

Barbour Ralph Henry

Left Half Harmon



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CHAPTER I

THE THREE GUARDSMEN

At a few minutes past three o'clock on a particularly warm afternoon in late September of last year three boys removed themselves and their luggage from the top of a Fifth Avenue stage in New York City and set forth eastward along Forty-second Street. Although decidedly dissimilar in looks and slightly dissimilar in build, they showed, nevertheless, a certain uniformity of carriage and action and, to a lesser degree, of attire. There was nothing strange in that, however, since, for the last two years, at least, they had spent nine months of the twelve in the same place, at the same pursuits and under the same discipline. The likeness of attire was less in material and color than in a certain tasteful avoidance of the extremes. Joe Myers and Martin Proctor wore blue serge and Bob Newhall a brownish-gray tweed, and in no case was the coat snugged in to the figure or adorned with a belt in conformity to the dictums of the Rochester school of sartorial art. Joe and Bob wore gray-and-gold ribbons about their straw hats, Martin a plain black. Each of the three carried a brown leather suitcase, and, had you looked closely, you would have discovered on each bag, amongst numerous other labels, a gray triangle bearing two A's in gold snuggled together in a pyramid-shaped monogram.

At Grand Central Station they crossed the street, showing a superb indifference to the traffic. The driver of a pumpkin-hued taxi-cab, whose countenance and manner of driving suggested that he had cut many notches in his steering-wheel, yielded to a momentary weakness and jammed on his emergency brake, thereby allowing the three boys to step calmly and unhurriedly from his path. They seemed not to have observed their danger, and yet, having gained the sidewalk unharmed, one of them turned and rewarded the taxi man with a grave wink which threw the latter into a state of apoplectic anger.

"Guess," observed Bob with a chuckle, "we spoiled his entire day!"

"Don't worry," responded Martin. "He'll kill enough to make up for losing us!"

Inside the station, they turned their steps toward the right and set their bags down near one of the ticket windows. "You get them, Joe," said Bob. "Here's mine." He proffered a five-dollar bill, but Joe waved it aside.

"I'll pay for them and you can settle on the train. I'll get all mixed up if you give me the money now." He took a rather fat wallet from an inner pocket of his coat and stepped into the line leading to the nearest wicket. The others moved their own suitcases and Joe's out of the way of the passers and settled themselves to wait. Martin compared the watch on his wrist with the station clock and yawned.

"Nearly twelve minutes yet," he observed.

Bob nodded. "What about parlor-car seats?" he asked.

"There aren't any on this train."

"Why not?"

Martin concealed another yawn with the back of a sunburned hand. "No parlor-car, dearie. You'll have to wait until five-ten for that, and it isn't worth it. I wouldn't wait in this Turkish bath another hour if they promised me a special train! Got anything to read in your bag?"

Bob was about to answer in the affirmative when a sudden shout from the ticket window interrupted and both boys looked across in time to see Joe clutch unsuccessfully at the arm of a

man who, swinging away from the window, now started to run fast toward the nearest exit. Perhaps Bob or Martin, had he sensed instantly what was happening, might have intercepted the man, but he had a good start before either of them realized that the black object he slipped into a pocket as he ran was Joe's wallet, and so it was Joe himself who led the evidently futile chase, Joe shouting "*Stop him! Stop him!*" most lustily. Abandoning suitcases, Bob and Martin dashed after.

The thief showed skill born of experience as he dodged his way toward the door, avoiding a stout lady with two small children in tow one instant and side-stepping a bundle-laden messenger boy the next and scarcely lessening his speed. Joe had poorer luck, however, for, although he got safely past the stout lady by a miracle of dexterity, he came a cropper a stride beyond and went down in a shower of parcels!

By now the waiting-room was in wild confusion. Cries of "Thief! Thief!" filled the air; those about the entrance were trying hard to get out of the way and those at a distance were striving madly to reach the scene. Station policemen hurriedly joined the pursuit, but their quarry was already on the threshold of freedom when a new actor made his appearance in the drama. Just as the thief swung toward the doors something shot through space, there was a crashing thud, a surprised grunt and the chase was over!

A boy of seventeen unwrapped his arms from the legs of the motionless form on the floor, arose to his feet, dusted his clothes and looked somewhat embarrassedly into the faces of the throng that had already surrounded him. A gray-coated officer pushed his way into the center of the circle, gave a quick, inquiring glance at the boy and leaned over the figure on the floor.

"He's all right. Hit his head when he went down. Give a hand with him, Conlon, and we'll get him to one side. You come along, sir, till I get the rights of it." A brother policeman aiding, the thief, now showing signs of consciousness, was lifted to one side of the entrance. By that time Joe and his companions had worked their way to the front and Joe quickly told his story.

"Grabbed your pocketbook, did he?" asked the first policeman. "Let's see has he got it. Sure, he has! Is this it? Hold on now, not so fast! What's your name?"

Martin whispered swiftly in Joe's ear, "Myers Joseph," answered Joe after a brief hesitation.

"And where do you live?"

"Philadelphia."

"Philadelphia, eh? What about making a charge against this feller?"

"I don't see how I can," answered Joe. "My train leaves in five minutes."

"Never mind the charge," broke in a new voice. "I know this duck and I'll look after him. On your feet, Clancey!"

A clean-shaven, lean-jawed man had pushed his way through the crowd, and now he gripped the thief's coat lapels and fairly lifted him to his feet.

"Detective," whispered a man behind Martin.

"This guy's wanted," continued the newcomer. "Stand up, you're all right, 'Spike.' Put up your hands." The captive, finding that playing possum would not do, obeyed meekly and the detective ran quick and practised fingers over him. Then a pair of handcuffs were slipped onto the man's wrists and he was being whisked through the throng.

"Here's your pocketbook, young man," said the policeman importantly. "You'd not have it saving this feller here." He indicated the boy whose football tactics had ended the chase and who, hemmed in by the crowd, was now striving to get away. "Better see if the contents is correct."

Joe had tried to express gratitude to the other boy, examine his pocketbook and listen to the low-voiced urging of Martin all at the same time, with the result that he was decidedly incoherent and confused. Martin was tugging at his arm and telling him that they had but five minutes to get the train. The policeman came to his rescue.

"Move on now! Move on!" he commanded sternly, pushing right and left. "Stop blocking up this passage!"

The throng dissolved almost as quickly as it had formed. Somehow, Joe and Martin, hurrying back to where Bob had returned to guard the suitcases, found themselves close to the boy who had made the capture. He had rescued his luggage, a large kit-bag, from a bystander and, too, was seeking the ticket window.

"I'm much obliged to you," said Joe. "I guess he'd have got away if you hadn't stopped him."

The stranger nodded. "Yes, he was in quite a hurry. I'd just come in when I saw him swing around the corner and knew that something was up. I wasn't sure he was the man they were after, but I thought I'd better take a chance."

"I'm certainly glad you did," replied Joe emphatically. "It was mighty nice of you."

"Not at all." The boy smiled and stepped into line at a window. Joe followed while Martin and Bob, bags in hand, stood ready to run for the gate. A moment later the stranger turned and found Joe behind him.

"I can get a ticket for Lakeville here, can't I?" he asked.

"Yes. Are you a Kenly fellow?"

"Not yet. I'm just entering. Are you going there?"

"No, I'm Alton." The other looked slightly puzzled and so Joe explained. "Alton Academy, you know. That's twelve miles this side of Lakeville. We play you fellows at football and baseball and so on."

"Oh, I see. Maybe I'll see you again some time then."

The purchaser in front hurried away and he turned from Joe to the ticket seller. A minute or so later, when the three were walking along the platform, they again overtook the stranger, and Joe said smilingly: "If you're looking for a parlor car, there isn't one."

"Thanks, I thought maybe it was up ahead."

"Not on this train. Better come and sit with us and we'll turn a seat over."

Fortunately for that project, the car they entered was no more than half filled, and soon, having stowed their suitcases in the rack overhead, they settled down, Bob and Martin taking the front seat and Joe and the stranger the other, the latter placing his kit-bag, which was too large for the rack, between his feet. As soon as they were settled the train started.

"By the way," said Joe, "my name's Myers, and this is Newhall and this is Proctor."

The other acknowledged the introductions with a smile. "Very glad to know you," he said. "My name's Harmon."

"Joe says you're going to Kenly," observed Bob, trying hard to keep pity out of his voice.

"Yes, I'm just entering." There was an embarrassed silence after that while the train rumbled its way through the tunnel. Then:

"Well, everyone to his taste," murmured Martin. Joe frowned rebukingly and Martin grinned back.

"Guess you chaps don't think much of Kenly," said Harmon with a laugh.

"Oh, don't pay any attention to Mart," said Bob. "Kenly's all right, I guess. She licked us last year, 14 to 6. Beat us at hockey, too."

"That's right," agreed Martin, though it evidently hurt him. "Kenly's going to have a good team this year, too, I hear."

"Is she?" Harmon didn't seem vastly interested.

"Guess you play football, don't you?" asked Bob. "A fellow back there said you made a corking tackle of that thief!"

"I've played some."

Joe started. "Did you say your name was Harmon?" he demanded almost brusquely. The other nodded inquiringly. "Did you go to Schuyler High last year?" pursued Joe. Harmon nodded again. Joe shot a meaningful look at Bob and Martin. Bob answered with a slow wink, but Martin looked puzzled. Joe relapsed into thoughtful silence, and conversation ceased for a minute or two.

When the train emerged from the tunnel, however, Joe settled himself further into his corner, which enabled him to see his seat companion without turning his head so far, and asked: "If it isn't too personal, Harmon, how did you happen to decide on Kenly Hall?"

Harmon looked the least bit surprised, but he answered unhesitatingly. "My brother was going to Kenly," he explained. "Then he decided he'd quit school and join the Navy. So I just thought I might as well go where he'd started for. Guess that was the way it happened. I don't really know much about the place. Dare say, if I'd heard of your school first I'd have gone there."

"Gee, I wish you had!" said Joe in heartfelt tones.

Harmon viewed him bewilderedly. Then he laughed with a suggestion of embarrassment. "Thanks," he murmured. "Guess your school isn't missing much, though." He turned his gaze and busied himself with getting his ticket ready for the conductor. Bob, opposite, viewed him with flattering attention. He saw a boy of apparently seventeen years, well if not heavily built, with clean-cut features, quiet gray-blue eyes and brown hair. He was not particularly good-looking, but his somewhat serious and self-confident expression would have brought a second glance from anyone. Then, too, when he smiled he looked very likable. Bob's thought was, as he turned his gaze away: "Thinks well of himself, but doesn't put on any airs. Doesn't do much talking, but thinks a lot. Looks like he'd be mighty shifty on his feet and pretty hard to stop if he once got started."

When the conductor had taken their tickets and gone on, Bob said: "I suppose you'll be going out for the Kenly team, Harmon."

"I think I'll have to try for it, but I guess I won't stand much of a show." Harmon smiled deprecatingly.

Bob frowned slightly. It was all right, he reflected, to be modest, but there was no sense in being a humbug! Joe laughed. "Oh, I dare say you'll get by," he said, faintly ironic. After a moment he added lightly: "If they turn you down, come over to us. I'll promise you a place!"

Harmon smiled politely, and Bob leaned across to him. "Better take him up, Harmon," he said. "Joe's our captain, you know."

Harmon looked with slightly more interest at Joe. "Really?" he asked. "I'll have to remember your offer then." But the joking tone in his voice indicated that he wasn't taking the suggestion very seriously. While his head was turned, Bob surreptitiously reversed the leather tag that hung from the handle of the kit-bag at his feet. Behind the little celluloid window the named stared out distinctly:

Gordon Edward Harmon.

"Yes, we're both guards," Joe was saying when Bob sank back in his seat again. "In fact, all three of us are, for that's Proctor's position, too."

"Oh, I'm only a sub," disclaimed Martin, "one of the 'also-rans.'"

"The Three Guardsmen," laughed Harmon. "I guess I read about you fellows once."

"Wasn't there a fourth one?" asked Bob. "I never could see why that fellow Dumas called the story 'The Three Guardsmen.'"

"That's right," said Martin. "D'Artagnan made the fourth."

"Maybe D'Artagnan was a back," suggested Joe, chuckling.

"Guess he was quarter-back," said Martin, "for he usually ran the game!"

Bob shifted his feet and stretched. "Guess I'll walk through and see if any of the fellows are aboard," he said. "Want to come along, Joe?"

"Sure." Joe arose with alacrity and joined Bob in the aisle, and they made their way forward. Martin, left alone with the new acquaintance, gazed wistfully after his friends and then, with a sigh, put his feet where Bob had sat and prepared to make polite conversation. Martin Proctor was seventeen, rather thick-set and had a round face from which a pair of brown eyes viewed the world with quizzical good humor. Just now the good humor was slightly obscured, for he wasn't keen on entertaining this strange youth who preferred Kenly Hall to Alton Academy. However, conversation progressed well enough, once started, and presently Martin forgot his hostility.

Meanwhile Joe and Bob had come to anchor in a seat in the smoking car ahead. "It's he, all right," announced Bob triumphantly.

Joe nodded. "Yes, I guess it is."

"I don't guess; I know! Wasn't Harmon's name Gordon Harmon?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the name on his bag. I looked when he was talking to you. Gordon Edward Harmon's his name!"

Joe shrugged. "I wonder how they got him, Bob," he said.

"You heard his yarn, didn't you?" replied Bob, chuckling.

"Yes, and I believed it – not! I'd just like to know how Kenly gets all the good players every year. They pretend they don't go after them, but it's mighty funny! There's a heap more than luck in it! Here we are needing a good full-back like Harmon the worst way, and he has to select Kenly. It makes you sick!"

"Reckon he's as good as the papers made him out?"

"Of course he is! Great Scott, you can't get away from his record, Bob! Why, last year every one of the New York papers that I saw made him first-choice full-back on the All-Scholastic Team. The man was a wonder, considering his age. Funny thing is that he doesn't look it. I mean he doesn't look as heavy as they said he was. He does look pretty good, though."

"Y-yes, but I'd never take him for a plunger. Doesn't seem to be the right build. Looks more like a fellow who'd be fast and shift outside tackles."

"Yes," Joe agreed, "but you can't always tell by appearances. Anyway, I wish to goodness we were getting him instead of Kenly!"

Bob nodded and there ensued a long silence during which Joe looked frowningly from the window and Bob gazed fixedly at his hands. It was Bob who spoke first. "Say, Joe," he asked slowly, "you don't suppose we could persuade him to come to Alton instead, do you?"

Joe sniffed. "He looks like a fellow you could persuade, doesn't he?" he asked sarcastically. "Besides, what are you going to offer him? And if we did make him an offer we'd get in wrong with faculty. The Athletic Committee wouldn't back us up, either."

"Reckon Kenly's making it easy for him?" asked Bob doubtfully.

"I don't know. Looks like it, doesn't it? I know they pretend to have clean hands and all that, and they surely do enough blowing, but it's mighty funny they're always getting star players from the high schools and smaller prep schools. Look at last year. If they hadn't had Greene and Powers they'd never have licked us; and Greene had just entered from that school up in Rhode Island and Powers was fresh from Stamford High. Oh, well, there's no use grouching. Let's go back."

"Wait a moment." Bob still stared at his hands and spoke thoughtfully. "Seems to me this chap's too good to lose, Joe, without making an effort."

"Sure he is," growled the captain. "What's on your mind?"

Bob looked around guardedly. "I'll tell you," he said.

CHAPTER II

KIDNAPPED!

“Well, our station’s next,” said Bob some forty minutes later. “Better change your mind, Harmon, and get off with us.”

Harmon answered his laugh and shook his head. “I’d like to, but I’m booked up the line. Is Lakeville the next stop?”

“Second after Alton,” answered Joe as he lifted the suitcases from the rack and handed them to Bob. “Look us up when you come over with the team some time. You’ll find Newhall and me in Lykes and Proctor in Haylow.” There was a warning blast from the locomotive and the train came slowly to a stop. The three Altonians shook hands with Harmon, taking, as it seemed, much time in the ceremony. Outside, on the station platform, a score or more of boys were hurrying toward the carriage stand. Bob had encumbered himself with Joe’s bag and his own and it was he who led the way to the door at last, Martin following with his suitcase and Joe still making his farewell to Harmon. Then the cry of “All aboard!” came and Joe gave Harmon’s hand a final clasp, picked up the kit-bag and fled down the aisle.

For a brief instant Harmon thought his sight had tricked him, but a swift glance showed that his bag was missing and in another instant he was on his feet and calling to Joe. “Hold on there! that’s my bag you’ve got!” he shouted. But Joe evidently didn’t hear, for he was through the door and down the steps before Harmon started after him. When Harmon reached the car platform Joe and his two companions were fifty feet distant, seeking a conveyance. The train was still motionless, although, further back, a trainman was holding his hand aloft. There was but one thing to do and Harmon did it. In an instant he was pushing his way through the luggage-laden throng about the carriages.

“You’ve got my bag, Myers,” he announced breathlessly as he laid hands on it.

Joe looked around in surprise, still holding tight to the bag. “What did you say?” he asked blankly.

Harmon tugged desperately. “My bag! Let go, will you? I’ll lose my train!”

Joe looked at the bag. “Well, what do you know?” he gasped. “By Jove, I *am* sorry, Harmon! I thought it was mine! Who’s got my bag? Here!” He thrust the bag at Harmon so energetically that the latter failed to grasp it. “Better hurry, old man! Your train’s going!”

“Thanks!” Harmon turned and started back. He would doubtlessly have swung himself to the platform of the rear car had it not been for Bob’s awkwardness. Bob was terribly sorry and apologetic about it afterwards! Just as Harmon was free of the group, a clear path across the station platform before him, Bob stepped directly in front of him! Of course you know what happened then. Harmon dodged to the right and at the same instant Bob stepped to the left, which didn’t better the situation the least bit. Bob looked most embarrassed, and you could see that he felt just like kicking himself. In fact, he assured them all afterwards that he felt that way. But meanwhile he made the mistake of stepping back to the right just as Harmon made a final despairing effort to get past him on that side, and again they collided!

Harmon set his bag down then, smiled rather a sickly smile and watched the train become smaller and smaller in the distance. Bob fairly revelled in self-reproach and abjected himself to such an extent that a heart of stone would have been moved to forgiveness. And as Harmon’s heart wasn’t made of any such material he gave his attention to assuring Bob that it didn’t really matter. Joe and Martin were most regretful, and Joe tried to take all the blame. But Bob wouldn’t allow that.

“No, if I hadn’t got in the way, like a blamed idiot, he’d have got it all right,” he insisted. “You see, I thought he was coming over here and so I stepped over there – like this – and he came the other way and I tried to side-step him and – ”

“It doesn’t matter a bit,” Harmon assured them, smiling quite cheerfully now. “There’ll be another train pretty soon.”

“That’s so!” Evidently the idea hadn’t occurred to Bob before and he welcomed it with enthusiasm. “Sure, there’s a train about six o’clock, fellows!”

“Well, that’s nearly two hours,” said Joe. “Let’s put our bags inside and find some seats. No use standing up all that time.”

“Oh, but you chaps needn’t wait around,” declared Harmon. “I wouldn’t think of having you do that!”

The three looked at each other inquiringly. Then: “Can’t let you wait around here all alone,” said Joe decidedly; “not after making you lose your train like that. Bob, you and Martin go on up and take my bag with you, and I’ll stay here.”

“Why not all go up?” asked Martin. “Harmon’s got nearly two hours to wait. He might as well come along and be comfortable.”

“That’s the ticket!” exclaimed Bob. “Leave your bag here and ride up to school with us, Harmon. We’ll show you around a bit and then we’ll go up to my room or Joe’s and rest until about a quarter of an hour before your train goes. And I’ll ride back with you!”

Harmon hesitated. “That’s very nice of you,” he said warmly, “but I wouldn’t want to miss another one. Maybe I’d better just sit in the station and – ”

“You’d die of the heat down here in this hole,” said Joe. “Come on! We’ll find out when the train is due, leave your bag with the agent and beat it.”

Harmon allowed himself to be persuaded. After all, it was decidedly warm there at the station, and an hour and fifty-one minutes – which was what the agent made it – would be a long time to wait. And Joe insisted on waiting with him, too, and that was the strongest argument presented, for Joe and his friends had treated him mighty nicely and Harmon felt that it would be a pretty low piece of business to make any of them suffer. So off they all went presently in one of the tumble-down, creaky carriages that still competed with the few taxi-cabs at Alton, and Harmon proved himself a thoroughly good sport by appearing to forget the regrettable incident and displaying much interest in the town and, finally, the school.

The others pointed out all points of interest on the way: the Congregational Church that had the tallest steeple in New England – none of them could remember the exact figures, however – the Town Hall and Library, the rival motion picture theaters, the Common with the statue of Nathan Hale in the center – at least Bob and Martin thought it was Nathan Hale and Joe was stoutly of the opinion that it was Lafayette – the ornate residence of Alton’s richest and most influential citizen, a brownstone monstrosity almost entirely surrounded by conservatories from which a very few sun-baked ferns and palms peered forth, and so on to the school entrance on Academy Street.

“On the left,” proclaimed Bob from the front seat, forming a megaphone of his hands, “the modest dwelling is the Principal’s residence. Behind it – you can see it now – is Haylow Hall. Next on the right you see Lykes, especially interesting as the home of Mr. Robert Newhall, one of Alton’s most prominent undergraduates. In the center of the row is Academy Hall. Directly back of it, if you look quick, you will discern Lawrence Hall. Lawrence is the most popular of all the buildings. It contains the dining hall. Further to the right is Upton, and then Borden. Behind Borden is the Carey Gymnasium. The building by itself at the further end of the Green is Memorial Hall. We are now entering the school grounds. Let me draw your attention to the German howitzer on the left, and, on the right, one of our own 25’s. Both guns saw service in the World War and were presented to the school – ”

“Oh, dry up, Bob!” protested Joe. “Harmon will think you’re an idiot.”

“Reckon he thinks so already,” responded Bob sadly, “after the way I acted at the station. Jimmy, you can dump us at Lykes.”

The driver of the vehicle nodded silently and turned to the left in front of Academy Hall, from the steps of which a group of boys shouted greetings, boisterous and even ribald, to the occupants of the carriage. Harmon found himself wishing that he had been included in that jovial and noisy welcome. This was his first sight of a preparatory school and he liked what he saw and hoped that Kenly would prove as attractive. Alton Academy occupied a tract of ground on the edge of the town apparently two blocks square. From the wide, well-shaded street the Green rose at a gentle grade to the row of brick and limestone buildings that fronted it, a smooth expanse of fine turf intersected by gravel roads and paths and shaded here and there by giant elms. There was no fence nor wall and from a little distance the Green seemed to run, right and left, into the flower-filled yards of the houses across the side streets. There was something very dignified, very lovely about the place, and the visitor’s heart warmed to it. He wanted to ask if Kenly was like this, but incipient loyalty to the school of his choice restrained him. Then the carriage pulled up at a dormitory building and everyone piled out. There was a squabble between Joe and Martin over who was to pay, Martin harking back to a similar occasion last spring when he had paid the bill and Joe’s memory failing him utterly. Harmon made a motion toward his pocket, but Bob edged him toward the steps.

“Leave it to them,” he chuckled. “Mart always pays in the end.”

This statement was speedily proved true and Joe and Bob conducted Harmon along the first floor corridor to the end of the building and there opened a door and ushered him into a cool, shadowy study. Martin had gone on to Haylow to dispose of his bag, but, before Harmon had got well settled in a comfortable chair where the faint afternoon breeze reached him from one of the windows, he was back.

They sat there awhile and talked. Once Joe and Bob absented themselves on some casual excuse that took them out of the room, and once Martin and Joe were gone for several minutes, but always one of the number was left to entertain the visitor. Harmon liked the study and the small alcove-bedroom that led from it and was much interested in the pictures and trophies that adorned the walls and the tops of the chiffoniers. Joe explained that his roommate, Don Harris, had not arrived and would probably not get there until the next morning. Harris came from Ohio and faculty allowed those who lived at a distance a day’s grace.

“I suppose you have to be at Kenly tonight, don’t you, Harmon?” he asked.

“I believe so. I understand that school begins in the morning. What time is it getting to be? I don’t want to miss that next train.”

“Oh, there’s an hour and twenty minutes yet,” said Bob. “How’d you like to take a look around? It doesn’t seem quite so warm now.”

The visitor was agreeable to the suggestion and the quartette set forth. They went first to Lawrence Hall and saw the big dining-room that accommodated four hundred. The forty-odd tables were already draped in white and set for supper, and, with the afternoon sunlight slanting through the high windows, the silent hall looked very pleasant. They climbed the stairs to the visitors’ gallery and then descended other stairs and looked into the big kitchen through the oval windows in the swinging doors. Then came the athletic field, where several of the tennis courts were already in use, and Harmon heard tales of hard-fought battles on gridiron and diamond and track, battles that were invariably won by Alton. He wanted to ask if Kenly had never scored a victory there, but he refrained.

They poked their heads into Upton and Borden Halls, the latter dormitory reserved for the freshman students, and then crossed to the gymnasium. Harmon could honestly and unaffectedly praise that, for it was just about the last cry in buildings of its kind. He looked longingly at the big swimming pool with its clear green water showing the white tiled floor below, and Bob regretted that there wasn’t time for a swim. Then came Memorial Hall, where the sunlight shone through

the many-hued windows and cast wonderful designs of red and blue and gold and green on the marble tablets across the silent nave. The library was here, a book-lined, galleried hall whose arched ceiling was upheld by dark oak beams. Two great tables, each on a deep-crimson rug, stood at either end, and many comfortable chairs surrounded them. There was a stone fireplace with monstrous andirons, and the school seal above it. Facing the corridor door, a clock, set in the gallery railing, ticked loudly in the silence. Upstairs was the Auditorium on one side of the corridor, a large, many-windowed hall with a platform at one end, while, across from it, were four recitation rooms.

Outside again, they followed a path that took them under the shade of the elms back to Academy Hall. There was not much time left now, and after viewing the school offices from a respectful distance and peering into some of the classrooms on the first and second floors, Joe decided that their guest had better be thinking of getting back to the station. "You mustn't go, though, without seeing the view from the cupola," he added. "There's plenty of time for that."

Harmon looked doubtfully at his watch, but Joe was already leading the way toward a narrow flight of stairs at the end of the second-floor corridor and Bob had an urging grip on his shoulder.

"That's right," agreed Martin. "Everyone ought to see the view from the cupola. It – it's one of the sights!" Perhaps he meant to add further persuasion, but a fit of coughing overtook him. Bob, over Harmon's head, scowled ferociously back at him.

The stairway ended at a closed door and the procession halted while Joe shot back a heavy iron bolt and drew the portal outward. Then he stepped politely aside and the visitor entered a small apartment some eight feet square. It was quite bare and lighted by four tiny panes set one in each wall and just under the ceiling. Harmon's gaze went questing for the stairs or ladder by which he was to reach the cupola, but there was nothing of that sort in sight. Indeed, there was no egress save by the door through which he had entered! He was on the point of calling polite attention to the fact when a sound behind him brought him quickly about. The sound had been made by the door as it closed, and while he stared, open-mouthed, a second sound reached him, and this time it was made by the bolt sliding harshly into place!

CHAPTER III

HELD BY THE ENEMY

A long moment of deep silence followed.

Harmon stared bewilderedly at the closed door. Of course, it was some sort of a silly joke, but it seemed so peculiarly at variance with all that had gone before that he couldn't understand. Wondering, he waited for the door to reopen. Instead, however, came the voice of Joe Myers, subdued by the intervening portal but recognizable and distinct.

"Harmon, can you hear me?"

"Yes!"

"That's good. Now listen. It's too late to make that train, old man, and there isn't another until about nine o'clock. That would get you to Lakeville pretty late and faculty wouldn't like it, I guess. What's the use of starting the term with a black eye, eh? No sense in getting in wrong right at the start, is there? It's a sort of a handicap to a fellow – "

"There's plenty of time to get the train if you'll open that door," replied Harmon impatiently. "What's the big idea, anyway? If it's a joke it's a mighty poor one, Myers!"

"It isn't a joke," came the answer. "You see, it's like this. We hate to see a nice, decent chap like you spoiling his whole – er – his whole future career by making a mistake, Harmon. And you will make a mistake if you go to Kenly. Why, you say yourself that you're not certain of making the team over there! What sort of a school is it, I ask you, where a fellow of your – your caliber has to get out and dig for a place on the eleven? Now, here you're sure of it. All you'll have to do will be just put your name down at the office. Of course we don't know what arrangement Kenly has agreed to make, and maybe we can't promise all they have. You see, faculty here's sort of – sort of strait-laced. But I'll promise you this much, anyhow, Harmon: Your first quarter won't cost you a cent. We'll see to that. All you need is to – "

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about!" protested the prisoner. "Open that door and let me out, or – or – "

"Now don't get peevish, *please!*" begged Joe. "Honest, we're doing this for your own good, Harmon. Just think a minute and you'll see it. We're offering you a quarter's tuition and the full-back position on the team. If Kenly can do any better, why, all I've got to say is that they're a lot of low-down cheats, after the way they talk over there!"

"But I'm not going to Kenly to play football!" exploded Harmon. "I don't care if I never play! I'm going to – to *learn!*"

"Sure! Well, that's another reason why you ought to stay here. Everyone knows that Alton's a better school for learning things than Kenly. You don't have to take my word for that, either. It's universally accepted. Why, gosh-ding-it, we've got a bigger faculty and a better one than Kenly ever thought of having! And we've got better buildings and a better plant generally! Why, say, you can learn more here in a month than you could learn at Kenly in a year!"

"Are you fellows crazy?" demanded Harmon. "Let me out or I'll kick the door down!"

"You can't do that," replied Joe equably. "It's two inches thick. And no one will hear you, no matter how much row you make, for there won't be anyone on the next floor until tomorrow morning. So you might just as well get rid of that idea, old man. We need you right here at Alton, and we mean to have you. And you'll be mighty glad some day that we did this. Of course, right now you're feeling a bit peeved with us, but you'll get over that when you calm down and think things over. Maybe you'd like to consider awhile. There's no hurry. How about it?"

There was no reply for a long moment. Then Harmon said in quite a placid voice: "Will you please tell me again what you're getting at? Maybe I'm kind of dense, but it's all hodgepodge to me!"

"Sure! Here it is in a nutshell. We need you on the team – "

"What team?" asked Harmon patiently.

"Why, the football team, man! We need you a heap more than Kenly does, and we're willing to do anything in reason to get you. Maybe you won't mind telling us what Kenly has offered you."

"For what?"

"Why, for – well, for going there."

"Kenly hasn't offered me anything. Why should she? I'm entering like anyone else."

There was a silence. Then Joe's voice came again, somewhat more chilly. "All right. It's your affair. If you don't want to tell, you needn't, but we wouldn't ever speak of it. I suppose you mean that we haven't offered enough. Well, I'll have a talk with some of the fellows and see what they say. You understand, Harmon, that whatever we do we do without faculty getting wise. And, of course, whatever money we managed to raise would come out of a few pockets, because lots of fellows wouldn't approve, and lots of 'em haven't got the money. For that matter, I don't altogether approve myself! If it was almost anyone else I'd tell him to go to thunder! Still, if Kenly can do this sort of thing and get away with it – "

"Would you very much mind listening to me a minute?" begged the boy on the other side of the door. "Kenly isn't paying me money for going there. She hasn't offered to and I wouldn't take it in any case. Is that plain?"

"Y-yes," replied Joe, "but – "

"Then why not stay here instead?" asked Bob eagerly. "You're sure of making the team and it won't cost you a cent for tuition the first quarter! We've got everything Kenly has and a lot she hasn't. Besides, it's a heap nicer playing on a winning team than on a losing one, and we're going to lick Kenly this fall as sure as shooting!"

"That train's gone, hasn't it?" asked Harmon quietly.

"Just leaving the station," answered Joe in relieved tones.

"Then you might as well let me out of here."

"That means you've decided to stay?"

"No, it doesn't. I haven't any idea of staying. But – "

"You think it over," advised Joe. "We'll be back in half an hour or so. What have you got against Alton, anyway?"

"Nothing against the place," answered Harmon, "but a lot against the crazy idiots in it! Open the door and stop acting the fool!"

There was a low-voiced conference outside and then Joe announced: "We'll let you think it over awhile, old man. There's no use getting mad about it. We're doing this for your sake as much as for our own, and you'd ought to see that. That offer still holds good, remember. Maybe I'll be able to better it when I come back. I'll see – "

"Look here, you – you crazy loon! Do you mean that you're going around telling the fellows that you've got me locked up here?"

"Well, I've got to tell them something, haven't I? I can't say – "

"Don't say anything! I don't want your money! I wouldn't stay here if you paid me a thousand dollars a week!"

"You mean that?" asked Joe dubiously.

"Of course I mean it! Now let me out!"

"Well, leaving money out of it altogether, Harmon, and all on the level: What's the matter with going to school here instead of over there?"

“Why should I?” asked Harmon exasperatedly. “I started for Kenly and that’s where I’m going. You can keep me here all night and all tomorrow and all – ”

“But that’s not reasonable,” protested Joe mildly. “Here we’re giving you a chance to – ”

“Reasonable! Ha! Do you call what you’re doing reasonable?”

“It may not look so, but it sure is! Hang it, man, we’re trying to save you from making a perfectly rotten mistake! Look here, have you paid your first quarter over there?”

“I have not, but that’s got nothing to do with it.”

“Of course it has!” returned Joe in triumph. “You aren’t a student there until you’ve registered and paid your first quarter bill! All right! Just pay your money here, old man: the tuition’s the same! What do you say?”

“No!”

“Well, I’ve said all I can think of,” replied Joe despondently. “You think it over awhile, Harmon. There’s no hurry: you can register any time this evening before nine and tomorrow morning before twelve. We’ll be back after a bit. You sort of think it over, eh?”

“I don’t need to think it over! I haven’t the least idea of doing anything so crazy! Come on and open the door now, and let’s have an end to this – this silly nonsense!”

But there was no reply. Instead, there came to the captive the faint sounds of retreating footsteps. He listened suspiciously. Perhaps it was only a hoax, perhaps Myers was still outside. After a minute he called.

“That doesn’t fool me!” he said. “I know you’re still there!”

But there was no answer, and when another minute had gone by he realized that they had actually gone and left him there alone!

CHAPTER IV

HARMON COMES TO TERMS

The prisoner thrust his hands in his pockets and made a frowning survey of his cell. From the point of view of his captors it appeared an ideal apartment. There was but one door and that was firmly locked and plainly invulnerable. The windows were beyond reach and, in any case, too small to crawl through, and what had once been an opening admitting to the belfry above had been long since boarded up. He kicked tentatively at the door and might just as well have kicked at any other place in the four surrounding walls so far as results were concerned. There was no furniture, not even a chair. Listening, he heard nothing save, once, the distant shriek of a locomotive.

After a few minutes of hopeless inspection of the place, Harmon shrugged his shoulders and seated himself on the floor with his back to the wall and acted on Joe Myers' advice to think it over. But thinking it over didn't enlighten him much. That his captors really meant business was evident, but why they had gone to so much trouble was a mystery. None of the reasons they had given seemed sufficient. That they had proceeded to such lengths merely to save him from the direful fate of becoming a Kenly fellow was too improbable. That they seriously wanted his services on the football team was just as unlikely: or, at least, it was unlikely that they would value those services highly enough to indulge in kidnapping as a means of securing them! No, there was something else, something that didn't appear. Perhaps Kenly had once enticed an Alton boy away and Alton was trying to get even. Or perhaps —

There was a sound beyond the door and Harmon stopped conjecturing and listened. A voice came to him that was not Joe Myers'.

"I say, Harmon!"

"Hello!" The prisoner tried to keep his tone hostile, but he wasn't altogether successful, for he was becoming tired of isolation and silence.

"Joe sent me up to read something out of the school catalogue to you. Can you hear all right?"

"Yes, go ahead and read," answered Harmon scornfully.

And Martin Proctor, sitting on the top step outside, read. He read at some length, too. He started in with a list of Alton Academy graduates who had attained national prominence. The list included a Secretary of State, two Chief Justices, three United States Senators, numerous congressmen and a wealth of smaller fry. When he had finished Harmon inquired: "No Presidents or Vice-Presidents?"

"I haven't graduated yet," replied Martin cheerfully. "Now I'll read you something from the report of the Board of Overseers."

"What for? What do I care about the Board of Overseers?"

"Joe told me to."

When that was done Martin paused for comment, got none and began a flattering description of the Carey Gymnasium. Inside, Harmon leaned against the wall and grinned. A brief summary of scholarships and a statement to the effect that the Academy roster of year before last represented thirty-nine states of the Union, two territories and three foreign countries completed the programme.

"Joe said I was to ask you if you'd made up your mind," announced Martin then.

"You tell him to give you an evening paper to read the next time," replied Harmon.

"Say, why don't you?" asked Martin persuasively. "Honest, Harmon, you'll like Alton a heap better than Kenly."

"You go back and ask Myers what he's going to say to the faculty when I get out of here and tell my story!"

“Oh, we’ve got that fixed all right,” chuckled Martin. “Well, I’ve got to be getting down to supper.”

“Hold on there! When do I eat?”

“I don’t know. You see, if we opened the door to give you anything you might try to get out!”

“You think so, do you?” asked Harmon grimly. “Well, you’ve got more sense than I thought you had! How long does supper run?”

“Until seven. It’s ten minutes past six now.”

“Listen, Porter – ”

“Proctor’s my name, old chap.”

“Proctor, then. Look here, now. If you’ll open that door and let me out I’ll keep quiet about this. You can tell the others that – that I asked to see that catalogue and that you went to hand it in and I knocked you down.”

“Yes, and they’d believe it, wouldn’t they?” asked Martin scornfully. “Think of something better, please! Besides, I’m just as much interested in saving you from your career of crime as they are, Harmon. Why, I’d never forgive myself if I left one turn unstoned! We’re trying to save you from yourself, old chap!”

“You’d much better be thinking about saving yourselves,” answered Harmon, laughing.

“Did you laugh then?” called Martin eagerly.

“Sure. It struck me as funny. You’ll see the joke later.”

“I’ll send Joe up. He said if you sounded like you were in a good temper – ”

The lessening sounds of footsteps hurrying down the stairs finished the sentence and Harmon chuckled. After all, it *was* funny, the whole thing; and he might as well laugh as frown. When it came right down to brass tacks there was no very good reason why he shouldn’t change his allegiance to Alton Academy. At the present moment it meant just as much to him as Kenly did: more in fact, for he had seen Alton and hadn’t seen Kenly. And he liked what he had seen. It might very well be that Kenly wasn’t nearly so good a school, even discounting the biased boastings of his captors. Of course his parents expected him to go to Kenly, and so did his brother, but the choice had been his and he saw no reason why he hadn’t a perfectly good right to choose over. It wasn’t too late, for he had not registered at Kenly and the first quarter’s tuition was still in his pocket. Possibly his brother would be slightly peeved —

He paused just there in his cogitating and comprehension slowly illumined his face. He jumped to his feet, thrust his hands into his pockets and grinned broadly at space. “That’s it!” he murmured blissfully. “I’ll bet that’s it!” He withdrew his hands, snapped his fingers and turned on a heel. After that he gave way to a spasm of laughter that left him, with streaming eyes, clinging weakly to the door frame. “Oh, gosh!” he gurgled. “It’s too good! Wait – wait till they find out – about it!” That thought sent him off again and he finally subsided on the floor, his laughter dying away in chuckles and his eyes fairly streaming.

Recovering from his levity, he reviewed the events of the afternoon from the time of his first meeting with the “Three Guardsmen.” He recalled Joe Myers’ surprising interest in his name and the fact that he had attended Schuyler High School, and how insistently the subject of football had held the conversation. Everything coincided with his theory. He understood now why the three boys had connived at getting off the train and keeping him off, why they had gone to so much trouble to show him about the school and, finally, why they had made him a prisoner. And he understood why he had been offered a quarter’s tuition and a place on the team! It was all very simple – and excruciatingly funny! And he was about to give way to laughter again when footsteps once more broke the silence. He pulled his face straight and waited. It was Joe this time.

“Hello, in there! Harmon!”

“Yes?”

"I've talked to four or five of the fellows and I guess it's all right. We'll manage to dig up enough so it won't cost you anything for tuition the first half of the year. How does that sound?"

"Rotten, Myers. I don't think I'd care to go to a school where they do that sort of thing."

"*What?* But you were going to Kenly!" sputtered Joe.

"I told you Kenly hadn't offered me money."

"Yes, but – Look here, Harmon, is that straight, man to man?"

"Absolutely."

"Gosh!" There was a long silence beyond the door. Then: "Well, I don't understand," said Joe helplessly. "How did you happen to decide on Kenly?"

"I told you once."

"Yes, that's so, but I thought you were just – just talking. Well, I don't see why you shouldn't be willing to stay here then, Harmon. If you aren't getting anything from them, what's the big idea? You're sure of a place on the team here and – and if you should change your mind you could have a half-term free of cost. Mind, I'd a heap rather you didn't change it, because I don't like that sort of thing any better than you say you do. We never have paid any fellow for playing on an Alton team and I don't want to begin now. Besides, if faculty ever found out about it – Zowie!"

"Well, I don't want any favors, thanks. But suppose I did decide to stay here, Myers –"

"Sure! That's the talk!"

"Wait a minute! First thing of all, do I get any supper?"

"You bet you do! Five minutes after you say the word I'll have you hitched up to a swell meal!"

"Well, what about a room? I'd want to be decently fixed that way, you know. Entering late like this I suppose I'd have to take the leavings, eh?"

"Listen! We've got a swell room waiting for you. The fellow that was going in with Mart isn't coming at all and I've asked the secretary to hold it open until tomorrow morning. It's a corking room; nice big study with three windows and a fine view; on the front of Haylow; big alcove; furniture nearly new and everything!"

"Sounds pretty fair," commented Harmon. "Maybe I wouldn't like this fellow Proctor, though: or maybe he wouldn't like me."

"Rot! Everyone likes Mart, and he's bound to like you. If he doesn't I'll knock him into the middle of next Sunday! You'll get on together great!"

"We-ell," said Harmon unenthusiastically, "maybe. And it's certain that I'm to make the team?"

"You bet it is!" laughed Joe. "Just as long as you can stand on your feet and play football you're sure of a job!"

"Suppose I'm not as good as you seem to think I am?"

"I'll risk that," chuckled Joe.

"How about the coach, though?"

"Johnny? Don't worry about him. He will be just as tickled as I am to get you! What do you say, old man? It's getting pretty close to seven o'clock."

"All right, I'll agree! Open the door!"

"No tricks? You're not meaning to get out and then say I misunderstood you or something?"

"No tricks, Myers, I give you my word!"

The bolt shot back protestingly, the door swung open and Joe's delighted countenance was revealed. "Gee, I'm glad, Harmon!" he exclaimed. "Shake!" Harmon shook. He, too, was smiling, but his smile was not so guileless.

"You win, Myers," he said. "Now lead me to that supper!"

"Come on! We'll feed first and then you can register. I haven't had anything myself yet." They sped down the stairs and across empty, twilighted corridors and finally to the cool outdoors.

“I didn’t tell any of the fellows where you were,” Joe explained as he guided Harmon around the building toward Lawrence Hall. “I just said that I was in touch with you. Here we are. It’s sort of late, but I guess there’s plenty left. I’ll take you to my table tonight and tomorrow we’ll see if there’s a place there you can have regularly.”

Both boys were much too hungry to waste breath on conversation, and the meal proceeded almost in silence. There was plenty to eat and Harmon did full justice to it. When they had finished Joe took him in tow again and they went back to Academy Hall and turned to the left on the first floor and passed through a door whose ground-glass pane bore the inscription: “Office – Walk In.” What happened was very simple. At a desk Harmon was introduced to a tall, lean gentleman whose name was Mr. Wharton. The secretary shook hands politely and scrutinized the applicant through a pair of strong glasses. Then he gave him a card and a pen and Harmon wrote on the dotted lines, going to some pains to conceal the writing from Joe. The latter, however, had no thought of looking. Then a sum of money changed hands, the secretary filled out a receipt for it, Harmon produced a certificate from the principal of the Schuyler High School and the interview ended with a long sigh of relief from Joe.

“That’s done,” he said as they reached the corridor again. “Now I’ll take you up to your room.”

Haylow Hall was the last building at the left of the Green. Joe pushed his way through a group of boys on the stone steps and Harmon followed, conscious that he was being viewed with a good deal of interest by the loungers. Joe, too, noticed the fact, for he chuckled, as they started up the stairs: “Guess some of those fellows recognized you, from the way they stared!” There, however, Joe was wrong. The interest had been only such as would have been accorded to any fellow under such circumstances. For Joe was unaware of the glow of triumph that shone from his countenance as he guided his companion into the dormitory!

In Number 16 Martin Proctor was unpacking a trunk when Joe and Harmon entered. Martin looked questioningly from the latter to Joe, a doubtful grin on his face.

“It’s all right,” announced Joe gayly. “He’s registered, Mart! Where’s Bob?”

“Over at the room, I guess. He brought the bag and lit out. Say, Harmon, I’m mighty glad about this. And – and I hope you don’t hold it against us for what we did. It was sort of rough stuff, but – ”

“Not at all,” answered Harmon calmly. “It’s quite all right. Guess I ought to feel flattered instead of sore, anyway. Myers says I’m to room here with you.”

“That’s right. It’s a pretty fair room, Harmon. Better than lots of ’em, anyway. You might take your pick of the beds in there. It doesn’t matter to me which I have.”

“Thanks.” Harmon gravely inspected the curtained alcove and decided on the left-hand bed. Perhaps the fact that Martin’s pajamas lay there had something to do with the decision. Martin blinked but stood the blow heroically and tried to forget that the right-hand bed had a weak spring. At that moment Harmon caught sight of his kit-bag on the floor and pointed at it in surprise.

“Isn’t that mine?” he asked. “How did get here?”

“Bob brought it up from the station a few minutes ago,” explained Martin.

“You fellows must have been pretty certain of having your way!” marveled the owner of the bag.

Joe nodded soberly. “We had to be,” he said grimly. “Once we had started, we had to go through with it, Harmon.”

“But suppose I hadn’t given in! Suppose I’d gone to the principal here and told him that you fellows had kidnapped me and locked me up in a room?”

Joe smiled gently. “No chance of that, old man. If you hadn’t decided to stay with us by midnight we’d have taken you back to the station and put you on the twelve-twenty train.”

“Hm! And I – er – I wouldn’t have had anything to say?”

“No.” Joe shook his head. “There’d have been three of us anyway; maybe four; and we’d have fixed you so you couldn’t talk much.”

Harmon smiled. “Still, afterwards I could have talked. I could have come back, or written a letter and spilled the beans.”

“Yes, you could have done that, but we argued that once away from here you’d get over your grouch and forget it. Besides, a chap doesn’t want to look foolish.”

“That’s so,” agreed Harmon, and he repeated it more emphatically in the next breath. “It is uncomfortable, isn’t it?” The arrival of Bob Newhall made a response by Joe unnecessary, although the latter wondered just a little over Harmon’s expression and the inflection of his voice. Bob gave a shout of triumph and joy when he saw Harmon.

“A brand from the burning!” he exclaimed. “This is great! I just knew you’d see reason, Harmon! Say, I’m tickled to death!”

“Well, don’t upset the table,” warned Martin. “Let’s sit down, fellows. This has been sort of a strenuous day. Try the big chair, Harmon. By the way, as we’re going to see a good deal of each other we might as well get used to real names. Mine’s Martin, but I’m generally called Mart.”

“But never Smart,” interpolated Bob.

Harmon smiled at the pleasantry. “And I’m usually called Will and never Way,” he said.

Martin looked puzzled. For that matter, so did the others.

“You mean folks call you Will?” asked Martin, doubtfully.

“Yes. Short for Willard.”

“Oh! Willard’s your middle name. I see. Well – ”

“Hold on!” exclaimed Bob. “I thought your middle name was Edward!”

“No, my middle name is Kane. Willard is my first name.” Harmon explained politely and smilingly. Joe’s jaw began to drop slowly.

“*What!*” cried Bob. “Aren’t you Gordon Harmon, the fellow who played full-back last year for Schuyler High?”

Harmon shook his head gently. “Oh, no, that’s my brother,” he said.

A deep silence fell. Bob stared at Joe and Joe stared at Martin and all three stared at Harmon. And the latter met their looks with an amused smile. When the silence threatened to continue forever Bob gave an audible gulp and blurted wildly:

“But I saw the name on your bag! It’s there now! ‘Gordon Edward Harmon!’”

“Oh,” replied Harmon gently, “that isn’t my bag. I borrowed it from my brother.”

CHAPTER V

THE WRONG BOY

Another silence ensued, broken at last by a groan from Bob.

“Then you’re not – you don’t – ”

“There’s evidently been a mistake,” said Willard regretfully. “Still, of course it doesn’t much matter whether my name’s Willard or Gordon, does it? As Shakespeare says, ‘What’s in a name?’”

“I never could stand that fellow Shakespeare,” muttered Bob. Joe was still staring across the table at Willard in a strange fascination. Martin’s countenance was gradually assuming a broad grin. Willard went on brightly and cheerfully.

“What I couldn’t understand was why you chaps were so anxious to have me here. Just at first, naturally, I was a bit peevish at being locked up, but when I came to think it over, like you told me to, I realized that your wanting me to stay was a compliment. It wasn’t as if I was of some consequence, as if I was a football player or an athlete or something like that. You fellows just took a liking to me and couldn’t bear to see me go anywhere else. When I realized that I didn’t feel as if I could disappoint you!”

“Oh, shut up,” pleaded Joe miserably.

Willard evidently didn’t hear him. “And then promising me a position on the football team and getting me a nice room and arranging to pay my tuition – ”

“No, by gosh!” exploded Joe. “You don’t come that, Harmon! That’s off! You hear me?”

“What do you mean?” asked Willard aggrievedly. “Didn’t you say you’d fix it so I wouldn’t have to pay any tuition for the first half of the year?”

“No matter what I said,” retorted Joe wildly. “It’s off!”

“But – but you promised me a place on the team, Myers! You can’t go back on that!”

“Can’t I?” asked Joe grimly. “You told me you were Gordon Harmon – ”

“I beg your pardon,” denied Willard firmly. “I didn’t tell you that. You – you must have seen that label on my bag!”

“Never mind! I thought you were Gordon Harmon. We all did. That’s why we wanted you here. That’s why we thought Kenly had made promises and why we offered to see you through the half-year. Now, by gosh, you aren’t Harmon at all!”

“But it wasn’t my fault you made the mistake! And awhile back when I said that maybe I wasn’t as much of a football player as you thought I was you said you’d risk it. Why, my main reason for agreeing to stay here was your promising me I could play football!”

“That’s right, Joe,” said Martin. “You did promise him that.”

Joe turned scowlingly and found Martin’s face red with repressed laughter. “What’s the matter with you?” he growled. “Hang it, it’s no laughing matter! If this chump thinks I’m going to stick him on the team – ”

“Oh, take a tumble, Joe!” gurgled Martin. “Can’t you see Harmon’s stringing you? Oh, gee!” And Martin gave way to uncontrolled laughter.

Joe looked at Willard searchingly, a somewhat forced smile on his face. “That’s right?” he asked doubtfully.

Willard nodded, his gray-blue eyes twinkling merrily.

“I hope you choke!” said Joe. But the wish was followed by a deep sigh of relief.

“Doesn’t it seem fair enough,” laughed Willard, “for me to have my joke after you’ve had yours?”

“Sure!” agreed Martin. “He who laughs last laughs best!”

“What I want to know,” declared Bob earnestly, “is where that brother of yours is! Has Kenly got him?”

“No, he’s entered the Navy. I told you, didn’t I? He has always wanted to, but dad wouldn’t stand for it. And a couple of months ago Gordon just lit out. He meant to go to Kenly, if he went anywhere, and that’s why I decided on Kenly. I thought one of us might as well go there!”

“Well,” said Joe, “I guess the laugh’s on us, all right! I – I suppose you mean to stay here?”

“Surely! I’m entered now, you know. Besides, I like the place very well, probably quite as well as I’d have liked Kenly. And then being sure of a place on the football team here – ”

“Have a heart!” groaned Joe. “Look here, have you ever played football at all?”

“A little. I got into a couple of games last year.”

“Where did you play?” asked Joe.

“Left half.”

Joe shook his head. “No good,” he muttered. “We’ve got more half-backs than we can use. What we need is a corking good full-back; and a couple of linemen.” He viewed Willard despondently. “I thought you looked pretty light for a full-back.”

“Me, too,” sighed Bob. “I couldn’t quite picture you smashing through a line like Gordon Harmon did!”

“No, Gordon’s four inches bigger all around than I am, and he weighs nearly thirty pounds more.”

“Too bad for a fellow like that to waste himself in the Navy,” mourned Joe. “Look here, Harmon, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I can’t promise you a place, old man: you must see that yourself: but I’ll see that you get every chance to make good.”

Willard laughed softly. “Well, I won’t hold you to the agreement, Myers, under the circumstances. In fact, I’d rather you didn’t show me any favor. I’ll probably have a stab at the team, but I shan’t be heartbroken if I don’t make it. In any case, I’d rather stand on my own feet. Much obliged, just the same.”

“Well, that’s decent of you,” muttered Joe relievedly. “But of course I want to do anything I can to help. Guess we got you here under false pretenses, sort of, and it’s up to us to – to – ”

“Oh, no, you didn’t,” Willard assured him. “I saw what was up before I consented. At first I thought you were all just crazy. Then I remembered how you had asked my name and if I’d come from Schuyler High and understood. You chaps pulled a neat trick down there at the station. I’ll say that. I didn’t even suspect that you meant me to lose that train.”

Joe nodded joylessly. “That was Bob’s idea. The poor simp saw the name on your bag and fell for it!”

“So did you when I told you,” retorted Bob resentfully. “Any fellow would have been fooled!”

“Seems to me,” said Martin, “it’s up to us to apologize to Harmon. If anyone has a right to be peeved it’s he.”

“Guess that’s right, too,” replied Joe. “I’m sorry, Harmon. Hope you’ll – er – overlook the way we treated you and – and everything.”

“Same here,” said Bob. “Of course, we didn’t know – ”

“I’ll apologize, too, for my part in the affair,” said Martin, “but I’m not going to pretend that I’m sorry, for I’m not. It was a lot of fun while it lasted, and even if we didn’t capture a football star we did Kenly out of a mighty decent sort of a chap!”

“Hear! Hear!” laughed Joe. “Mart’s right. Harmon, we welcome you to our midst, and we trust that you will never regret your decision to – er – to – ”

“Join the gang,” ended Martin, jumping up. “Fellows, the occasion demands a celebration!” He went to his partly unpacked trunk and dug out a tin cracker box which he placed triumphantly on the table. “And here’s the wherewithal!” A generous section of a chocolate layer-cake and many doughnuts came to light and were hailed with acclaim.

“Wait a sec!” said Bob. “We’ve got some ginger-ale. I’ll fetch it. Keep ’em off the cake till I get back, Mart!”

“I’ll do my best,” Martin assured him, “but you’d better hurry. I know that gleam in Joe’s eye of old!”

Bob made what was probably a record trip to Lykes Hall and return, arriving anxious and breathless and laden with four bottles of ginger-ale. Then Martin cut the cake in four equal wedges, doled out the doughnuts and bade them “Go to it!” For a minute or two conversation was taboo, and then Bob held his bottle aloft and, speaking somewhat thickly, offered a toast.

“Gentlemen, I give you Mr. Willard Harmon, the brand plucked from the burning, the lamb saved from the slaughter, the – the – ”

“The innocent victim of a deep-dyed plot!” supplied Martin.

“The full-back who was only a half!” cried Joe.

“The gold brick!” laughed Willard.

“Charge your glasses, gentlemen! To the – the Brand!” And Bob drank deeply, with mellow gurgles.

“The Brand!” chanted Joe and Martin, and followed the example.

Afterwards they reviewed the afternoon’s events in the utmost good humor and with frequent laughter. Martin’s account of sitting on the step outside the door and reading choice bits of the school catalogue to the prisoner was especially amusing, and Willard revived the laughter when he supplemented gravely: “It was that bit about the open plumbing in the gymnasium that decided me! I couldn’t resist that!”

When, finally, Bob and Joe had taken themselves off and the roommates were preparing for bed, Martin said: “Look here, what about your trunk?”

Willard shook his head ruefully. “It’s at Lakeville by now, I suppose, and I’m likely to run short of shirts before I get it. I’ve got only one in my bag.”

“You can wear mine, I guess,” answered Martin. “Better telephone to the station the first thing in the morning and get the agent to have them send it back.”

“Maybe the quickest way would be to go over and get it myself,” suggested the other.

“No you don’t! You stay right here! We went to too much trouble to get you to let you go over there and forget to come back!”

“No fear,” laughed Willard. “I’ve paid my money here and I’ll have to stick now! Honest, Proctor, is Alton a better school than Kenly?”

Martin paused in the act of disrobing and looked gravely judicial. “Well, we like to say it is,” he answered cautiously.

“Is it bigger?”

“Not much. They usually have a few less students.”

“But the faculty here is better?”

“Hm: well, I wouldn’t go so far as to claim that. Maybe it used to be, but Kenly enlarged hers a couple of years ago.”

“I see. How about athletics: football and baseball and so on? Do we usually beat Kenly?”

“Oh, I reckon it’s about a stand-off. One year we win at football and she wins at baseball. Or we win at both and she gets the track championship and the hockey series. Call it fifty-fifty.”

“Well, then, what about the – the buildings and location and all that?”

“No comparison as to location.”

“Oh, Alton’s got the best of it there, eh?”

“Alton?” said Martin contemptuously. “I should say not! Why, this place is stuck right down in the village, you might say. Kenly’s got about thirty acres of land on the side of a hill: trees and brooks and fields – why, say, she’s got four gridirons and four diamonds and a quarter-mile running track and a regular flock of tennis courts!”

“Sounds good,” commented Willard. “What about the buildings over there?”

“They’re all right, too. Guess they’re as good as ours, anyway. There are more of them. She’s got a corking gymnasium. It would make two of ours!”

Willard sighed discouragedly. “But you fellows kept telling me how much better Alton was than Kenly!”

Martin grinned slowly. “Sure! Why not? That’s patriotism. Every fellow’s got to think his school better than the other school!”

“Oh! Then Alton isn’t *really* any better than Kenly?”

“Of course it is!”

“In what way?” urged Willard hopefully.

“Well,” began the other reflectively, holding his pajama jacket together with one hand and rubbing a touseled head with the other. “Well – ”

“Better class of fellows?” suggested Willard.

“N-no, they’re about the same. Some pretty decent chaps go to Kenly. It isn’t that. It – it – well, Alton’s just *better*, if you see what I mean!”

“I’m afraid I don’t,” laughed Willard.

Martin grinned. “You will when you’ve been here awhile,” he said encouragingly. “The switch is at the left of the door when you’re ready.”

“All right. I say, though, I’ve changed my mind about the beds. I’d rather have the other.”

“Honest? Well – ” Martin hesitated. “You’d better stick to the one you picked out, old man. That one’s got curvature of the spine. The spring lets you down in the middle.”

“I don’t mind,” laughed Willard. “I only chose the other because I saw it was yours.”

“Oh, that was it! Well, say, if you make a kick at the Office they’ll put a new spring on for you. Logan was always threatening to do it, but he never did. He was in here with me last year.”

Willard turned the switch and felt his way to the bed. “I don’t call this very bad,” he declared when he had experimented. “Anyway, it won’t keep me awake tonight!”

“That’s good. I hope it won’t. Good night – Brand!”

“Good night, Mart!”

CHAPTER VI

FIRST DAYS AT ALTON

Willard's trunk arrived two days later, as though, by its delay, protesting against the change of plan, and by that time its owner was going about in one of Martin's shirts. Those two days witnessed the shaking down of Willard into the manners and customs of Alton Academy. It wasn't hard, for Martin was there to serve as a very willing counselor and guide. Willard became a member of the Junior Class on the strength of his high school certificate, and, since that was also Martin's class, the latter was able to render assistance during the first difficult days. Fortunately the two boys took to each other at once and life in Number 16 Haylow promised to move pleasantly.

The term began on Thursday, and on Friday the football candidates gathered for the first practice. Alton Academy's registration was well over four hundred, as the catalogue later announced, and of that number nearly one-fourth reported on the gridiron as candidates for the school team. Willard, viewing the throng, thought little of his chances of securing a place.

Coach Cade made much the same sort of a speech as coaches generally make on such occasions, and promised a successful season in return for cheerful obedience and hard work; and looked unutterably relieved when the more or less attentive audience dispersed. Mr. Cade was a short, thick-set man of twenty-seven or twenty-eight years, with black hair that stood up on his head much like the bristles of a blacking brush, a square face that looked at least one size too large for the rest of him, small features which included two very piercing dark eyes, a button nose and a broad mouth and, to cap the climax, a very gentle voice. Not a handsome chap, Willard thought, but certainly a very capable looking one. Later, he learned from Martin that John Cade had played with Alton Academy for three years and then for as many more on the Lafayette teams, making a remarkable reputation, first as a school quarter-back and then as a college guard. Willard found it difficult to imagine Coach Cade as a quarter. Probably, he concluded, in those days the coach lacked the breadth and heaviness he showed now, a conclusion proved to be correct when Willard came across an old photograph of an Alton eleven in the gymnasium some weeks later. In the picture John Cade was a short, not over-heavy and very alert boy of seventeen, his dark eyes darting defiance and his black hair bristling a challenge. He was familiarly known among the fellows of present-day Alton as Johnny, but none had ever been heard to address him so!

Practice this first afternoon wasn't a serious ordeal, for much time was given to verbal instruction, and at half-past four the squads were dismissed. Willard, walking back to the gymnasium with Martin and Bob, said that it ought to be easy to get a good team with such a raft of candidates to choose from, and Bob snorted derisively.

"You're wrong, Brand," he said. "If we had half as many we'd get on better. It takes three weeks, nearly, to find out who's good and to weed out the others, and that's just so much time lost. Johnny's dippy on the subject of having every fellow who ever heard of football come out, and it's a sad mess for the first fortnight. Of course it sometimes happens that he finds a player that way who mightn't show up if he wasn't urged to, but, gee, I think it's piffle! Give me last year's first and second teams, or what's left of 'em, and a dozen chaps who have made names where they come from and I'll turn out as good a team as any. Must have been a hundred fellows out there this afternoon, and I'll bet you fifty of them never played a game of football in their lives!"

"Sure," agreed Martin, "but some of them are capable of playing, you poor fish, and it's just those that Johnny wants to find. If they don't make good this year, he's got them started for next. Your plan might work all right this year, Bob, but you'd run short of material next year. You've got to plan ahead, old son, and that's what Johnny does."

"Are there many of last season's fellows left?" asked Willard.

“Six first-string chaps,” answered Bob. “Joe, Stacey Ross, Jack Macon, Gil Tarver, Arn Lake and myself. There is quite a bunch of good last year subs and second team fellows, though. And then there’s Mart!”

“Yes, and Mart’s going to try for something besides guard position this year,” remarked that youth. “With you and Joe holding down each side of center there’s no hope for me. Last season I lived in hope that Joe would get killed or that you’d be fired, but nothing happened. This thing of waiting around for dead men’s shoes is dull work!”

“What are you going after?” laughed Bob.

“I don’t know,” replied Martin discouragedly. “How’d I do as a full-back?”

“Great! Say, Mart, do something for me, will you? Go and tell Johnny to let you play full-back!”

“Oh, dry up, you big ape! I could play full-back as well as Steve Browne can.”

“Steve hasn’t a chance!”

“Who, then?”

“Search me! We’ve got to find someone. Steve’s a good chap, but he hasn’t the weight, speed, or fight for full-back. If we could buy Brand’s brother out of the Navy, now – ”

“Well, you did your best,” laughed Martin. “You got the right bag, but the wrong boy! Look here, Brand – ”

“I refuse to answer to that name,” said Willard haughtily.

“What’s the matter with it? It’s a perfectly good name. What I was about to say when so rudely interrupted – ”

“What I was about to say,” interjected Bob, “is that it would be a good plan to hurry up a bit and get ahead of some of this mob. If we don’t we’ll be waiting around until supper time for a shower!”

“Come on, then: stir your stumps, slow poke! I was going to say, Brand, that it’s your duty to either fill the full-back position yourself or find someone to fill it. You were – admitted to Alton on your representation that you were a full-back – ”

“‘Admitted’ is good!” jeered Willard.

“And you aren’t,” Martin proceeded, unheeding the interruption. “Fellows are asking Joe where Gordon Harmon is and Joe’s having an awful time explaining how the deal fell through. He’s told four quite different stories so far and is working on a fifth! You could save Joe a lot of mental worry, Brand, if you turned yourself into a star full-back.”

“I’m afraid I’m a bit light,” laughed Willard. “Maybe I could find a full-back for you, though, if the reward was big enough.”

“You’ll receive the undying gratitude of Joe and the key of the city.”

“Huh, I’ve seen the city!” said Willard.

The “city,” though, in spite of Willard’s sarcasm, was really a very nice one. Not, of course, that it was more than a town, and a small one at that, but it was clean and well laid out, with plenty of trees, lots of modestly attractive residences and a sufficiency of wide-awake stores. When Willard said he had seen it he was enlarging on the truth, for it was not until the day succeeding the remark that he really had a thorough look at it. Then Martin took him in tow and, since there were few recitations on Saturdays, they spent an hour or more roaming about it. There were two distinct shopping centers in Alton. One lay along Main Street a good half-mile from the Academy, and on the side streets adjacent, and one occupied two blocks on West Street, scarcely more than a long stone-throw from the school. The latter catered almost exclusively to the students, and the latter found few excuses for going further afield to make their purchases. Martin told Willard which of the nearby ice cream parlors had the best soda fountain, showed him which of the stationery stores was most popular, where he could buy haberdashery at fair prices, where to get his shoes shined if such an extravagant proceeding appealed to him, where the best barber shop was – even cautioning

him against “the wop at the third chair who would shave your neck if you didn’t watch him” – and, in short, thoroughly initiated him into the mysteries of West Street buying. In school parlance, the locality was “Bagdad,” although the shops were never referred to as “bazaars.”

“You can get tick at any of them,” Martin explained, “but they’ll make it mighty uncomfortable for you if you don’t pay up every half-year, and faculty sort of frowns on running up bills. It’s better to pay cash if you can, Brand. Besides, you can usually jew ’em down if you have the money in your hand. Last spring Stacey Ross bought a suit over there at Girtle’s and they charged it to him at sixty dollars, and a fellow called ‘Poke’ Little went and paid cash for one just like it and got off for forty-seven-fifty. Stacey had a fit and went back and read the riot act. But the old geezer told him that ‘time was money’!” Martin chuckled. “In his case two months’ time was twelve dollars and a half! Stacey got even, though.”

“How?” asked Willard.

“Got a thin fellow named Patterson, a sophomore, to put the suit on and walk up and down the block for an hour one Saturday afternoon. The clothes hung all over Patterson and he looked like a scarecrow, and he carried a placard around his neck that said: ‘This suit was bought at Girtle’s.’ Old Girtle was furious and tried to get Patterson to go away. Offered him ten dollars, Patterson said, but it didn’t sound like Girtle! Anyhow, Patterson kept on walking up and down and about two dozen kids went with him and a lot of the fellows stood around and cheered and we had quite a fine moment! ‘Mac’ had Stacey on the carpet about it, but when Stacey explained Mac only smiled and let him go.”

“Is ‘Mac’ what you call the Principal?” asked Willard.

“Yes, it’s short for ‘Doctor Maitland McPherson.’ Have you met him yet? He’s a good sort, Mac is. There’s a story that some years back there was a wild westerner here from Wyoming or Arkansas or some of those places and he was talking one day in the corridor in Academy and Mac was in one of the classrooms right near, and this fellow – I forget his name; Smith, maybe – called him ‘the old Prince,’ and Mac overheard him and came out. ‘Were you referring to me, Smith?’ he asked. ‘Yes, sir.’ ‘And what was the name you gave me?’ ‘Prince, sir; that’s short for Principal.’ ‘Ah,’ said Mac. ‘Most ingenious! You may go on Hall Restriction one week for “int.”’ ‘Int’ is short for interest.”

Football affairs got straightened out that afternoon and Willard found himself in C Squad with some twenty or so other candidates whose knowledge of football ranged from fair to middling. Only the simpler exercises were indulged in and the hour-and-a-half period stretched out interminably. The day was unseasonably warm and the bored youth who had C Squad in charge was unable to work up much enthusiasm. Willard was heartily glad when the session was over. He presumed that a certain amount of catching and passing was beneficial to him, but he mildly resented spending an hour and a half at it. Joe Myers showed every indication of acceding to Willard’s request that he be allowed to stand on his own feet, for so far Joe had paid no attention to the newcomer during practice. There were times this afternoon when Willard rather wished that he hadn’t been so independent. He would not have resented it a bit had Joe yanked him out of that beginner’s squad and put him where he could have worked with something besides his hands! By five o’clock, when the end came, Willard was sick of the sight and the feel of a football!

That evening, however, when he accompanied Joe and Martin and Bob to the Broadway Theater, the moving picture house patronized by the school, Joe inquired most solicitously about Willard’s progress in practice. He did not, though, seem much concerned when Willard hinted that he was wasting his time learning how to pass a football. “It is dreary work, isn’t it?” said Joe cheerfully. “Well, there won’t be much more of it, Brand. You’ll get into formations next week. By the way, you want to try for half-back, don’t you? Hm. That’s so. Hm. Too bad you’re so light. Ever try playing end?”

Willard answered that he never had, whereupon Joe remarked: “’S ’at so?” in an absent way and said he hoped there’d be a good comedy at the theater!

CHAPTER VII IN THE COACH'S ROOM

Whether the comedy was good or not, it at least evoked much laughter, and was followed by a thrilling “big picture” that worked Willard to a pitch of excitement that lasted until he was out on State Street again. They ran into Mr. Cade in front of the theater and he fell into step with them as they walked back toward the Green. He and Joe and Bob talked about the show, while Martin and Willard followed behind and listened. At West Street Bob proposed drinks, and they crossed to The Mirror and sat about a tiny table and drank colorful concoctions through paper straws. The coach rather surprised Willard by displaying positive enthusiasm for his tippie, which, as near as Willard could determine, contained a little of everything that could come out of the glistening taps! Willard was a little bit too much in awe of the coach to feel quite at ease, and his contributions to the conversation were few and brief. Not that the talk was very erudite, however, for Bob talked a good deal of nonsense and Mr. Cade certainly didn't oppress them with a flow of wisdom. On the contrary, he laughed at Bob a good deal and said one or two funny things himself, things at which Willard laughed a bit constrainedly, not being certain that it was right to greet anything a head football coach said with levity. At Schuyler High School the coach had been a most dignified and unapproachable martinet of whom everyone stood in admiring awe!

When they went out Bob leaned carelessly across the counter and instructed the young lady with the enormous puffs over her ears to “put that down to me, please.” Willard, following the others out, reflected that, while trading on a cash basis might be wiser, one missed many fine moments by not having a charge account! (This, perhaps, is a good place to explain that the expression “fine moments” was widely current at Alton that term. Like many other expressions, its origin was a mystery, and, like them, its vogue grew by leaps and bounds until even the freshmen were having their “fine moments” and Mr. Fowler, in English 7, prohibited its use in themes.)

Near the end of State Street, with the lights on the Green gleaming through the trees ahead, Mr. Cade proposed that the boys pay him a visit, and Willard found himself turning in at a little white gate. The old green-shuttered Colonial mansion on the corner was one of several houses standing across from the Green that had at one time or another, sometimes as a gift, sometimes by purchase, become Academy property. This particular mansion was occupied by three of the married faculty members and, in turn, by the football and baseball coaches. Mr. Cade's apartment was on the lower floor, at the right, two huge, high-ceilinged rooms separated by what had once been a pantry but was now a dressing and bathroom. The furnishings were comfortable but plain, and in the front room a generous grate eked out the efforts of a discouraged furnace. Tonight, however, the sight of the fireplace brought no pleasurable thrill. Instead, it was the four big, wide-open windows that attracted the visitors. Those in front opened on a narrow veranda set with tall white pillars, those on the side shed the light of the room onto a maze of shrubbery and trees beyond which the illumined windows of the dormitories twinkled. There was a big table in the center of the living-room littered with books and writing materials, smoking paraphernalia, gloves, a riding crop, a camera, a blue sweater and many other things, a fine and interesting hodgepodge that Willard, pausing beside it, viewed curiously. The object that engaged his closest attention, though, was a board about thirty inches square. It was covered with green felt on which at intervals of an inch white lines crossed. On the margins were figures: “5,” “10,” “15,” and so on up to “50.” Stuck at random into the board were queer little colored thumb-tacks, twenty-two in all. Half of them were gray and half of them were red, and each held letters: “L. H.,” “R. G.,” “L. E.,” and so on. Willard was still studying the board, its purpose slowly dawning on him, when Mr. Cade spoke.

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