

The Rockspur Eleven

A FINE FOOTBALL STORY FOR BOYS

BY
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THE ROCKSPUR ELEVEN.

CHAPTER I.

A BOY WITH A TEMPER.

Danny Chatterton came up the street whistling a merry tune, while Don Scott lay under an apple-tree back of his father's house, munching an apple and scowling blackly, although the September afternoon was pleasant and sunny enough to put any boy in an agreeable humor. Judging by the sour expression on Don's face one might never have fancied the half-devoured apple in his hand was sweet.

Spying the boy beneath the tree, Danny stopped, leaned on the fence, and called:

"Hullo, Scotty! What you dud-dud-dud-doing?"

"Can't you see?" growled the boy addressed. "I'm eating an apple."

"Dud-does it hu-hurt ye much?" grinned the cheerful lad at the fence. "What do you eat it for if it makes you fur-fur-feel so bad?"

Don's answer to this bit of persiflage was a still blacker scowl and sullen silence. Danny kicked the fence and whistled, a twinkle in his eyes.

"Say, gimme an apple," he entreated. "You'll mum-mum-mum-make yourself sus-sick trying to eat the ho-ho-whole of 'em."

The boy under the tree picked up an apple and threw it viciously at the sarcastic fellow outside the fence, who caught it with one hand, crying:

“Judgment! Out! Gug-gug-great work!”

Then he gave the apple a wipe on his jacket and took a trial bite out of it, his manner being suspicious till he had tested it, upon which his face betrayed satisfaction and he immediately took a still larger bite.

“Ji-ji-ji-jimminy!” he stuttered, speaking with his mouth full and chewing and talking at the same time. “It’s sus-sus-sweet! I never knew that was a sus-sweet apple tut-tut-tree, and I thought it must be sus-sour or bub-bub-bitter from the way you looked. If I’d known——”

“Better not come round here for apples after dark,” grimly warned Don. “Pat sleeps over the kitchen, and his window looks right out onto this orchard. He’s got a gun loaded with rock-salt, and he’d shoot just as quick as he’d take a drink of water.”

“If that’s the case,” grinned Danny, “judgin’ by the cuc-cuc-color of his nose, there ain’t no great danger that he’ll ever dud-do any sus-sus-sus-shooting. But say, ain’t you coming up to the field for pup-pup-practice?”

“No!”

Don replied in such a short, savage manner that Chatterton paused with his mouth stuffed full and stared.

“Hey?” he exclaimed. “Wh-why not?”

“Because I don’t want to.”

“Well, that’s a gug-good reason, but it ain’t mum-mum-much of an explanation. We cuc-cuc-can’t do our bub-best without the whole eleven, and we’ve got to pup-put in some hot pup-practice if we expect to cuc-cuc-cut any ice with them Ha-Highlanders next Saturday. Sterndale will lul-look for every mum-man this afternoon.”

“Let him look and be hanged!” snapped Don, sitting up and claspng one knee with both hands. “He’ll find out there is one fellow who won’t stand to be called a chump and a duffer by that cheap city dude, Renwood.”

Danny threw the apple-core backward over his shoulder.

“But Renwood is our cuc-cuc-coach, you know,” he said. “He knows all abub-bub-bub-about playing football.”

“He says he does, but I don’t believe he knows half as much as he pretends to, and I’ll bet he’s a great bluffer. Anyhow, he can’t shoot off his mouth at me. What’s the matter with Sterndale? He’s captain, but he permits this Renwood to run things. He makes me sick!”

“So that’s what ails ye, is it? I knew it was sus-sus-something. You gug-gug-gug-got mad because Renwood mum-made some talk to ye when you fur-fur-fumbled his pass last night.”

“I didn’t fumble it!” snarled Don. “He was to blame himself, for he didn’t pass it right, and then he tried to lay it all on to me. I won’t take that kind of talk from anybody, I don’t care who it is!”

“Bub-bub-bub-but the rest of us have to tut-tut-take it,” chattered Danny. “He even gave Sus-Sterndale a bub-bub-brushing up abub-bout his kicking.”

“And the more fools you for standing it! Just because he’s lived in Boston and played football on Boston Common, he takes us for a lot of chumps down here. No stuck-up city chap can lord it over me, and don’t you forget it!”

“But he’s our coach!” said Danny, again. “We don’t know much about fuf-fuf-football, and he knows everything. Highland has a reg’ler college player for a cuc-cuc-coach, you know.”

“That’s all right. He doesn’t play with the Highlanders; he only coaches them; and he knows his business. If we had such a fellow as that——”

“You’d get mum-mum-mad the first tut-time he tut-talked straight to ye. You’re always gug-gug-gettin’ mad and sus-sulking so you sus-sus-spoil everything you go into. That’s what’s the mum-mum-matter with you.”

Don sprang to his feet, his face turning pale and his eyes gleaming. With his hands clenched, he advanced toward the fence.

“You better go along about your business, Chatterton!” he grated. “I won’t take that kind of talk from you, either! You can run your old football team without me, and you’re all a lot of soft-headed chumps to let Renwood lord it over you. Now, don’t make any back talk to me! Go on and tell them what I think of them.”

Danny backed away from the fence and sidled off, as Don came forward threateningly.

“I don’t know but we’ll get along bub-bub-better without ye,” he declared, with a taunting grin. “You’re always rah-rah-raising a rah-rah-row.”

Don had reached the fence, and, in a sudden burst of rage, he tore off a broken picket and flung it after Danny, who skillfully dodged the missile and then hastily scudded away, still laughing.

“That’s right—run!” snarled Don, glaring after the little fellow. “If I had hold of you, I’d make ye laugh out of the other corner of your mouth!”

He kicked the fence savagely, and then retreated to the apple-tree once more, in anything but an agreeable humor.

Pat, the Irish hostler and man about the place, came round to the front of the house, leading Dr. Scott’s horse, attached to a light driving carriage. The doctor, medicine-case in hand, appeared at the front door; but, instead of descending the walk and entering the carriage at once, he came down the steps and turned into the orchard back of the house, where his son was still sulking under the sweet apple-tree.

“My boy,” said the doctor, a gravely handsome man with iron-gray beard and dark eyes, which now seemed strangely sad, “sitting there at my window just now, I happened to overhear your conversation with that other lad.”

Don flushed a little, but continued to scowl, though he had risen to his feet and was standing in a respectful attitude of attention before his father.

“I noted,” said the gentleman, “that you were in a very bad humor, and your words told me why you were angry. I also observed that you flew into an unreasonable passion at the close of your talk. Now I am not going to lecture you, Don, but I wish to warn you. You must learn to govern your temper, my son, or it will control you, to your sorrow and everlasting regret.”

“But, father, there are times when it’s impossible not to become angry,” protested the boy.

“Perhaps it may seem so, but every time a person gives way to a fit of anger he weakens his self-control and makes himself less capable of successfully coping with the trials and emergencies of life.”

Don made a swift, impatient gesture.

“I can’t help getting mad!” he cried. “It’s no use for me to try to restrain my temper; I have tried, and I can’t do it.”

“It shows how much your will-power is weakened already when you make such a confession,” said the doctor, regretfully. “I once thought the same about myself.”

“You, father?” exclaimed the boy, in surprise. “Why, I never knew you to lose your temper. I didn’t suppose——”

“Because I was taught to control my passions at any cost, and a bitter lesson it was, my son. When I have noted how quick and

choleric you are, I have sometimes been tempted to tell you the whole sad story, but it is something of which I do not like to think or speak, and so I have refrained. Perhaps I will do so some day; but, in the meantime, I urge you, Don, to struggle with yourself to get the mastery of your temper at any cost, which I sincerely hope may never bring to you such sorrow as an act of mine, done in a moment of anger, brought upon me.”

The doctor spoke with such earnestness that Don was greatly impressed, and he immediately promised:

“I’ll try, father—I’ll try, though I am afraid I cannot succeed.”

“You can and must, my boy. Be sure you have my sympathy, for I know you inherited your passionate temperament from me. Do not fear to come to me for sympathy and encouragement any time.”

With those words, the doctor turned away, leaving Don standing there beneath the tree, watching him depart. The gentleman entered his carriage, and, with a wave of one gloved hand to his son, drove away. Don followed the retreating figure with his eyes till it disappeared from view, and then he earnestly murmured:

“It doesn’t seem possible that he ever could know what it is to be really and truly angry, for he is the best and kindest father in the whole world. For his sake I’ll do my best to control my temper—I’ll do my best.”

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER BOY.

Don's musings were broken in upon by a familiar voice, which cried:

"Hello there, old man! What's the matter with you—in a trance? Come out of it!"

Looking up, Don saw Leon Bentley stopping outside the fence. As usual, Leon was smoking a cigarette. He was dressed in a padded football suit, with his cap set rakishly over one ear, and his manner was that of one possessed of unlimited conceit and an overwhelming sense of his own importance.

Don had never liked Bentley but his dislike had not been particularly noticeable, for he was a fellow who, on account of his quick temper and sulky moods, had few associates and no close companions among the boys of the village.

Bentley had a strong taste for flashy clothes and cheap jewelry, being inclined to swagger and boast and use profane language, so it was not strange that any thoroughly self-respecting boy in the village did not care to be regarded as his intimate friend.

At one time close friendship had seemed to exist between Leon and Rob Linton, a lad whose bullying inclinations had caused him to be disliked secretly by those who openly professed admiration and regard for him; but even Linton, awakened at last to his own faults, sickened of Bentley and fell to avoiding

him as far as possible, which left Leon casting about for another associate.

Remembering the words of his father and his own resolution to try to control his temper, even though Linton's free-and-easy manner around within him a feeling of resentment, Don held himself in check, nodded shortly, and said:

"Hello, Bentley. Going to practice?"

"Sure thing," returned Leon, airily. "Got to do it, I suppose, though it's a horrid bore. Fellow has to practice to keep in the swim and be a real athlete; and he has to be an athlete nowadays, or take part in athletic sports, at least, in order to stand any show with the girls. If he isn't right in it they'll throw him down for some fellow who is, even though that fellow may be as long, lank, awkward and clownish as that duffer John Smith. Why, even a girl like Dora Deland, proud as she is, has fallen to raving over him since he happened to turn out something of a baseball pitcher. You must show your skill, old man, if you hope to cut any figure with Zadia Renwood."

Bentley fell to laughing over his final words, as if he regarded them as a good joke; but he stopped suddenly as he saw Don step quickly toward the fence, scowling his fiercest.

"Have a care with that tongue of yours, Bentley!" Scott almost snarled. "Because I happen to be acquainted with Zadia Renwood does not give you license to make cheap talk, and I won't take it from you."

Leon whistled softly, and then hastened to declare:

“I didn’t mean anything, Scott, so what’s the use to flare up and get mad like that! You ought to take something for that temper of yours. At the smallest spark you go off like a flash of powder.”

Don paused, and his flushed face suddenly began to pale, for he realised how soon he had flown into a passion after vowing to do his best to control his temper, which filled him with shame and vexation over his own weakness.

With an effort, the boy cast out from his soul the anger that had seized upon him, and he actually forced a faint smile to his face, which made it seem rather handsome in a dark and cloudy way.

“You’re right, Bentley,” he said; “I was a fool to become angry over your careless words, but neither Zadia Renwood nor any other girl is anything to me, for you know I dislike girls. They’re all silly creatures.”

“They may be silly, but they’re sweet,” Bentley grinned, in a manner that was decidedly repulsive to the other boy. “I tell you, girls are great inventions, and I know you’d like them, old man, if you’d just overcome your foolish prejudice against them. And Zadia Renwood is a peach, too! I’m sure she’s struck on you, and you only have to brace up——”

Don stopped the speaker with a gesture.

“That will do, Bentley!” he exclaimed, harshly, holding himself in check. “Even if I cared for girls, I’d steer clear of Dolph Renwood’s sister.”

“You don’t like him?” questioned Leon, pulling out a package of cigarettes and selecting one, which he proceeded to roll gently between the palms of his hands, all the while watching Don with a curious, cunning look in his washed-out gray eyes.

“I hate the cad!” broke out Scott; but he suddenly seemed to remember his failing and got a firm hold on himself. “He puts on too many airs, Bentley, and he makes a great bluff that he’s a football expert; but it is my private opinion, which I am willing to express publicly, that he doesn’t know the rudiments of the game.”

“I think so, too,” eagerly nodded the lad outside the fence, as, with his yellow-stained fingers, he nervously pulled a little of the filling from one end of the paper wrapper. “And Sterndale is a fool to let that city fop run things the way he does. Never knew Dick to be so soft before, but I suppose we’ll have to stand it if we wish to play the game. Come, it’s time we were on the field now.”

Don hesitated. “I don’t think I’ll go,” he said, in an unsettled manner.

“Oh, rats!” cried Leon, lighting the prepared cigarette from the stub of the one he had finished, which he tossed aside. “Come along, Scott, for you’re needed, and it’s your duty to play for the honor of Rockspur.”

“By your own words a few moments ago, you confessed that you are not going into the game for any such reason, but simply to win admiration from the girls. I do not believe any fellow

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