unseasonably warm, the rest was just what the fellows needed. Wednesday's practice went with a new snap and vim and those who broiled in the afternoon sun and watched it found grounds for hope.

It was on Wednesday that Don began his connection with the second team, and by then the injured hand was so well along that he was able to discard the glove. Three days of kindergarten work followed, with, on Saturday, a short signal drill. The first team journeyed away that afternoon to play Miter Hill School, and Don would have liked very much to have gone along. But Boots put his charges through a good, hard hour and a half of work, and Don had all he could attend to at home. Just before supper he did, however, walk down to the station and meet Tim when the team arrived home. Tim, who seemed remarkably fresh for a youth who had played through the most of four ten-minute periods, scorned the coach and he and Don footed it back.

"Twenty to nothing, my boy," said Tim exultantly. "They never had a look-in. It was some game, believe me, dearie! And I want to tell you, too, that Miter Hill is fifty per cent better than Canterbury ever thought of being!"

"That's fine," said Don. "What sort of a game did you play?"

"Me? Oh, I was the life of the party. Got off two nice little runs, one for thirty and the other for forty-five yards. Got a touchdown the second time. I wouldn't have, though, if Steve hadn't paced me most the way down and put the quarter out. Old Steve played like a whirlwind today. We all did, I guess. There was only one fumble, and that wasn't anyone's fault. Holt got a forward pass and a Miter Hill chap plunged into him and just about knocked the breath out of him and he let go of the ball."

"Twenty to nothing? Three touchdowns, then."

"Yep, and Rollins only missed one goal. Rollins scored once, I scored once and Steve took over the last one."

"Forward pass?"

"No, end-around. It went off great, too. We were way back on the eighteen yards, I think it was, and we worked the fake forward pass play, with Steve taking the ball from Carmine. We fooled them finely. They never got onto it at all until Steve was over the line. Some of the fellows who were doing so much grousing last week ought to have come along today and seen some real football. Robey was as pleased as anything. You could tell that because he looked sort of cross and told us how bad we were!"

"Wish I'd seen it," mourned Don.

"It was some game, all right, all right! We're going to have a modest celebration this evening; just Tom Hall and Clint Thayer and Hap Crewe, maybe, and yours truly. Better come along. Will you?"

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, just down to the village. We'll leave the window open."

"You'll get nabbed if you try that," demurred Don. "Better not, Tim."

"Well, we may be back by ten. No harm in having a way open in case something delays us, though. We'll have a little feed at the Inn, you know, and – "

"Don't be a chump," growled Don. "You're in training and you know mighty well Robey won't stand for any funny-business."

"What Robey doesn't know isn't going to hurt him," replied Tim untroubledly. "And he won't know anything about this because he's off for home on the seven o'clock train. Tom heard him tell Steve he wouldn't be back until Monday noon."

"Yes, but someone will see you and Robey'll hear of it. And then you'll get the dickens from him and be hauled up to the office. Better not risk it, Timmy."

"Gee, you're worse than Mr. Poe's crow! Or was it a raven? What's the difference, anyhow? Now don't tell me they're both anthropeds or pods, or whatever it is, because I'm onto you as a disseminator of knowledge! I never got even with you yet for calling me 'something like a human being'."

"I'll take it back, then; you aren't. But, just the same, Tim, I wish you'd cut out the celebration."

"You're all the time interfering with my innocent pleasures," protested Tim. "Why, bless you, dearie, we aren't going to cut-up. We're merely going to stroll quietly to the village, trolling a song, mayhap, and look in the windows."

"That'll take you a long time," Don laughed. "There are only half a dozen."

"Wrong. A fellow opened a watchmaker's emporium next door to the post office t'other day and has a most fascinating window. It has four alarm clocks, three pairs of cuff-links and a chronometer in it! Oh, it's swell! Do you realise, Don, that slowly but surely our little village is taking on the – the semblance of a metropolis? All we want is a movie palace!"

"Let's start one. They say there's a lot of money in them."

"Bet there is! We've got three or four at home, and they're peaches. Full every minute, too. I went a lot last Summer; had filmitis, I guess. But how about the party? Will you come along?"

"No, thanks."

"Oh, come on, Don! Have a heart! Be one of our merry gang."

"I'd rather not, thank you. I like Josh well enough, but I don't like to stand on the carpet and hear him say 'Until further notice, Gilbert.' Nothing doing, Tim!"

And Don remained adamant the rest of the way to school and while they made a hurried toilet and rushed to dining hall in an effort to reach it before the food gave out.

The team members received an ovation that evening when they entered the dining hall. It seemed as if the school wanted to make up for its unkindness of a week before. Some few of the fellows, recalling sarcastic comments overheard, were inclined to be haughty and unforgiving, but eventually they melted. Don, now at the second training-table, presided over by Mr. Boutelle, saw that Coach Robey's chair was vacant, which fact bore out Tim's statement that the coach had gone home over Sunday. But, even granting that, Don didn't approve of Tim's celebration, for, as he very

well knew, after a football victory fellows were very likely to be carried away by their enthusiasm and to forget such trifling things as rules and regulations. He determined to try again to dissuade Tim after supper.

But Tim, who was in a very cheerful and expansive mood, refused to be dissuaded. Instead, he turned the tables and begged so hard for Don to come with him that Don finally relented. After all, there was no harm in the excursion if they got permission and were back in hall by ten o'clock. And it was a wonderfully pleasant, warm evening, much too fine an evening to spend indoors, and – well, secretly, Don wanted some fun as much as any of them, perhaps!

Permission was easily obtained and at seven they met Tom Hall and Clint Thayer in front of Torrence. Crewe failed them, but Tim said it didn't matter; that there were only four "Three" anyhow! So they set off for the village in high spirits, through a warm, fragrant, star-lighted evening, with no settled plan of action in mind save to do about as they liked for the succeeding three hours. Clint Thayer had a strip of plaster across the saddle of his nose, which gave him a strangely benign expression. Tom walked a bit stiffly and confessed to "a peach of a shin," which probably meant something quite different from what it suggested. Only Tim, of the three first team fellows, had emerged unscathed, and he referred to the fact in an unpleasantly superior manner which brought from Tom Hall the remark that it was easy enough to get through a game without any knocks if you didn't do anything! Whereupon Tim flicked him across the cheek with an imaginary glove, the challenge was issued and accepted and the two fought an exciting duel with rapiers – as imaginary as the glove – on the sidewalk, feinting, thrusting, parrying, until Clint cried "The guard! The guard!" and they all raced down the road to the nearest lamp-post, where Tim insisted on looking to his wounds. To hear him tell it, he was as full of holes as a sieve, while, on the same authority, Tom was a dead man. Tom denied being dead, but Tim insisted and refused to pay any heed to him all the rest of the way to the village on the ground that, being dead, Tom had no business to talk.

But when they reached what Tim called "the heart of the city" Tom was allowed to come to life again. The heart of the city consisted of the junction of two village streets whereon were located the diminutive town hall, the post office, a fire house and five stores. They began with the druggist's, ranging themselves in front of one of the two windows and pretending to be overwhelmed with the beauty and magnificence of the goods displayed.

"What beautiful soap," exclaimed Tom. "I never saw such beautiful soap, fellows. Pink and green and white! Looks almost good enough to wash with, doesn't it?"

"And get on to the lovely toilet set in the green velvet box," begged Tim awedly. "Scissors and brushes and little do-funnies and –"

"I'm going to buy a bottle of that hair-grower," announced Don. "I want to raise a beard."

"Let's get a bottle and present it to Uncle Sim," suggested Clint. Uncle Sim was Mr. Simkins, the Greek and Latin instructor, and was noticeably bald. The others chuckled and thought very well of the suggestion until Tom discovered that the price, as stated on the label, was one whole dollar. They had, they decided, better uses for what little money they carried. Eventually they went inside, and sat on stools in front of the small soda fountain and drank gaily-coloured concoctions which, according to Tim, later, sounded better than they tasted. Having exhausted the amusement to be derived from the drug store, they went to the fire house next door and, pressing their noses against the glass, debated what would happen if an alarm was rung in. There was a box beside the doors, a most tempting red box and Tim eyed it longingly until Don led him gently but firmly away from temptation.

In the small store across the street they examined all the books and magazines displayed on the counters, which didn't take long, as literature was not a large part of the stock. Tim spent ten cents for a football guide, explaining that he had always wanted to know some of the rules of that game! Don bought some candy and Clint a bag of peanuts, although the others protested that if they ate truck they'd spoil their appetites for real food. The force of the protest was somewhat marred by the actions of the protestants, who helped themselves liberally to the contents of the two bags.

There was a convenient fence a few steps along the street and they perched themselves on the top rail and consumed the peanuts and candy and watched the "rush of the great city," to again quote the poetic Tim. During the next twenty minutes exactly eight carriages and four automobiles entered their range of vision; and at that Clint insisted that they had counted one automobile twice. He accused it of going around the block in order to add to the confusion. Possibly some three dozen people passed within sight, although that may have been a too liberal estimate. Tom at last declared that he couldn't stand the excitement any longer; that his brain reeled and his eyes ached; and that he was going to find a quiet spot far from the dizzy whirl. So they adjourned to the grocery and butcher shop and talked learnedly of loins and shoulders and ribs. And Clint dragged what he alluded to as a "brisket" into the conversation to the confusion of the others, who had never heard of it and didn't believe in it anyway. Tom said Clint meant "biscuit" and that this wasn't a bakery. Then he caught sight of some rather pathetic and unseasonable radishes and, having a passion for radishes, went in and purchased four bunches. That outlay led to an expenditure for salt, and as a large, round pasteboard carton of it was the least they could buy, they retreated down the street to the Inn porch, trickled the salt along the top of the railing, drew up chairs and consumed the radishes at their leisure. All, that is, save Tim. Tim didn't like radishes, called them "fire-crackers" and pretended to be deeply disgusted with his companions for eating them.

When the radishes were consumed they invaded the Inn and assaulted the water tank in force. Then, as there were practically no sights left to be viewed, they went back to their chairs and, as Tom had it, waited for inspiration. Don was for trolleying over to the shore, having a dip in the ocean and returning to school in good time. But Tim pointed out that the trolley line was a good half-mile distant, that he had not filled himself with radishes and was consequently quite famished for food and favoured remaining within easy distance of the Inn so that, in case he grew faint, he could reach sustenance. Don's motion was defeated. In view of what eventually occurred, that was, perhaps, unfortunate.

CHAPTER VII

FIGHTING FIRE

"THIS," said Tim presently, "is a bit dull, if you ask me. I came out for some excitement. Let's do something."

"What?" asked Clint, yawning loudly.

"Let's eat."

The others groaned.

"That's all right for you chaps, but I'm getting hungry," Tim asserted. "I thought we were going to have a feed. They'll be closing this place up the first thing we know. How about a rarebit, fellows?"

"Oh, let's wait awhile," said Don. "Let's take a walk and get up an appetite."

"Walk!" jeered Tim. "Gee, I've walked enough. And there's nothing the matter with my appetite right now. Tell you what – " Tim paused. An automobile was stopping in front of the Inn. The headlights suddenly dimmed and the single occupant, a tall man in a light overcoat, got out, walked up the path, ascended the steps and passed into the house. "Now, who's he?" asked Tim. "Say, I wish he'd loan us his car for awhile."

"Run in and ask him," suggested Tom. "He looked kind."

"Maybe he'd give us a ride if we asked him," pursued Tim. "It's a peach of a car; foreign, I guess."

"It's a Mercy Dear," said Tom.

"Or a Fierce Sorrow," hazarded Clint.

"Bet you it's a Cheerless," said Don, "or a Backhard."

"Don't care what it is," persisted Tim. "I want a ride in it."

"Let's go down and stand around it with our fingers in our mouths," said Tom, with a chuckle. "Perhaps he will take pity on us and ask us in."

"Or we might open the door for him," offered Don.

At that moment Clint, who had left his chair to lean across the railing and gaze past the end of the porch, interrupted with an exclamation. "Say, fellows, what's that light over there?" he asked eagerly.

"Fire, by jingo!" cried Tim.

"That's what!" agreed Tom. "Say, you don't suppose it's the school, do you?"

"Of course not! The school's over that way. Besides, that fire's away off; maybe two miles. Come on!" And Clint started for the steps.

"Wait!" called Tim. "I want to see the engine come out. Bet you it's a fine sight! Anyway, we can't foot it two miles."

"Maybe it isn't that far," said Don. "Fires look further than they are sometimes."

"Yes, and nearer, too," replied Tim. "Think we ought to run over and tell them about it?"

But that question was speedily answered by the sudden clanging of a gong inside the fire house, followed by the sound of running footsteps and, an instant later, the wild alarm of the shrill-tongued bell in the little belfry.

"My word!" exclaimed Tom. "I didn't know there were so many folks in the town!" Already a small-sized crowd had gathered in front of the fire house, some fifty yards up the street. The doors rolled open and a figure pushed through the throng and loped across the street and disappeared. The bell clanged on and on. Don and Clint and Tom made a dash for the steps. Tim slid over the railing. But before any of them had more than reached the sidewalk the tall owner of the automobile catapulted himself down the steps, hailing them as he came.

"Where is it, boys?" he shouted.

"Over there," answered Clint, pointing. But the glow in the sky was scarcely visible from the sidewalk and they all swarmed back to the porch again.

"I see," said the man. "Some farm house, I guess. They'll know at the fire house." He sprang down the steps again, the boys streaming after him. He was already in the car when Tim asked breathlessly: "You going, sir?"

"Sure! Want to come? Pile in, then. There are some packages in there. Look out for them."

Clint had already put his foot down hard on something that, whatever it might be, was never meant to be walked on, but he made no mention of the fact. The car leaped forward, swung to the right, stopped with a jerk six inches from a lamp-post, backed, straightened out and careened along to the fire house. All was excitement there. Men were rushing into the building and rushing out again, agitatedly donning rubber coats and hats. Speculation was rife. A score of voices argued as to the location of the fire. The throng swayed back and forth. The man in the car demanded information as he drew up at the curb and a dozen answers were flung at him. Then a small, fat man ran up and leaned excitedly across the front of the auto. "Hello, Mr. Brady!" he panted. "You going out there?"

"Yes, but I've got a load, Johnson. Where is it?"

"Don't no one seem to know. Jim Cogswell knows, but he's gone for the horses."

"Look out! Here they come!" "Get that auto out of the way there!" "Stand aside, everyone!" "Get a move on, Jim!" A lean little man in his shirt sleeves suddenly appeared leading two jogging horses, while a third horse trotted along behind. The crowd scampered aside and the horses beat a tattoo on the floor as they wheeled to their places. Mr. Brady jumped from his seat, pushed his way through the crowd as it closed in again about the doorway and disappeared. Tim whooped with delight.

"What did I tell you?" he demanded. "Didn't I say it would be a great sight? Gee, I haven't had such a good time since I had the measles!"

Mr. Brady reappeared, scrambled back to his seat and slammed the door behind him. "Jim says it's Corrigan's barn," he said. "Sit tight, boys!" The car leaped forward once more, took the first corner at twenty miles an hour, took the next at thirty and then, in the middle of a firm, hard road, simply roared away into the starlit darkness, the headlights throwing a great white radiance ahead. Tim, on the front seat, whipped off his cap and stuffed it into his pocket. Behind, the three boys huddled themselves low in the wide seat while the wind tore past them.

"Must be going ninety miles an hour!" gasped Clint.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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