

Barbour Ralph Henry

The Turner Twins



Ralph Barbour
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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCES A PAIR OF HEROES

“Jail,” said the boy in the gray flannels.

“School,” pronounced the boy in the blue serge.

“Bet you!”

“No, sir, you owe me ten cents now. You didn’t pay up the last time.”

“It’s wrong to bet for money, Ned.”

The other set down the suitcase he was carrying and scoffed. “Yes, when you lose,” he observed, with deep sarcasm. “That’s thirty-five cents you owe me. You bet in Chicago that – ”

“That debt’s outlawed. Chicago’s in Michigan – ”

“Bet you!”

“And this is New York, and so – ”

“Mighty good thing Dad sent you to school, Laurie. Chicago’s in Illinois, you ignoramus.”

“Is it? Well, who cares?” Laurence Stenman Turner had also deposited the bag he was carrying on the brick sidewalk and was applying a lavender-bordered handkerchief to a moist brow. “Just the same, that’s a jail.”

“If that’s a jail, I’ll eat my hat,” declared the other,

“It’s not a school, though, and that’s flat,” was the prompt retort.

“Huh, that was an easy one!” Edward Anderson Turner retreated to a flat-topped stone wall bordering a well-shaded lawn and seated himself with a sigh of relief. His companion followed suit. Behind them, grass and trees and flower beds made a pleasant setting for a square gray house, half hidden from the street. Overhead a horse-chestnut tree spread low branches across the sidewalk. The quiet village street ascended gently, curving as it went, empty in both directions. Somewhere on a neighboring thoroughfare a scissors-grinder was punctuating the silence with the musical *ding – dang – dong* of bells. In a near-by tree a locust was making his shrill clatter. Across the way, the subject of contention, stood a large red-brick edifice, stone trimmed, many windowed, costly and unlovely. The boys viewed it silently. Then their glances fell to the two black suitcases on the curbing.

“How far did that hombre say it was to the school?” asked Ned Turner, after a minute of silence.

“Three quarters of a mile.”

“How far have we walked already?”

“Mile and a half.”

“Consequently?”

“Said hombre was a li – was unvoracious.”

“Un-*ver*-acious is the word, old son.”

“What do we care? We don’t own it,” replied Laurie, cheerfully. “Want to go on?”

Ned shook his head slowly. “What time have you got?” he asked.

“What time do you want?” was the flippant response.

With a sigh, Ned pulled back his left sleeve and looked at his watch. “It’s only about a quarter to twelve. We don’t have to get there until six if we don’t want to.”

“I know, but I couldn’t sit on this wall all that time! Besides, what about lunch?”

“I’m not very hungry,” was the sad reply.

“That’s the trouble with having your breakfast late.”

“That’s the trouble with eating two plates of griddle-cakes, you mean,” retorted Laurie. “Anyway, I’m hungry if you’re not. Let’s go.”

But he made no move, and they continued to dangle their shoes from the wall and gaze lazily across the shady street. The scissors-grinder's chime died in the distance. Farther down the street the whirring of a lawn-mower competed with the locust.

"Upon a wall they sat them down," murmured Ned, turning a challenging look on his companion.

"Lost in the wilds of Orstead Town," added Laurie.

Ned nodded mild approval and once more silence held.

Save that one was dressed in gray and the other in blue, the two boys were strikingly alike. Each was slim of body and round of face, with red-brown hair and a short, slightly impertinent nose. Ned's eyes were a trifle bluer than Laurie's and he had the advantage – if advantage it was – of some five pounds of weight. But neither of these facts was apparent at first glance. Faces and hands were well browned and the pair looked extremely healthy. They were dressed neatly, with perhaps more attention to detail than is usual in lads of their age, their attire terminating at one end in well-polished brown shoes and at the other in immaculate black derbies. Their age was fifteen years, three months, and eleven days. Which, of course, leads you to the correct conclusion that they were twins.

"Maybe," hazarded Laurie, presently, "we've lost our way."

"Don't just see how we could," Ned objected. "The old chap at the station said we were to keep right along up Walnut Street. This is still Walnut Street, isn't it?"

"I suppose so." Laurie's glance strayed right and left. "Must be; I don't see any walnuts."

"Guess the only 'nuts' are right here. Come on, let's hit the trail again." Ned slid to his feet and took up his burden. "Why the dickens we didn't take that carriage the fellow wanted to sell us is more than I see."

"'Cause we needed the exercise. Also, 'cause we're down to a dollar and fourteen cents between us – unless you're holding out."

"Well, I'm not!" replied Ned, indignantly. "I paid for the breakfasts in New York –"

"And I paid for dinner on the diner last night –"

"Who said you didn't?" They went on leisurely, and presently Ned continued: "Say, suppose we don't like this ranch after we get there – then what, old son?"

Laurie considered thoughtfully. Then, "Two things we can do," he pronounced. "No, three. We can put up with it, change it to suit us, or leave it."

"Leave it! Yes, we can! On a dollar and fourteen cents?"

"We'll have nearly twenty more when we cash Dad's check and pay the term bill. Twenty dollars would take us back to New York and buy a lot of griddle-cakes, anyway."

Laurie's voice was partly drowned by a small delivery automobile that dashed into sight at a corner ahead and sped by with a clamor worthy of a four-ton truck. The brothers looked after it interestedly. "That's the first sign of life we've seen," said Ned. "Say, I do wish this street would stop twisting this way. First thing we know, we'll be back at the station!"

"Bet you I'd hop the first freight then. I've got a hunch that we're not going to care for Hillman's School."

"Speak for yourself. I am. I like this town, too. It's pretty."

"Oh, it's pretty enough," grumbled Laurie, "but it went to sleep about a century ago and hasn't waked up since. Here's somebody coming; let's ask where the school is."

"It's just a girl."

"What of it? She probably knows."

The girl appeared to be of about their own age and wore a white middie dress with black trimming and a scarlet tie knotted below a V of sun-browned throat. She wore no hat and her dark hair was gathered into a single braid. As she drew near she gave the boys a quick glance of appraisal from a pair of gravely friendly brown eyes. It was Ned who shifted his suitcase to his left hand and raised his derby. It was always Ned who spoke first; after that, they alternated scrupulously.

“Would you please tell us where Hillman’s School is?” he asked.

The girl stopped and her somewhat serious face lighted with a smile. “It’s right there,” she replied, and nodded.

The boys turned to the blankness of a high privet hedge behind an iron fence. The girl laughed softly. “Behind the hedge, I mean,” she explained. “The gate is a little way around the corner there, on Summit Street.”

“Oh,” said Laurie. That laugh was contagious, and he grinned in response. “A man at the station told us it was only three quarters of a mile, but we’ve been walking for hours!”

“I guess it’s nearer a mile than three quarters,” answered the girl, slowly. She appeared to be giving the matter very serious consideration and two little thoughtful creases appeared above her nose, a small, straight nose that was bridged by a sprinkling of freckles. Then the smile came again. “Maybe it did seem longer, though,” she acknowledged, “for it’s uphill all the way; and then, you had your bags. You’re new boys, aren’t you?”

Ned acknowledged it, adding, “Think we’ll like it?”

The girl seemed genuinely surprised. “Why, of course! Every one likes it. What a perfectly funny idea!”

“Well,” said Laurie, defensively, “we’ve never tried boarding-school before, you see. Dad didn’t know anything about Hillman’s, either. He chose it on account of the way the advertisement read in a magazine. Something about ‘a moderate discipline rigidly enforced.’”

The girl laughed again. (She had a jolly sort of laugh, they decided.) “You’re – you’re twins, aren’t you?” she asked.

“He is,” replied Ned, gravely.

“Why – why, aren’t you both?” Her brown eyes grew very round and the little lines creased her nose again.

“It’s this way,” explained Laurie. “Ned was born first, and so, as there was only one of him, he wasn’t a twin. Then I came, and that made two of us, and I was a twin. You see, don’t you? It’s really quite plain.”

The girl shook her head slowly in puzzlement. “I – I’m afraid I don’t,” she answered apologetically. “You *must* be twins – both of you, I mean – because you both look just like both – I mean, each other!” Then she caught the sparkle of mischief in Ned’s blue eyes and laughed. Then they all laughed. After which they seemed suddenly to be very good friends, such good friends that Laurie abandoned custom and spoke out of turn.

“I suppose you know a lot of the fellows,” he said.

The girl shook her head. “N – no, not any, really. Of course, I see most of them when they come to Mother’s, but she doesn’t like me to – to *know* them.”

“Of course not,” approved Ned. “She’s dead right, too. They’re a pretty poor lot, I guess.”

“Oh, no, they’re not, really! Only, you see –” She stopped, and then went on a trifle breathlessly: “I guess she wouldn’t be awfully pleased if she saw me now! I – I hope you’ll like the school.”

She nodded and went on.

“Thanks,” called Laurie. “If we don’t like it, we’ll change it. Good-by.”

“Nice kid,” observed Ned, tolerantly, as they turned the corner of the hedge. “Wonder who she is. She said most of the fellows went to her mother’s. Maybe her mother gives dancing lessons or something, eh?”

“If she does, she won’t see me,” responded his brother, firmly. “No dancing for mine.”

“Maybe it’s compulsory.”

“Maybe it’s esthetic,” retorted Laurie, derisively. “It makes no never mind. I’m agin it. This must be the place. Yes, there’s a sign.”

It was a very modest sign a-swing from a rustic post beside a broad entrance giving on to a well-kept drive. “Hillman’s School – Entrance Only,” it read. Laurie stopped in pretended alarm and laid a detaining clutch on Ned’s shoulder.

“Entrance Only! Sounds as if we couldn’t ever get out again, Ned! Do you dare?”

Ned looked doubtfully through at the curving drive and the red-brick building that showed beyond the border of trees and shrubbery. Then he threw back his shoulders and set foot bravely within.

“Come, comrade, let us know the worst!”

Laurie, with a gesture of resignation, followed.

“What you durst I will likewise durst!”

CHAPTER II – THE GIRL IN THE WHITE MIDDY

When Doctor John Hyde Hillman started a modest school for boys, on the bank of the Hudson River, at Orstead, the town barely crept to the one brick building that contained dormitory and recitation-rooms. But that was nearly twenty years ago, and to-day the place is no longer isolated, but stands well inside the residence section of the village. There are four buildings, occupying most of an unusually large block. School Hall, four stories in height, is a red-brick, slate-roofed edifice, whose unloveliness has been mercifully hidden by ivy. It faces Summit Street and contains the classrooms, the offices, and, at one end, the principal's quarters. Flanking it are the two dormitories, East Hall and West Hall. These, while of brick too, are modern and far more attractive. Each contains sleeping-rooms to accommodate forty students, two masters' studies, a recreation-hall, dining-room, kitchen, and service-rooms. Behind East Hall is the gymnasium, a picturesque structure of random-set stone, gray stucco, and much glass. Here, besides the gymnasium proper, is an auditorium of good size, a modest swimming-tank, locker-room and baths, and a commodious office presided over by Mr. Wells, the physical director. From the gymnasium steps one looks across an attractive, well-kept quadrangle of shaded turf, vegetable and flower gardens, and tennis-courts.

Doctor Hillman occupies an apartment at the west end of the School Hall, gained from the building by way of the school offices, and from without by way of a wide porch, vine screened in summer and glassed in winter, an outdoor living-room where, on seasonable Friday afternoons, the doctor's maiden sister, Miss Tabitha, who keeps house for him, serves weak tea and layer-cake to all comers. Miss Tabitha, I regret to say, is known among the boys as "Tabby," with, however, no more intention of disrespect than in alluding to the doctor as "Johnny." Miss Tabitha's thin body holds a warm heart, and her somewhat stern countenance belies her kindly ways.

On this fifteenth day of September, shortly after twelve o'clock, Miss Tabitha was seated on the vine-shaded porch in an erect and uncompromising attitude, her knitting-needles clicking busily. Near by, but a few moments before released from the office, the doctor was stretched in a long wicker chair, a morning paper before him. At the other end of the porch, a gate-legged table was spread for the mid-day meal, and a middle-aged colored woman – who, when it pleased her, answered to the name of Aunt Persis – shuffled in and out of sight at intervals. It was Miss Tabitha who, hearing the sound of steps on the walk, peered over her glasses and broke the silence.

"Two more of the boys are coming, John," she announced.

The doctor grunted.

"I think they are new boys. Yes, I am sure they are. And bless my soul, John, they're alike as two peas!"

"Alike?" The doctor rustled the paper to indicate interest. "Well, why shouldn't they be? Probably they're brothers. Let me see, weren't those two boys from California brothers? Of course, Turner's the name."

"Well, I never saw two boys so much alike in all my born days," Miss Tabitha marveled. "Do you suppose they can be twins, John?"

"It's quite within the realm of probability," was the reply. "I believe that twins do occur occasionally, even in the – er – best-regulated families."

"Well, they certainly *are* twins!" Miss Tabitha laid down her work, brushed the front of her immaculate dress, and prepared to rise. "I suppose I had better go and meet them," she added.

"I don't see the necessity for it, my dear," the doctor protested. "Cummins may, I think, be relied on to deal even with – er – twins."

"Of course; but – still – California's such a long way – and they may feel strange – or lonesome –"

The doctor laughed gently. “Then by all means go, my dear. If you like, have them out here for a few minutes. If the resemblance between them is as striking as you seem to think, they must be worth seeing.”

When Miss Tabitha had tripped into the house, the doctor dropped his paper, stretched luxuriously, and, with a sigh of protest, sat up. He was several years younger than his sister – which is to say, in the neighborhood of forty-seven. He was a smallish man, compactly built, with a pleasant countenance on which a carefully-trimmed Vandyke beard made up to an extent for the lack of hair above. He wore shell-rimmed glasses and was very near-sighted, a fact emphasized by his manner of thrusting his head forward to eke out the deficiencies of his lenses. This trick was apparent a minute later when, following in the tripping footsteps of Miss Tabitha, the two boys emerged on the porch. They were amazingly alike, the doctor decided: same height, same breadth at hip and shoulder, same coloring, same leisurely, yet confident, ease of movement, same expression of lively curiosity twinkling through an almost depressingly respectful solemnity.

“These are the Turner boys,” announced Miss Tabitha. “This is Edward and this is – ” She halted to look doubtfully from one to the other. “Or – or perhaps *this* is Edward and – Dear me!”

“I’m Edward, ma’am,” said the boy in blue.

“Well, I don’t see how you can ever be *certain* of it!” sighed Miss Tabitha, doubtfully. “This is Doctor Hillman.”

They shook hands, and in a moment the boys found themselves seated side by side and replying to the doctor’s questions.

“You are entering with certificates from your high school principal, I believe, young gentlemen. What year were you?”

“Second, sir,” answered Ned.

“And your home is in – ”

“Santa Lucia, sir,” replied Laurie.

“California,” added Ned.

“Well, you’re quite a ways from home. Did you make the trip alone?”

“Yes, sir. Dad was coming with us as far as Chicago, but something happened so he couldn’t. We didn’t have any trouble, though.”

“Really? Well, I believe you have the distinction of residing farther away than any of your fellows here. I don’t recall any one who lives as far away as California; do you, sister?”

Miss Tabitha looked doubtful and hesitated an instant before she replied, “George Watson comes from Wyoming, I think, John.”

“So he does,” assented the doctor, gravely; “but measured in a straight line, my dear, California is slightly farther than Wyoming.”

“Is it?” asked Miss Tabitha, untroubled. “I never could remember where those western States are.”

“You remember many more important things, however. My sister, boys, fancied that she detected a certain resemblance between you, and even surmised that you might be – er – twins. Doubtless she’s mistaken.”

“No, sir,” answered Ned, more than a trace of surprise in his voice. “I mean, we are twins, sir.”

“Why, now that’s interesting! Looking closer – ” the doctor leaned forward and craned his head – “I believe I detect a certain slight similarity myself!”

There was a perceptible twinkle behind the glasses and Laurie dared a laugh, in which the doctor and Ned joined, while Miss Tabitha murmured: “Well! I should think you *might*!”

“I hope you are both going to like the school,” continued the doctor. “Of course, you’ll find our ways a little different, but we’ll try to make you feel at home. You are the first representatives of your State who have attended our school, and I trust that both in conduct and industry you will bring honor to it. Mr. Cornish, your hall master, will advise you in all matters pertaining to your studies, Other

questions may be taken to Mr. Cummins, the school secretary, whom you have doubtless already met. But I want you always to feel at perfect liberty to come to me at any time on any matter at all. And," added the doctor, with a twinkle, "if we fail you, there is still my sister, who, I assure you, possesses more wisdom than all of us."

Miss Tabitha acknowledged the compliment with a little wry smile, and Ned and Laurie arose. "Yes, sir," said the former.

"Thank you, sir," said Laurie.

"Luncheon is served at one in West Hall," continued the doctor. "That's the dormitory behind you there. Beginning with supper to-night, you will take your meals in your own hall, but only a few of the students have arrived as yet, and so only one dining-room is open. I'm very glad to have met you, young gentlemen. Mr. Cummins will direct you to your room. Good morning."

Five minutes later, the Turner twins set their suitcases down on the floor of Number 16 East Hall and looked about them. Number 16 was not palatial as to size, but it was big enough to hold comfortably the two single beds, the study-table, the two narrow chiffoniers, and the four chairs that made up its furnishing. There was a generous-sized closet at each side of the door, and two windows set close together between the beds. Under the windows was a wide seat, lacking only pillows to make it inviting. From the casements the boys looked over or through the topmost branches of the maples that lined Washington Street and followed Summit Street as it continued its ascent of the hill and presently leveled out between a thick wood on one side and an open field on the other.

"That must be the athletic field," said Laurie. "See the stand there? And the goal-posts? How do you like it?"

"The field? Looks all right from here."

"I mean the whole outfit, you simp; the school and Doctor Hillman and Miss Frosty-Face and everything."

"Cut out calling names, Laurie. Miss Hillman's all right. So's the doctor. So's the school. I like it. Wonder when our trunks will get here."

"Half an hour ago you had a hunch you weren't going to like it," jeered Laurie. "Changed your mind, haven't you?"

"Yes, and I'm going to change more than my mind." Whereupon Ned opened his bag and selected a clean shirt. "What time is it?"

"What do you wear a watch for if you never look at it?" grumbled his brother. "It's ten to one, Lazy. I'm going to find a place to wash up. I choose this side of the room, Ned."

Ned studied the room a moment. "No, you don't," he challenged. "I'll take this side. I'm the oldest." "There isn't any difference, you chump. One side's as good as the other."

"Then you won't mind taking the other," answered Ned, sweetly. "Run along and find the lavatory. I think it's at the head of the stairs. Wonder why they put us up two flights."

"Guess they knew you were naturally lazy and needed the exercise."

Laurie dodged a pair of traveling slippers in a red-leather case and disappeared into the corridor.

Some ten minutes later they descended the stairway together and set out for West Hall. Laurie drew attention to the gymnasium building, but Ned, who had recovered his appetite, only deigned it a glance. Two boys, luggage laden, evidently just arrived, came down the steps of School Hall as the twins passed, and stared curiously.

"Guess they've never seen twins before in this part of the world," grumbled Laurie. "Those chaps nearly popped their eyes out!"

West Hall proved an exact duplicate of their own dormitory, and the dining-room occupied all the right end of it. There were about fifteen boys there, in age varying from fourteen to eighteen, and there was a perceptible pause in the business of eating when the newcomers entered. A waitress conducted them to seats at a table already occupied by three other lads, and asked if they'd have milk or iced tea. Ned, as usual, answered for both.

“Iced tea, please, and lots of lemon.”

A very stout boy, sitting across the table, sniggered, and then, encountering Ned’s inquiring regard, said, “Guess you think you’re in the Waldorf!”

“What’s the Waldorf?” asked Ned. “Don’t you get lemon with iced tea here?”

“Sure! but you don’t get much. Say, are you fellows – twins, or what?”

“Twins?” repeated Laurie. “Where do you get that stuff? This fellow’s name is Anderson and mine’s Stenman. What’s yours?”

“Crow. Honest, is that a fact?” Crow looked appealingly at the other occupants of the table. These, however, two rather embarrassed-looking youngsters of fourteen or thereabouts, fixed their eyes on their plates, and Crow turned his regard incredulously back to the twins. “Gee, you fellows look enough alike to be – be – ” He swallowed the word. “Aren’t you even related?”

Ned gazed speculatively at Laurie and Laurie gazed speculatively at Ned. “We might be,” hazarded the latter.

Laurie nodded. “If we went back far enough, we might find a common ancestor.”

The arrival of luncheon caused a diversion, although Crow, who was a round-faced, credulous-looking youth of perhaps seventeen, continued to regard them surreptitiously and in puzzlement. At last, making the passing of the salt an excuse, for further conversation, he asked, “Where do you fellows come from?”

“California,” said Ned.

“Santa Lucia,” said Laurie.

“Well, but,” sputtered Crow, “isn’t California in Santa – I mean, isn’t Santa – Say, you guys are joking, I’ll bet!”

“Methinks,” observed Ned, helping himself gravely to mustard, “his words sound coarse and vulgar.”

Laurie abstractedly added a fourth teaspoon of sugar to his iced tea. “Like Turk or Kurd or even Bulgar,” he murmured.

Crow stared, grunted, and pushed his chair back. “You fellows think you’re smart, don’t you?” he sputtered. “Bet you you are twins – both of you!”

Ned and Laurie looked after him in mild and patient surprise until his broad back had disappeared from view. Then a choking sound came from one of the younger lads, and Ned asked gently, “Now what’s your trouble, son?”

The boy grew very red of face and gave way to giggles. “I knew all the time you were twins,” he gasped.

“Did you really?” exclaimed Laurie. “Well, listen. Just as a favor to us, don’t say anything about it, eh? You see, we’re sort of – sort of – ”

“Sort of sensitive,” aided Ned. “We’d rather it wasn’t generally known. You understand, don’t you?”

The boy looked as if he was very far indeed from understanding, but he nodded, choked again, and muttered something that seemed to indicate that the secret was safe with him. Laurie thanked him gratefully.

After luncheon they went sight-seeing about the school, snooped through the dim corridors and empty class-rooms of School Hall, viewed the gymnasium and experimented with numerous apparatus, and finally, after browsing through a flower and vegetable garden behind the recitation building and watching two boys make a pretense of playing tennis, returned to Number 16 in the hope of finding their trunks. But the baggage had not arrived, and presently, since the room was none too cool, they descended again and followed the curving drive to the right and past a sign that said “Exit Only” and wandered west on Summit Street.

For the middle of September in the latitude of southern New York the weather was decidedly warm, and neither grass nor trees hinted that autumn had arrived. In the well-kept gardens across the way, scarlet sage and cosmos, asters and dahlias made riots of color.

“Hot!” grunted Ned, running a finger around the inside of his collar.

“Beastly,” agreed Laurie, removing his cap and fanning his heated face. “Wonder where the river is. If we had our bathing-suits, maybe we could go for a swim.”

“Yes, and if we had a cake of ice we could sit on it!” responded Ned, sarcastically. “This place is hotter than Santa Lucia.”

At the next corner they turned again to the right. Morton Street, like so many of the streets in Orstead, refused to go straight, and after a few minutes, to their mild bewilderment, they found themselves on Walnut Street once more, a block below the school.

“I’m not going back yet,” said Laurie, firmly. “Let’s find a place where we can get something cool to drink.”

As Walnut Street was unpromising, they crossed it and meandered along Garden Street. The houses here appeared to be less prosperous, and the front yards were less likely to hold lawn and flowers than dilapidated baby-carriages. At the first crossing they peered right and left, and were rewarded by the sight of a swinging sign at a little distance.

What the sign said was as yet a mystery, for the trees intervened, but Laurie declared that he believed in signs and they made their way toward it. It finally proved to be a very cheerful little sign hung above a little white door in a little pale-blue two-story house, the lower floor of which was plainly devoted to commercial purposes.

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That is what the sign said in red letters on a white background. The windows, many paned, allowed uncertain glimpses of various articles: tops of red and blue and green, boxes of pencils, pads of paper, jars of candy, many bottles of ink, a catcher’s glove, a dozen tennis-balls, some paper kites

—
Laurie dragged Ned inside, through a screen door that, on opening, caused a bell to tinkle somewhere in the farther recesses of the little building. It was dark inside, after the glare of the street, and refreshingly cool. Laurie, leading the way, collided with a bench, caromed off the end of a counter, and became aware of a figure, dimly seen, beyond the width of a show-case.

“Have you anything cold to drink?” asked Ned, leaning across the show-case.

“Ginger-ale or tonic or something?” Laurie elaborated.

“Yes, indeed,” replied the apparition, in a strangely familiar voice. “If you will step over to the other side, please – ”

Ned and Laurie leaned farther across the show-case.

It was the girl in the white middy dress.

CHAPTER III – CAKES AND ALE

“Hello!” exclaimed the twins, in one voice.

“Hello,” replied the girl, and they suspected that she was smiling, although their eyes were still too unused to the dimness of the little store for them to be certain. She was still only a vague figure in white, with a deeper blur where her face should have been. Treading on each other’s heels, Ned and Laurie followed her to the other side. The twilight brightened and objects became more distinct. They were in front of a sort of trough-like box in which, half afloat in a pool of ice-water, were bottles of tonic and soda and ginger-ale. Behind it was a counter on which reposed a modest array of pastry.

“What do you want?” asked the girl in the middy.

“Ginger-ale,” answered Ned. “Say, do you live here?”

“No, this is the shop,” was the reply. “I live upstairs.”

“Oh, well, you know what I mean,” muttered Ned. “Is this your store?”

“It’s my mother’s. I help in it afternoons. My mother is Mrs. Deane. The boys call her the Widow. I’m Polly Deane.”

“Pleased to know you,” said Laurie. “Our name’s Turner. I’m Laurie and he’s Ned. Let me open that for you.”

“Oh, no, thanks. I’ve opened hundreds of them. Oh dear! You said ginger-ale, didn’t you! And I’ve opened a root-beer. It’s so dark in here in the afternoon.”

“That’s all right,” Ned assured her. “We like root-beer. We’d just as soon have it as ginger-ale. Wouldn’t we, Laurie?”

“You bet! We’re crazy about it.”

“Are you sure? It’s no trouble to – Well, *this* is ginger-ale, anyway. I’m awfully sorry!”

“What do we care?” asked Ned. “We don’t own it.”

“Don’t own it?” repeated Polly, in a puzzled tone.

“That’s just an expression of his,” explained Laurie. “He’s awfully slangy. I try to break him of it, but it’s no use. It’s fierce.”

“Of course *you* don’t use slang?” asked Polly, demurely. “Who wants the root-beer?”

“You take it,” said Laurie, hurriedly.

“No, you,” said Ned. “You’re fonder of it than I am, Laurie. I don’t mind, really!”

Laurie managed a surreptitious kick on his brother’s shin. “Tell you what,” he exclaimed, “we’ll mix ’em!”

Ned agreed, though not enthusiastically, and with the aid of a third glass the deed was done. The boys tasted experimentally, each asking a question over the rim of his glass. Then looks of relief came over both faces and they sighed ecstatically.

“Corking!” they breathed in unison.

Polly laughed, “I never knew any one to do that before,” she said. “I’m glad you like it. I’ll tell the other boys about it.”

“No, you mustn’t,” protested Ned. “It’s our invention. We’ll call it – call it – ”

“Call it an Accident,” suggested Laurie.

“We’ll call it a Polly,” continued the other. “It really is bully. It’s – it’s different; isn’t it, Laurie? Have another?”

“Who were those on?” was the suspicious reply.

“You. The next is on me. Only maybe another wouldn’t taste so good, eh?”

“Don’t you fool yourself! I’ll risk that.”

However, the third and fourth bottles, properly combined though they were, lacked novelty, and it was some time before the last glass was emptied. Meanwhile, of course, they talked. The boys acknowledged that, so far, they liked what they had seen of the school. Mention of the doctor and

Miss Hillman brought forth warm praise from Polly. “Every one likes the doctor ever so much,” she declared. “And Miss Tabitha is – ”

“Miss what?” interrupted Laurie.

“Miss Tabitha. That’s her name.” Polly laughed softly. “They call her Tabby, – the boys, I mean, – but they like her. She’s a dear, even if she does look sort of – of cranky. She isn’t, though, a bit. She makes believe she’s awfully stern, but she’s just as soft as – as – ”

“As Laurie’s head?” offered Ned, helpfully. “Say, you sell ’most everything here, don’t you? Are those cream-puffs?”

Ned slipped a hand into his pocket and Laurie coughed furiously. Ned’s hand came forth empty. He turned away from temptation. “They look mighty good,” he said. “If we’d seen those before we’d had all that ginger-ale – ”

Polly spoke detachedly. “You can have credit if you like,” she said, placing the empty bottles aside. “The doctor lets the boys run bills here up to a dollar. They can’t go over a dollar, though.”

“Personally,” observed Laurie, jingling some coins in a trousers pocket, “I prefer to pay cash. Still, there are times – ”

“Yes, a fellow gets short now and then,” said Ned, turning for another look at the pastry counter. “Maybe, just for – for convenience, it would be a good plan to have an account here, Laurie. Sometimes a fellow forgets to put any money in his pocket, you know. Does your mother make these?”

“Yes, the cream-cakes, and some of the others. The rest Miss Comfort makes.”

“That’s another funny name,” said Laurie. “Who is Miss Comfort?”

“She’s – she’s just Miss Comfort, I guess,” replied Polly. “She lives on the next corner, in the house with the white shutters. She’s quite old, almost seventy, I suppose, and she makes the nicest cake in Orstead. Everybody goes to her for cakes. That’s the way she lives, I guess.”

“Maybe we’d ought to help her,” suggested Ned, mentally choosing the largest and fattest cakes on the tray. “I guess we’ll take a couple. How much are they?”

“Six cents apiece,” said Polly. “Do you want them in a bag?”

“No, thanks.” Ned handed one of the cakes to Laurie; “we’ll eat them now.” Then, between mouthfuls; “Maybe you’d better charge this to us. If we’re going to open an account, we might as well do it now, don’t you think?”

Polly retired behind a counter and produced a long and narrow book, from which dangled a lead pencil at the end of a string. She put the tip of the pencil between her lips and looked across. “You’d better tell me your full names, I think.”

“Edward Anderson Turner and – ”

“I meant just your first names.”

“Oh! Edward and Laurence. You can charge us each with two bottles and one cake.”

“I like that!” scoffed Laurie. “Thought you were treating to cakes?”

“Huh! Don’t you want to help Miss Comfort? I should think you’d like to – to do a charitable act once in a while.”

“Don’t see what difference it makes to her,” grumbled Laurie, “whether you pay for both or I pay for one. She gets her money just the same.”

Ned brushed a crumb from his jacket. “You don’t get the idea,” he replied gently. “Of course, I might pay for both, but you wouldn’t feel right about it, Laurie.”

“Wouldn’t I? Where do you get that stuff? You try it and see.” Laurie spoke grimly, but not hopefully. Across the counter, Polly was giggling over the account-book.

“You’re the funniest boys I ever did see,” she explained, in answer to their inquiring looks. “You – you say such funny things!”

Before she could elucidate, footsteps sounded in the room behind the store and a tiny white-haired woman appeared. In spite of her hair, she couldn’t have been very old, for her face was plump

and unwrinkled and her cheeks quite rosy. Seeing the customers, she bowed prettily and said “Good afternoon” in a very sweet voice.

“Good afternoon,” returned the twins.

“Mama, these are the Turner boys,” said Polly. “One of them is Ned and the other is Laurie, but I don’t know which, because they look just exactly alike. They – they’re twins!”

“I want to know!” said Mrs. Deane. “Isn’t that nice? I’m very pleased to meet you, young gentlemen. I hope Polly has served you with what you wanted. My stock is kind of low just now. You see, we don’t have many customers in summer, and it’s very hard to get things, nowadays, even if you do pay three times what they’re worth. Polly, those ice-cream cones never did come, did they?”

“Gee, do you have ice-cream?” asked Ned; eagerly.

“Never you mind!” said Laurie, grabbing his arm. “You come on out of here before you die on my hands. I’m sorry to tell you, ma’am, that he doesn’t know when to stop eating. I have to go around everywhere with him and look after him. If I didn’t, he’d be dead in no time.”

“I want to know!” exclaimed the Widow Deane interestedly. “Why, it’s very fortunate for him he has you, isn’t it?”

“Yes’m,” answered Laurie, but he spoke doubtfully, for the little white-haired lady seemed to hide a laugh behind her words. Ned was grinning. Laurie propelled him to the door. Then, without relinquishing his grasp, he doffed his cap.

“Good afternoon,” he said, “We’ll come again,”

“We know not how,” added Ned, “we know not when.”

“Bless my soul!” murmured the Widow, as the screen door swung behind them.

Back at school, the twins found a different scene from what they had left. The grounds were populous with boys, and open windows in the two dormitory buildings showed many others. The entrances were piled with trunks and more were arriving. A rattling taxi turned in at the gate, with much blowing of a frenzied but bronchial horn, and added five merry youths to the population. Ned and Laurie made their way to East Hall, conscious, as they approached, of many eyes focussed on them from wide-flung windows. Remarks reached them, too.

“See who’s with us!” came from a second-floor casement above the entrance; “the two Dromios!”

“Tweedledum and Tweedledee!”

“The Siamese Twins, I’ll bet a cooky!”

“Hi, East Hall! Heads out!”

The two were glad when they reached the shelter of the doorway. “Some one’s going to get his head punched before long,” growled Ned, as they started upstairs.

“What do we care? We don’t own ’em. Let them have their fun, Neddie.”

“I’ll let some of them have a wallop,” was the answer. “You’d think we were the first pair of twins they’d ever seen!”

“Well, maybe we are. How do you know? Suppose those trunks have come?”

They had, and for the next hour the twins were busy unpacking and getting settled. From beyond their door came sounds of much turmoil; the noise of arriving baggage, the banging of doors, shouts, whistling, singing; but they were otherwise undisturbed until, just when Laurie had slammed down the lid of his empty trunk, there came a knock at their portal, followed, before either one could open his mouth in response, by the appearance in the doorway of a bulky apparition in a gorgeous crimson bath-robe.

“Hello, fellows!” greeted the apparition. “Salutations and everything!”

CHAPTER IV – KEWPIE STARTS SOMETHING

The twins stared silently and suspiciously for an instant. Then Ned made cautious response. “Hello,” he said, with what must have seemed to the visitor a lamentable lack of cordiality.

The latter pushed the door shut behind him by the kick of one stockinged foot, and grinned jovially. “My name’s Proudtree,” he announced.

“You can’t blame us,” replied Laurie, coldly.

Proudtree laughed amiably. “It is a rotten name, isn’t it? I live across the corridor, you know. Thought I’d drop in and get acquainted, seeing you’re new fellows; extend the hand of friendship and all that. You understand. By Jove, Pringle was right, too!”

“That’s fine,” said Ned, with more than a trace of sarcasm. “What about?”

“Why,” answered Proudtree, easing his generous bulk into a chair, “he said you fellows were twins.”

“Not only were,” said Laurie, gently, “but are. Don’t mind, do you?”

“Oh, come off your horse,” begged the visitor. “Don’t be so cocky. Who’s said anything? I just wanted to have a look. Never saw any twins before – grown-up twins, I mean. You understand.”

“Thought you said you came to extend the hand of friendship,” retorted Ned, sarcastically. “Well, have a good look, partner. There’s no charge!”

Proudtree grinned and accepted the invitation. Ned fumed silently under the inspection, but Laurie’s sense of humor came to his aid. Proudtree appeared to be getting a lot of entertainment from his silent comparison of his hosts, and presently, when Ned’s exasperation had just about reached the explosive point, he chuckled.

“I’ve got it,” he said.

“Got what?” Laurie asked.

“The – the clue! I know how to tell you apart! His eyes are different from yours; more blue. Yours are sort of gray. But, geewhillikins, it must be a heap of fun! Being twins, I mean. And fooling people. You understand.”

“Well, if you’re quite through,” snapped Ned, “maybe you’ll call it a day. We’ve got things to do.”

“Meaning you’d like me to beat it?” asked the visitor, good-temperedly.

“Just that!”

“Oh, come, Ned,” Laurie protested, soothingly, “he’s all right. I dare say we are sort of freakish and – ”

“Sure,” agreed Proudtree, eagerly, “that’s what I meant. But say, I didn’t mean to hurt any one’s feelings. Geewhillikins, if I got waxy every time the fellows josh me about being fat – ” Words failed him and he sighed deeply.

Laurie laughed. “We might start a side-show, the three of us, and make a bit of money. ‘Only ten cents! One dime! This way to the Siamese Twins and the Fat Boy! Walk up! Walk up!’”

Proudtree smiled wanly. “I only weigh a hundred and seventy-eight and three quarters, too,” he said dolorously. “If I was a couple of inches taller it wouldn’t be so bad.”

“I don’t think it’s bad as it is,” said Laurie, kindly. “You don’t look really *fat*; you just look sort of – of – ”

“Amplitudinous,” supplied Ned, with evident satisfaction.

Proudtree viewed him doubtfully. Then he smiled. “Well, I’ve got to get rid of nearly fifteen pounds in the next two weeks,” he said, with a shake of his head, “and that’s going to take some doing.”

“What for?” Laurie asked. “Why destroy your symmetry?”

“Football. I’m trying for center. I nearly made it last year, but Wiggins beat me out. He’s gone now, though, and Mulford as good as said last spring that I could make it this fall if I could get down to a hundred and sixty-five.”

“Who’s Mulford?” inquired Ned. “A fortune-teller?”

Proudtree ignored the sarcasm. “Mulford’s our coach. He’s all right, too. The trouble with me is, I’m awfully fond of sweet things, and I – I’ve been eating a lot of ’em lately. But I guess I can drop fourteen pounds if I cut out pies and candy and things. Don’t you think so?” Proudtree appealed to Laurie almost pathetically.

“Don’t let any one tell you anything different,” replied Laurie, reassuringly. Ned, evidently recovered from his peevishness, asked:

“What sort of football do they play here?”

“Corking!” answered Proudtree.

“I mean, Rugby or the other?”

“Rugby!” exclaimed Proudtree, scornfully. “I guess not! We play regular football. Nobody plays Rugby around these parts. Are you fellows going out?”

“Not just yet,” replied Ned.

“He means are we going to try for the football team,” explained Laurie. “Yes, we are, Proudtree; at least, one of us is.”

“You?”

“We haven’t decided yet. You see, we’ve never played your kind of football. Back home, at high school, we played American Rugby, and it’s quite different. But we decided that one of us had better go in for football and the other for baseball, if only to do our duty by the school.”

Proudtree looked puzzled. “How are you going to decide?” he asked.

“Oh, we’ll toss up or draw lots or something, I suppose. Maybe, though, Ned had better play football, because I know more baseball than he does. Still, I’m not particular.”

“That’s the limit!” chuckled the visitor. “Say, what are your names? I didn’t see any cards on the door.”

“Turner. His is Laurie and mine’s Ned,” answered the latter. “Do we put our names on the door?”

“It’s the best way,” answered Proudtree. “Well, I’ve got to be moving. I started to take a shower and got side-tracked. You chaps come on over and see me and I’ll get some of the other fellows in. You want to meet the right sort, you know. What’s your class?”

“Lower middle, I reckon,” said Ned. “That’s what we expect.”

“Too bad you can’t make upper. That’s mine. We’ve got a corking bunch of fellows this year. Well, see you later. Try for Mr. Barrett’s table when you go down. That’s the best. Maybe they’ll put you there if you bluff it out. You understand. So long, fellows.”

Proudtree withdrew with considerable dignity in view of his bulk, waving a benedictory hand ere the door closed behind him. Ned shook his head. “Sort of a fresh hombre,” he said.

“Oh, he only meant to be friendly, I reckon,” said Laurie. “You understand.”

Ned laughed. “I’ll bet they’ve got a wonderful football team here if he plays on it! By the way, maybe we’d better settle which of us is to be the football star. I suppose they begin to practise pretty soon. I’ll be the goat, if you like; though you had better luck with that book you bought in Chicago. I couldn’t make head or tail of it. I never saw so many rules for playing one game in my life!”

“It *was* sort of difficult,” agreed Laurie. “I dare say, though, that you pick up the rules quick enough when you start to play. If you don’t really mind, I think you’d better go in for football, and I’ll do the baseball stunt. I’ve played it more than you have, you know, even if I’m no wonder.”

“All right!” Ned sighed. “We’ll get a bottle of arnica to-morrow. Nothing like being prepared. How about going to see Mr. What’s-his-name before supper about courses?”

“Might as well, and have it over with. I’d like to know whether we’re going to make the lower middle.”

“Don’t see what else we can make. They can’t stick us in the junior class. Where’s my coat? For the love of lemons, Laurie, can’t you find anything else to sit on? Gosh, look at the wrinkles!”

“Those aren’t wrinkles; they’re just creases. Come on!”

Half an hour later they closed the door of Mr. Cornish’s study on the floor below, in a chastened mood. Each carried a little buff card whereon the instructor had tabulated an amazing number and variety of study periods. Back in Number 16, Ned cast himself into a chair, thrust his legs forth, and gazed disconsolately at the card.

“I don’t see where a fellow finds time for anything but work here,” he complained. “Sixteen, eighteen, twenty-one hours a week! What do you know about that?”

“Well, don’t be so proud of it. I’ve got the same, haven’t I? I wonder how many hours he thinks there are in a day?”

“I tell you what I think,” said Ned, after a moment’s thought. “I think he got it into his head that we’re very ambitious and want to graduate next spring!”

“Maybe that’s it,” agreed Laurie, gravely. “Shall we go back and tell him he’s wrong?”

“N-no, let’s not. He seemed a well-meaning old codger, and I wouldn’t want to hurt his feelings – if he has any. Let’s go down and see what they’ve got for supper.”

Ned’s blandishments failed with the waitress, and they were established at a table presided over by a tall and very thin gentleman, whose name, as they learned presently, was Mr. Brock. There were four tables in the room, each accommodating ten boys and a member of the faculty. Diagonally across the dining-hall, the twins descried the ample Mr. Proudree. Another table was in charge of a pleasant-faced woman who proved to be the school matron, Mrs. Wyman. Mr. Cornish, the hall master, and Mr. Barrett sat at the heads of the remaining boards.

The room was very attractive, with a fine big stone fireplace at the farther end, and broad windows on two sides. The food proved plain, but it was served in generous quantities; and notwithstanding that the twins were a bit self-conscious, they managed a very satisfactory meal.

Their fellow-students seemed to be a very decent lot. Their ages appeared to average about sixteen, and they had the clean, healthy look of boys who spent much of their time outdoors. At the table at which the twins sat, four of the boys were evidently seniors, and one was as evidently a junior. The latter looked hardly more than thirteen, though he was in reality a year older than that, and had the features and expression of a cherub. The twins concluded that he was a new boy and felt a little sorry for him. He looked much too young and innocent to face the world alone.

No one made any special effort to engage either Ned or Laurie in conversation, perhaps because the returning youths had so much to talk about among themselves. Mr. Brock ate his supper in silence, save when one of the older boys addressed him, and had a far-away and abstracted air. Laurie saw him sweeten his tea three times, and then frown in annoyance when he finally tasted it.

The boy who had guessed their awful secret at luncheon sat at the next table, and more than once Ned caught him looking across with a half-bewildered, half-frightened expression that somehow managed to convey the intelligence that, in spite of temptation, he had kept the faith. Ned finally rewarded him with a significant wink, and the youth retired in confusion behind the milk-pitcher.

When the meal was over the twins went outside and, following the example set by others, made themselves comfortable on the grass beyond the walk. Near by, two older boys were conversing earnestly, and Ned and Laurie, having exhausted their own subjects of conversation, found themselves listening.

“We’ve got to do it,” the larger of the two was saying. “Dave’s going to call a meeting of the school for Friday evening, and Mr. Wells is going to talk to them. I’ll talk too. Maybe you’d better, Frank. You can tell them a funny story and get them feeling generous.”

“Nothing doing, Joe. Leave me out of it. I never could talk from a platform. Anyway, it’s the fellows’ duty to provide money. If they don’t, they won’t have a team. They understand that – or they will when you tell them. There’s another thing, though, Joe, that we’ve got to have besides money, and that’s material. We’ve *got* to get more fellows out.”

“I know. I’ll tell them that, too. I’m going to put a notice up in School Hall in the morning. Mr. Cummins says there are eight new fellows entering the middle classes this year. Maybe some of them are football-players.”

“Bound to be. Did you see the twins?”

“No, but Billy Emerson was telling me about them. What do they look like?”

“Not bad. Rather light-weight, though, and sort of slow. They’re from Arizona or somewhere out that way, I think. You can’t tell them apart, Joe.”

“Think they’re football stuff?”

“Search me. Might be. They’re light, though. Here comes Kewpie. Gosh, he’s fatter than ever! Hi, Kewpie! Come over here!”

It was Proudtree who answered the hail, descended the steps, and approached. “Hello, Joe! Hello, Frank! Well, here we are again, eh? Great to be back, isn’t it? Have a good summer, Joe?”

“Fine! You?”

“Corking! I was on Dad’s yacht all through August. Saw the races and everything. Bully eats, too. You understand.”

“Yes,” Joe Stevenson replied, “and I understand why you’re about twenty pounds overweight, Kewpie! You ought to be kicked around the yard, you fat loafer. Thought you wanted to play center this fall.”

“I’m going to! Listen, Joe, I’m only fourteen pounds over and I’ll drop that in no time. Honest, I will. You see! Besides, it isn’t all fat, either. A lot of it’s good, hard muscle.”

“Yes, it is! I can see you getting muscle lying around on your father’s yacht! I’m off you, Kewpie. You haven’t acted square. You knew mighty well that you were supposed to keep yourself fit this summer, and now look at you! You’re a big fat lump!”

“Aw, say, Joe! Listen, will you?” Proudtree’s gaze wandered in search of inspiration and fell on the twins. His face lighted. “Hello, you chaps!” he said. Then he leaned over and spoke to Joe. “Say, have you met the Turner brothers, Joe? One of ’em’s a swell player. Played out in North Dakota or somewhere.”

“Which one?” asked Joe, surreptitiously eying the twins. “Why, the – I forget: they look so much alike, you know. I think it’s the one this way. Or maybe it’s the other. Anyway, I’ll fetch them over, eh?”

“All right, Kewpie.”

Kewpie started away, paused, and spoke again. “They’re – they’re awfully modest chaps, Joe. You’d think from hearing them talk that they didn’t know much about the game, but don’t you be fooled. That’s just their way. You understand.”

“Oh, sure, Kewpie!” And when the latter had gone on his errand Joe smiled and, lowering his voice, said to Frank Brattle: “Kewpie’s trying to put something over. I wonder what.”

“Proudtree tells me one of you fellows plays football,” said Joe, a minute later, when introductions had been performed and Ned and Laurie had seated themselves. “We need good players this fall. Of course, I hope you’ll both come out.”

“Ned’s the football chap,” said Laurie. “Baseball’s my line.”

“I don’t know – ” began Ned, but Laurie pinched him warningly, and he gulped and, to Kewpie’s evident relief, made a fresh start. “I’m not much of a player,” he said modestly, “but I’m willing to have a try at it.”

Kewpie darted an “I-told-you-so” glance at Joe and Frank.

“Where do you come from, Turner?” Joe asked politely.

“Santa Lucia, California. I was in the high school there two years. Everything’s quite – quite different here.” Ned spoke hurriedly, as though anxious to switch the conversation from football, and Laurie smiled in wicked enjoyment. “The climate’s different, you know,” Ned went on desperately, “and the country and – and everything.”

“I suppose so,” said Frank Brattle. “What’s your position, Turner?”

“Position?”

“Yes; I mean, where did you play? Behind the line, I suppose, or maybe end.”

“Oh, yes, yes, behind the line. You see, I – I – ”

“There aren’t many fellows can play half-back the way Ned can,” said Laurie, gravely. “He won’t tell you so, but if you ever meet any one who saw him play against Weedon School last year – ”

“Shut up!” begged Ned, almost tearfully.

Kewpie was grinning delightedly. Joe Stevenson viewed Ned with absolute affection. “Half-back, eh? Well, we can use another good half, Turner, and I hope you’re the fellow. I don’t know whether Kewpie told you that I’m captain this year, but I am, and I’m going to try mighty hard to captain a winning team. You look a bit light, but I dare say you’re fast, and, for my part, I like them that way. Besides, we’ve got Mason and Boessel if we want the heavy sort. Practice starts to-morrow at four, by the way. How about your brother? Glad to have him come out, too. Even if he hasn’t played, he might learn the trick. And there’s next year to think of, you know.”

“I think not, thanks,” answered Laurie. “One football star is enough in the family.”

“Well, if you change your mind, come on and have a try. Glad to have met you. See you to-morrow – er – Turner. I want to find Dave, Frank. Coming along?”

The two older boys made off toward West Hall, and as soon as they were out of hearing Ned turned indignantly on Laurie.

“You’re a nice one!” he hissed. “Look at the hole you’ve got me in! ‘Half-back’! ‘Played against Weedon School’! What did you want to talk that way for? Why, those fellows think I know football!”

“Cheer up,” answered his brother, grinning. “All you’ve got to do is bluff it through. Besides, Proudree asked us not to let on we didn’t know a football from a doughnut, and I had to say something! You acted as if you were tongue-tied!”

“Yes; that’s so – you started it!” Ned turned belligerently around. “Said it would be a favor to you – ” He stopped, discovering that Proudree had silently disappeared and that he was wasting his protests on the empty air. “Huh!” he resumed after a moment of surprise, “it’s a good thing he did beat it! Look here, Laurie, I’m in a beast of a mess. Yow know I can’t face that captain chap to-morrow. Suppose he handed me a football and told me to kick it!”

“He won’t. I’ve watched football practice back home. You’ll stand around in a circle – ”

“How the dickens can I stand in a circle?” objected Ned.

“And pass a football for a while. Then you’ll try starting, and maybe fall on the ball a few times, until you’re nice and lame, and after that you’ll run around the track half a dozen times – ”

“Oh, shut up! You make me sick! I won’t do it. I’m through. I’d look fine, wouldn’t I? I guess not, partner!”

“You’ve got to, Ned,” replied Laurie calmly. “You can’t back down now. The honor of the Turners is at stake! Come on up and I’ll read that rules book to you. Maybe some of it’ll seep in!”

After a moment of indecision Ned arose and followed silently.

CHAPTER V – IN THE PERFORMANCE OF DUTY

School began in earnest the next morning. Ned and Laurie were awakened from a deep slumber by the imperative clanging of a gong. There were hurried trips to the bath-room, and finally a descent to the recreation-room and morning prayers. Breakfast followed in the pleasant, sunlit dining-hall, and at half-past eight the twins went to their first class. There wasn't much real work performed that morning, however. Books were bought and, being again in possession of funds, Ned purchased lavishly of stationery and supplies. He had a veritable passion for patent binders, scratch-pads, blank-books, and pencils, and Laurie viewed the result of a half-hour's mad career with unconcealed concern.

"You're all wrong, Ned," he said earnestly. "We aren't opening a stationery emporium. Besides, we can't begin to compete with the office. They buy at wholesale, and –"

"Never mind the comedy. You'll be helping yourself to these things soon enough, and then you won't be so funny."

"That's the only way they'll ever get used up! Why, you've got enough truck there to last three years!"

There was one interesting annual observance that morning that the twins witnessed inadvertently. At a little after eight the fellows began to assemble in front of School Hall. Ned and Laurie, joining the throng, supposed that it was merely awaiting the half-hour, until presently there appeared at the gate a solitary youth of some fourteen years, who came up the circling drive about as joyfully as a French Royalist approaching the guillotine. Deep silence prevailed until the embarrassed and unhappy youth had conquered half of the interminable distance. Then a loud "*Hep!*" was heard, and the throng broke into a measured refrain:

"Hep! – Hep! – Hep! – Hep!"

This was in time to the boy's dogged steps. A look of consternation came into his face and he faltered. Then, however, he set his jaw, looked straight ahead, and came on determinedly.

"Hep! – Hep!"

Up the steps he passed, a disk of color in each cheek, looking neither to right nor left, and passed from sight. As he did so, the chorus changed to a good-humored laugh of approval. Ned made inquiry of a youth beside him.

"Day boy," was the explanation. "There are ten of them, you know: fellows who live in town. We always give them a welcome. That chap had spunk, but you wait and see some of them!"

Two more followed together, and, each upheld in that moment of trial by the presence of the other, passed through the ordeal with flying colors. But the twins noted that the laughing applause was lacking. After that, the remaining seven arrived almost on each other's heels and the air was filled with "*Heps!*" Some looked only surprised, others angry; but most of them grinned in a sickly, embarrassed way and went by with hanging heads.

"Sort of tough," was Ned's verdict, and Laurie agreed as they followed the last victim inside.

"It looks as if day students weren't popular," he added.

Later, though, he found that he was wrong. The boys who lived in the village were accepted without reservation, but, naturally enough, seldom attained to a full degree of intimacy with those who lived in the dormitories.

By afternoon the twins had become well shaken down into the new life, had made several superficial acquaintances, and had begun to feel at home. Of Kewpie Proudree they had caught but fleeting glimpses, for that youth displayed a tendency to keep at a distance. As the hour of four o'clock approached, Ned became more and more worried, and his normally sunny countenance took on an expression of deep gloom. Laurie kept close at his side, fearing that courage would fail and Ned would bring disgrace to the tribe of Turner. But Laurie ought to have known better, for Ned

was never what his fellows would have called a “quitter.” Ned meant to see it through. His mind had retained very little of the football lore that his brother had poured into it the night before, but he had, at least, a somewhat clearer idea of the general principles of the game. He knew, for instance, that a team comprised eleven players instead of the twelve he had supposed, and that certain restrictions governed the methods by which you might wrest the ball from an opponent. Thus, you could not legally snatch it out of his arms, nor trip him up in the hope that he would drop it. Ned thought the restrictions rather silly, but accepted them.

The athletic field, known in school parlance as the play-field, was even larger than it had looked from their windows. It held two gridirons and three baseball diamonds, as well as a quarter-mile track and ten tennis-courts. There was also a picturesque and well-appointed field-house and a fairly large grand stand. To Ned’s relief, most of the ninety students were in attendance, though only about forty of the number were in playing togs. Ned’s idea was that among so many he might escape close observation.

He had, of course, handled a football more or less, and he was possessed of his full share of common sense. Besides, he had perhaps rather more than his share of assurance. To his own surprise, if not to Laurie’s, he got through the hour and a half of practice very creditably. Seasoned candidates and novices were on the same plane to-day. There was, first of all, a talk by the coach. Mr. Mulford was a short, broad, good-humored man of about thirty, with a round and florid countenance, which possibly accounted for the nickname of “Pinky” that the school had affectionately awarded him. His real name was Stephen, and he had played guard, and played it well, for several years with Trinity College. This was his fourth season as football coach at Hillman’s and his third as baseball coach. So far he had been fairly successful in both sports.

His talk was brief and earnest, although he smiled through it all. He wanted lots of material, but he didn’t want any fellow to report for practice who didn’t mean to do his level best and stick it out. Those who were afraid of either hard work or hard knocks had better save their time and his. Those who did report would get a fair trial and no favor. He meant to see the best team this fall that Hillman’s School had ever turned out, one that would start with a rush and finish with a bang, like a rocket!

“And,” he went on, “I want this team made up the way a rocket is. A rocket is filled with stars, fellows, but you don’t realize it until the final burst. So we’re going to put the soft pedal on individual brilliancy this year. It almost had us licked last fall, as you’ll remember. This year we’re going to try hard for a well-rounded team of hard workers, fellows who will interlock and gear together. It’s the machine that wins, the machine of eleven parts that work all together in oil. We’re going to find the eleven parts first, and after that we’re going to do the oiling. All right now! Ten men to a squad. Get balls and pass in circles. Learn to hold the ball when you catch it. Glue right to it. And when you pass, put it where you want it to go. Don’t think that the work is silly and unnecessary, because it isn’t. A fellow who can’t hold a ball when it comes to him is of no use on this team. So keep your minds right on the job and your eyes right on the ball. All right, Captain Stevenson.”

At least, Ned could, to quote Laurie, “stand in a circle” and pass a football, and he did, and did it better than several others in his squad. In the same way, he could go after a trickling pigskin and catch it up without falling over himself, though it is possible that his “form” was less graceful than that of one or two of his fellows. When, later, they were formed in a line and started off by the snapping of the ball in the hands of a world-wearied youth in a faded blue sweater bearing a white H on its breast, Ned didn’t show up so well, for he was almost invariably one of the last to plunge forward. The blue-sweatered youth called his attention to the fact finally in a few well-chosen words.

“You guy in the brown bloomers!” he bellowed. (Of course they weren’t bloomers, but a pair of somewhat expansive golf breeches that Ned, lacking proper attire, had donned, not without misgivings, on Laurie’s advice.) “Are you asleep? Put some life into it! Watch this ball, and when you see it roll, jump! You don’t look like a cripple, but you surely act like one!”

Toward the end a half-dozen last-year fellows took to punting, but, to Ned's relief, no one suggested that he take a hand at it, and at half-past five or thereabouts his trials came to an end. He went out of his way, dodging behind a group on the side-line, to escape Joe Stevenson, but ran plump into Frank Brattle instead.

"Hello, Turner," Frank greeted. "How did it go?"

"All right," replied Ned, with elaborate carelessness. "Fine."

"Rather a nuisance having to go through the kindergarten stunts, isn't it?" continued the other, sympathetically. "Mulford's a great hand at what he calls the fundamentals, though. I dare say he's right, too. It's funny how easy it is to get out of the hang of things during the summer. I'm as stiff as a broom!"

"So am I," answered Ned, earnestly and truthfully. Frank smiled, nodded, and wandered on, and Ned, sighting Laurie hunched up in the grand stand, joined him. "It's a bully game, football," he sighed, as he lowered himself cautiously to a seat and listened to hear his muscles creak. "Full of beneficial effects and all that." Laurie grinned in silence. Ned felt experimentally of his back, frowned, rocked himself backward and forward twice, and looked relieved. "I guess there's nothing actually broken," he murmured, "I dare say it'll be all right soon."

"They say the first two months are the hardest," responded Laurie, comfortingly. "After that there's no sensation."

Ned nodded. "I believe it," he said feelingly. He fixed his gaze on the farther goal-post and after a minute of silence remarked:

"I'd like to catch the man who invented football!"

He turned a challenging look on his brother. Laurie blinked and for several seconds his lips moved noiselessly and there was a haunted look in his gray eyes. Then, triumphantly, he completed the couplet: "It may suit some, but it doesn't suit all!"

"Rotten!" said Ned.

"I'd like to see you do any better," answered Laurie, aggrievedly. "There isn't any proper rhyme for 'football,' anyway."

"Nor any reason for it, either. Of all –"

"Hi, you fellow!" interrupted a scandalized voice. "What are you doing up there? Have you done your two laps?"

The speaker was a lanky, red-haired man who bristled with authority and outrage.

"Two laps?" stammered Ned. "No, sir."

"Get at it, then. And beat it in when you have. Want to catch cold, do you? Sitting around without a blanket or anything like that!" The trainer shot a final disgusted look at the offender and went on.

"Gee," murmured Ned, "I thought I was done! Two laps, he said! I'll never be able to, Laurie!"

"Oh, yes, you will," was the cheerful response. "And while you're doing them you can think up a better rhyme for 'football' than I did!"

Ned looked back reproachfully as he limped to the ground and, having gained the running-track, set off at a stiff-kneed jog. Laurie's expression relented as he watched.

"Sort of tough on the kid," he muttered sympathetically. Then his face hardened again and he shook his head. "I've got to be stern with him, though!"

CHAPTER VI – NED IS FIRM

Kewpie Proudtree obeyed the shouted invitation to enter Number 16 and appeared with a countenance as innocent as that of an infant. “Hello, fellows,” he said cordially, dropping into a chair with indications of exhaustion. “How do you like it as far as you’ve gone?”

Ned shifted in his seat at the study-table, choking back a groan, and fixed Kewpie with a baleful look. “Listen, Proudtree,” he said sternly. “I’ve got a bone to pick with you!”

“With me?” Kewpie stared in amazement. “What have I done?”

“You’ve got me into a fix, that’s what you’ve done! Didn’t you ask me – us – last night not to let on to Stevenson that we – I – couldn’t play football? Didn’t you say it would be a favor to you? Didn’t you say it would be all right and – and everything?”

“Sure! What of it?”

“Why, you crazy galoot, you must have told him that I knew all about the game! And you knew mighty well I didn’t! Stevenson thinks I’m a wonder, and I don’t know a touch-down from a – a forward kick!”

“Pass, not kick,” corrected Kewpie, patiently. “Look here, Turner – Say, are you Ned or Laurie? Blessed if I can tell!”

“Ned,” replied that youth, with much dignity.

“Guess I’ll have to call you Ned, then. Can’t call you both Turner. You understand. It was like this, Ned. You see, I want to stand in with Joe Stevenson. It – it’s for the good of the school. If they don’t play me at center this fall, who are they going to play? Well, Joe thought I – well, he seemed to think I hadn’t acted just right about keeping my weight down. He – he was sort of peeved with me. So I wanted to smooth him down a bit. You understand. That’s why I told him what I did.”

“Well, what *did* you tell him?”

“Why, I sort of – well, it wasn’t what I *said* exactly; it was what he thought I meant!”

“Proudtree, you’re telling a whopper,” said Ned, sternly. “And you told one to Stevenson, too, or I miss my guess.”

“I only said that you were a swell football-player.”

“For the love of lemons! What do you call that but a whopper?”

Kewpie looked both ashamed and distressed. He swallowed hard and glanced furtively at Laurie as though hoping for aid. But Laurie looked as unsympathetic as Ned. Kewpie sighed dolefully. “I – I suppose it was,” he acknowledged. “I didn’t think about that. I’m sorry, Ned, honest! I didn’t mean to tell what wasn’t so. I just wanted to get Joe’s mind off his troubles. You understand.”

“Well, you got me in a mess,” grumbled Ned. “I got by all right to-day, I suppose, but what’s going to happen to-morrow?”

Kewpie evidently didn’t know, for he stared morosely at the floor for a long minute. Finally, “I’ll go to Joe and fess up if – if you say so,” he gulped.

“I think you ought to,” responded Ned.

“Where’s the sense in that?” demanded Laurie. “What good would it do? Proudtree did fib, but he didn’t mean to. I mean he didn’t do it for harm. If he goes and tells Stevenson that he fibbed, Stevenson will have it in for him harder than ever; and he will have it in for you, too, Ned. Maybe he will think it was a scheme that you and Proudtree hatched together. That’s a punk idea, I say. Best thing to do is prove that Proudtree didn’t fib.”

“How?” asked Ned.

“Why, Proudtree – ”

“There’s an awful lot of that ‘Proudtree’ stuff,” complained the visitor. “Would you mind calling me Kewpie?”

“All right. Well, Kewpie told Captain Stevenson that you are a swell player. Go ahead and be one.”

“Huh, sounds easy the way you say it,” scoffed Ned; “but how can I, when I don’t know anything about the silly game? I wish to goodness you’d taken up football instead of me!”

“You got through to-day all right, didn’t you?” asked Laurie. “Well, keep it up. Keep your eyes open and learn. You can do it. You’re no fool, even if you haven’t my intellect. Besides, you’re the best little fakir that ever came over the range.”

“You can’t fake kicking a football,” said Ned, scathingly.

“Look here!” exclaimed Kewpie, his round face illumined by a great idea. “Tell you what, Ned! I’ll show you how to kick!”

The silence that greeted the offer might have offended a more sensitive youth, but Kewpie went on with enthusiasm. “Of course, I’m no wonder at it. I’m a little too short in the leg and, right now, I – I’m a bit heavy; but I used to kick and I know how it ought to be done. Say we have a half-hour or so at it every morning for a while?”

“Wouldn’t Stevenson know what was up?” asked Ned, dubiously.

“He needn’t know. We’ll go over to the lot behind the grammar school. Even if he saw us, he’d think we were having some fun.”

“He must have a strange idea of fun,” sighed Ned. “Still, if you want to take the trouble – ”

“Glad to! Besides, I owe you something for – for getting you in wrong. And I can put you wise to a lot of little things about handling a ball. We could do some passing, for instance. Wonder who’s got a ball we could borrow. I’ll find one somewhere. You understand. Now, what hour have you got free in the morning?”

A comparison of schedules showed that on two mornings a week the boys could meet at ten, and on two other mornings at ten-thirty. The remaining days were not accommodating, however.

“Well, even four times a week will show results,” said Kewpie, cheerfully. “This is Thursday. We’ll have the first lesson Saturday at ten.”

“I hope they don’t ask me to do any kicking before then,” said Ned.

“Not likely. You’ll get about the same stuff to-morrow as you had to-day. You’ll get by, take my word for it. That’s settled, then.” Kewpie referred to an ornate gold wrist-watch. “It’s after eight. You’re going over to Johnny’s, aren’t you!”

“Johnny’s?” repeated Laurie. “Oh, Doctor Hillman’s! I suppose so. What’s it like?”

“Oh, it isn’t bad. The eats are pretty fair. Anyway, he sort of likes the fellows to go, and he’s a good sort. You’ll be introduced to the faculty and their wives, if they have any, and meet a lot of fellows whose names you’ll forget the next minute. Take my advice and sort of work in toward the dining-room. Last year, the harlequin ice-cream gave out before I could get to the table.” Kewpie sighed. “Tabby has bully cake, too, and I’m off of cake. Isn’t that rotten luck?”

“Awful!” laughed Ned. “You going over now?”

“Yes. Come on and I’ll introduce you to some of the fellows you ought to know. I’ll wash my dirty paws and meet you in two minutes.”

The principal’s reception proved rather enjoyable. The “eats” were excellent and, under Kewpie’s guidance, the twins reached the long table in the dining-room well in advance of the crowd. As Laurie remarked afterward, it was worth the amount of trouble involved just to watch Kewpie’s mouth water as he gazed soulfully at the chocolate layer-cake. To his credit be it narrated that he manfully resisted it. Besides consuming much delectable food, the twins were impressively introduced by their guide to a number of their fellow-students, the introduction being prefaced in each case by a sort of biographical note, as: “There’s Dan Whipple. The tall fellow with the trick collar, talking to Mrs. Wells. Rows stroke on the crew. Senior class president. Honor man last year. President of Attic, too. Good chap to know. Come on.” In such manner they met at least a half-dozen school notables, most of whom were extremely affable to the new boys. Sometimes, to be sure, the twins

had a suspicion that Kewpie was pretending a closer intimacy with a notable than in fact existed, but he always “got away with it.”

The only fly in the ointment of the evening’s enjoyment occurred when Kewpie mischievously introduced them to Mrs. Pennington, the wife of the Greek and Latin instructor, and sneaked away. Mrs. Pennington was tall and extremely thin, and viewed the world through a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles. She had a high voice and what Ned termed a “very Lake Superior” manner, and, since she confined her conversation to the benefits to be derived from an earnest study of the Latin poets, philosophers, and historians, the twins were not happy. Fortunately, very little was demanded from them conversationally, Mrs. Pennington being quite competent to do all the talking. But, unfortunately, she gave them no chance to get away. Ned descried Kewpie grinning heartlessly from the doorway and rewarded him with a terrific and threatening scowl. Kewpie, however, waved blandly and faded into the night. Release came to them at last and they scurried away, neglecting, in their hurried departure, to say good night either to the doctor or Miss Tabitha, a breach of etiquette which probably passed unnoted by the hosts. Back in East Hall, the twins hammered loudly at Number 15, but Kewpie was either absent or discreet. At any rate, there was no response, and revenge had to be postponed.

To Laurie’s surprise, a notice on the bulletin-board in the corridor of School Hall the following morning announced that autumn baseball practice would begin that afternoon. He had supposed that his hour to offer himself on the altar of school patriotism would not arrive until the next spring; and later, when he strode down Walnut Street with Ned, in search of football togs for the latter, he broached the subject diplomatically.

“Funny idea to have baseball practice this time of year, I think,” he remarked carelessly. “Not much good in it. A fellow would forget anything he learned by next April.”

“Didn’t know they did,” replied Ned, uninterestedly. “Who told you that?”

“Oh, there was a notice on the board in School Hall. Don’t believe many fellows go out in the fall.”

“Thought baseball was a spring and summer game. Still, I dare say you can play it just as well now. Seems to me I’ve heard of having spring football practice, haven’t you?”

“I dare say. Crazy scheme, though, playing games out of season.”

“Ye-es.” Ned went on thoughtfully a moment Then he shot a suspicious glance at his brother. “You going out?” he demanded.

“N-no, I don’t think so,” answered Laurie, lightly. “There’s that building we had the bet on the other day. We never did find out – ”

“Never you mind about that building,” interrupted Ned, severely. “I’m on to you, partner. You’re trying to renege on baseball. Well, it doesn’t go! You’re a baseball hero and you’ve got to get busy!”

“Aw, Ned, have a heart! There’s plenty of time – ”

“No, sir, by jiminy! You got me slaving for the dear old school, now you do your bit!”

“Yes, but it isn’t fair to start the baseball season in September. You know it isn’t.”

“Cut out the alibis! You can get some baseball togs right now. Good thing you spoke of it. What’ll you need?”

“All I need is kindness,” wailed Laurie. “Ned, I don’t want to be a hero! I don’t want to save the dear old school from defeat in the ninth inning! I – I – ”

“You’re going to do as you agreed to,” answered Ned, grimly. “Remember that the honor of the Turners is at stake!”

Laurie sighed deeply. Then, “You speak of honor! Say no more. I yield,” he declaimed dramatically.

“You bet you do,” answered Ned, unhesitatingly. “You for the baseball field!”

CHAPTER VII – HIGH SCHOOL ACCEPTS DEFEAT

A week passed, and the twins began to feel like old residents. They had ceased being “the Turner twins” to acquaintances, although others still referred to them so, and their novelty had so far worn off that they could enter a classroom or walk side by side across the yard without being conscious of the rapt, almost incredulous stares of the beholders. To merely casual acquaintances they were known as Ned and Laurie; to a few friends they had become Nid and Nod. Kewpie was responsible for that. He had corrupted “Ned” into “Nid,” after which it was impossible for Laurie to be anything but “Nod.” Laurie had demurred for a time, demanding to be informed who Nod had been. Kewpie couldn’t tell him, being of the hazy belief that Nid and Nod were brothers in some fairy story he had once read, but he earnestly assured Laurie that both had been most upright and wholly estimable persons. Anyhow, Laurie’s objections wouldn’t have accomplished much, for others had been prompt to adopt the nicknames and all the protests in the world wouldn’t have caused them to drop them. These others weren’t many in number, however: Kewpie and Thurman Kendrick and Lee Murdock and George Watson about made up the list of them at this time.

Kendrick was Kewpie’s room-mate, a smallish, black-haired, very earnest youth of sixteen, which age was also Kewpie’s. Thurman was familiarly known as “Hop,” although the twins never learned why. He was a candidate for quarter-back on the eleven and took his task very seriously. Lee Murdock was one of the baseball crowd, and Laurie had scraped acquaintance with him on the diamond during a practice game. The word “scraped” is used advisedly, for Laurie, in sliding to second base, had spiked much of the skin from Lee’s ankle. Of such incidents are friendships formed! Lee was two years older than Laurie, a big, rather raw-boned fellow with a mop of ash-colored hair and very bright blue eyes.

George Watson was sixteen, an upper middler, and, as Laurie frequently assured him, no fit associate for a respectable fellow. To the latter assertion George cheerfully agreed, adding that he always avoided such. He came from Wyoming and had brought with him a breeziness of manner that his acquaintances, rightly or wrongly, described as “wild and woolly.” Of the four, Kewpie and George were more often found in company with the twins.

There had been four lessons in kicking on an open lot behind the grammar school, two short blocks away, and while Ned had not yet mastered the gentle art of hurtling a football through the air, Kewpie was enthusiastic about his pupil’s progress. “Why, geewhillikins, Nid,” he broke forth after the fourth session, “you’re a born kicker! Honest you are! You’ve got a corking swing and a lot of drive. You – you’ve got real *form*

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