

Frank Merriwell at Fardale . . .

By
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The Original
BURT L. STANDISH

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WNU Service

CHAPTER IX —14—

Given time to think a little about the remarkable happenings which had pushed him into the limelight at Fardale, Frank became panicky himself. For quite the opposite reason, he suddenly understood, fully and completely, how Bart Hodge had felt when he went to Inza and told her he was going away because he couldn't face the school. For Merry was no bouncer, no show-off, who reveled in notoriety; and even though he was at the same time not a shrinking violet, he had always found it easier to face criticism and blame than mealy-mouthed flattery.

Therefore anybody who looked for him to go on parade and do a little strutting was making a bad guess. He merely forced himself to go through the usual moves as if nothing unusual had happened. No swank, no posing.

It was disappointing to his enemies. Particularly so to Bascomb. The fellow simply refused to behave the way Bascomb expected—and wanted—him to. Very annoying.

By noon on Monday somebody had brought in a newspaper containing an account of the runaway and rescue. It passed from hand to hand.

Pete Smith had done no kidding this time. He had written a straightforward, honest story, giving Frank credit for nerve, fast-thinking and modesty. Bascomb and his bunch didn't like that much, either.

Nor did they like it when Merry, caught crossing the campus and questioned by some upperclassmen, failed to get smart and make fresh answers. What they understood even less was the way he gave credit to Bart Hodge. That, as they saw it, was foxy stuff. He was pulling a thin trick.

"Well, anyhow," said Hugh, "we'll have the pleasure of not seeing him try to become a football hero."

And then, when Bascomb galloped into the gym to dress for field practice Tuesday afternoon, Merriwell was there. Wearing a Bloomfield high rig from sweater to cleated shoes, he was talking to Dick Springall, the quarterback and captain.

There was a frightful convulsion in the depths of the Grand Canyon. This, Bascomb told himself, was the limit and then some.

"Well," he said, when he could speak, "is it possible you've got over being afraid to play football, Merriwell?"

"I've never been afraid to play football, sir," said Frank.

"Oh, yeah?" Hugh's mouth threatened to luff off all the upper part of his head with its expanding grin. "Then how come you laid down on your team last year and watched it from the stand while it took a licking by Torrence academy?"

"Did it ever occur to you," Merry asked, "that that might be my business?"

"Oh, so you've got a nasty comeback, have you?" said Bascomb, his grin changing to something hard and cruel. "Well, that just makes the account heavier to settle."

Springall interposed at this point. "Drop it, both of you," he said. "That stuff is out, around here. The next one to start it will be reported to the coach, and what he'll do about it will be enough."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Springall," apologized Frank, "but Bascomb ought to get it through his head before long that I'm more than fed up with his funny business. But I'll wipe the slate when he's ready to call it quitting time."

"That's real nice of you," said Bascomb sourly. "And I'll tell you when, but everything will be all squared up then."

It was a threat Merriwell did not miss, though he appeared to ignore it. As an enemy Bascomb would be far more tenacious and vindictive than a person with the instability of Hodge.

Bart arrived presently and was no less surprised to see Frank there. But he said nothing. The coach, when he appeared, was the only person who did not show surprise. Practically everybody noticed that.

On the field Kane turned the new man over to Hanscomb, the assistant coach, a Fardale grad whose special duty was to instruct in kicking and passing. Two minutes later Hanscomb was putting Merriwell through a series of drop-kicks, place kicks and punts of every variety.

All the other men on the field were busy also, but many of them stole glances at Frank whenever they found an opportunity to do so. They were, naturally, very curious about him. They suspected that pressure had been brought to bear to get him out there, and it seemed strange that Kane would bother a moment with a fellow reputed to be a football quitter.

Watching Merry darkly in a lull of his own work, Bascomb was

spoken to by another man of the Varsity, who had stopped near him: "Maybe Merry will pan out, after all. He sure can boot the old ball hard and pretty, and he seems able to place it on a dime."

Bascomb grunted. "Huh! Wait till you see him try to make a quick kick with a charging line tearing through on him. That will be something else again."

A short time before work was to end for the day Kane called the regular team together to make a few rushes against the scrub. He wanted, in particular, to oil up a play that had gone sour against Mayfield, for he still believed in it.

Not a little to his surprise, Frank was sent in as right halfback for the scrub. That was more than he had expected, his first day on the field.

Passing him before the line-up, Hodge spoke from the side of his mouth: "Well, they've promptly buried you with the rest of us dead ones, Merriwell. You'll never get out of this graveyard."

In the backfield behind the varsity line, Bascomb, who wasn't yet aware of what was to be tried, said to Springall: "Call a play that'll let me get at him Dick, and I'll block the legs off Merriwell."

That was the kind of a play Springall called when they were



"I've Never Been Afraid to Play Football, Sir," Said Frank.

ready to go. It was a faked right-end run with a spin and reverse around the left end.

Tackle and guard opened the hole that let Bascomb go through on the jump, and he sheered to the left and cross-blocked Merry, who was charging.

Frank's churning knees struck Bascomb's ribs a split-second after he realized what was going to happen. Over Bascomb's body he spun, hands outflung. His palms struck the turf. Like tempered springs his arms flung him upright on his feet again to complete the impromptu handspring.

He wasn't confused. In his stride again, he leaped at the interloper, who was coming round the end ahead of the runner, and laid him low.

The safety man, coming at full speed, tackled the runner and smothered the play for a slight loss. Everybody who had seen just what had happened was laughing.

Bascomb wasn't. He was getting up, his hand pressed to his side, his face twisted with wrath and pain.

Because of malicious eagerness to get at Merriwell and hurt him as much as possible Bascomb had made a cross-block worthy of the rankiest amateur.

The coach had warned him about stuff like that, more than once. Now, as Bascomb rose to his feet again, Kane came swiftly toward him.

"That'll be enough for you today," said the coach. "I'm tired of telling you." Then he turned and beckoned a substitute. "Come in here, Davis."

Bascomb walked away slowly and left the field, still holding his hand to his side. Practice went on without him.

When it was all over Kane asked the assistant coach: "What do you think of Merriwell's kicking?"

"He's a natural," answered Hanscomb.

"Then don't try to coach him. Coaching hurts a fellow with natural kicking ability more than it helps."

"And he knows how to pass, as well. He's got an arm and he's rifle accurate."

"Sounds like something. That was a stunt he did when Bascomb threw that low block at him."

"Didn't I see it! He's better walking on his hands than some of the would-bees."

Kane almost smiled. "That sounds odd from an old pessimist like you. Are you telling me he doesn't belong on the scrub?"

"What I don't understand," said Hanscomb, avoiding a direct answer, "is how that lad can be a football quitter. A fellow who has got the nerve to face mad dogs and snatch a girl off a runaway horse two or three seconds before she'd have been killed hasn't any right to turn yellow just because he's been knocked cold in a line buck. There's something wrong about it."

Now Kane did smile a little. "It does sound a bit balmy," he allowed, and said no more.

Outwardly calm, Frank was inwardly almost tumultuously happy that night. Maybe Hodge was right in thinking he, like Bart, had been buried in the Fardale graveyard of football hopes, but he had a feeling that the scrub could be used as a springboard from which to leap to a more lively field.

He felt a thrill of pleasure when he sat down that night in the smaller dining room with the other football men. He hadn't got to training table, but maybe he was on his way. He thought of Barney, who never muffed a chance to cheer him on, and missed him for the time being. Barney was all wool and a yard wide. Some pal!

Those fellows were agreeable fellows who were still a little curious about him, still a little doubtful and suspicious. He could feel that uncertainty behind their evident willingness to take him for what he might prove to be worth. Physically they were a healthy he-man lot, packed to capacity with leashed vigor.

He noticed, quickly, that Bascomb was not there. That was odd. He didn't understand it until the reason came out in the remarks of two fellows on the opposite side of the table.

Said one: "Well, maybe we're going to be a backfield man shy after today."

Said the other: "You mean Bascomb? What's the report?"

The first one answered: "The doctor says he may have a cracked rib. They're taking an X-ray."

That gave Merriwell a queer sensation. He said impulsively: "Oh, that'll be tough! It'll weaken the team. I'm sorry."

Then it seemed that everybody was staring at him. He was embarrassed, but his face was sober and honest. He was really concerned for the welfare of the team. Dick Springall said: "We have to take practice injuries as they come at this stage of the season. We can stand them better now than later on."

Somehow Springall did not appear as much worried over losing a big shot as Frank had expected.

Mulloy was waiting for Frank and they walked back to Union hall together. The Irish boy was bubbling over with chuckles.

"When they try to stop you they go to the hospital, me lad," said Barney. "Maybe that'll o o z e through Bascomb's thick head while his rib is mending. You busted it, all right. That's the latest intelligence."

And that makes Fardale that much weaker," said Merry.

"Who says so? Let me tell you something. It's just been poured into my ear that the Grand Canyon was pushed on Fardale by some rich old grad with more influence than sense. It's done nowadays, you know. And he hasn't panned out. It's suspected that the coach was looking for a good excuse to bench him. Now he won't have to look any more, and he really ought to give you a loving cup."

There was a long period of skull practice the following afternoon. State Second, the strong team Fardale would meet Saturday, had been scouted in its first game, and Kane spent the best part of an hour demonstrating State's scoring plays.

Little Ohio City Claims the Shortest, Smallest Street in World; No Traffic

Berlin may have her Unter Den Linden, Rome her Corso and Paris her Avenue de L'Opera, but this little Ohio river-front town of 10,000 persons goes to the other extreme and boasts what is probably the smallest avenue in the world, writes a Bellaire, Ohio, correspondent in the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Federal avenue, a narrow thoroughfare bordering on the north side of the Bellaire postoffice, not only is probably the shortest and smallest street in the world but is believed to be the only one on which there is no vehicle traffic of any kind.

The street has no traffic lights and no space for parking—because it is exactly 32 inches wide. Youngsters can play in this street all day long without thought of approaching automobiles, buses or street cars.

Two families live on Federal avenue, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Boswell at 3219 and Mr. and Mrs. Fred White, right next door, at 3220.

with blackboard diagrams and showing his plans of defense against them.

"State is counting on a push-over Saturday," said the coach in conclusion, "and they have a right to after the showing we made against Mayfield. But what I'm counting on is that you'll get together and hand that bunch an upset that'll take the conceit out of them. You can if you want to."

Then he took a letter out of his pocket and went on. "I've got something here that I want to read—part of it. It's a letter that Professor Scotch got Doctor Massey, of Bloomfield, to write me. Doctor Massey is the physician for Mr. Asher Merriwell, Frank Merriwell's uncle and guardian, who is being treated by the doctor for heart trouble. Mr. Merriwell collapsed in the stand at Bloomfield last fall during a game in which his nephew was knocked out in a line smash."

Sitting as still as stone and looking straight ahead, Frank heard the coach read a portion of the letter:

"Mr. Merriwell is a sportsman who has always encouraged his nephew's love of athletics, but the shock of seeing Frank stretched on the ground and hearing a woman shriek that he had been killed caused him to collapse that day. Afterwards I found that Mr. Merriwell's heart had been seriously affected by the shock, and it was I who pledged the boy to play no more football until I should say he might without apprehension that another, similar, accident might not have an even more serious repercussion on his uncle. And to make sure Asher Merriwell would not hear of what I had done, I asked Frank to tell nobody. Now, however, I feel confident that Mr. Merriwell has so far recovered that I am willing to release the boy from his promise, as long as he's so anxious to play football again."

"That's all," concluded the coach, "and it ought to be enough to end the guessing and loose talk that's been going on."

The whistle! The kick-off! The plunk of the lusty foot of a State kicker boosting the ball high and far toward the east goal, which Fardale, having won the toss, had chosen to defend because of the favoring wind. Racing from the restraining line, the maroon-clad State men blazed like a sheet of flame across the field.

Under wraps, Merriwell sat with the squad and saw the game begin. Elmer Davis was in there at right half, where Bascomb would have been had he not been hurt. The kick, aimed for "coffin corner," was coming into his territory. He took the ball cleanly and was away, with two interlopers sweeping in ahead to blaze a path for him. Twenty-two yards of green sod were left behind his flying feet before he was slammed down by a State tackler.

That was good. Good enough to bring a great cheer from the Fardale crowd that packed the north stand. But State wasn't disturbed. They were brimming over with confidence, those fellows. This was a game they had reckoned in the bag before it started. Any team Mayfield could trim, even by the closest score, just had to be an easy bounce-around for them when they turned on the juice.

Davis was on his feet again. If that hard tackle had jolted him much he didn't show it. A quick huddle was followed by a shifting switch behind the line and a center buck, Davis carrying the ball. But the State line was a stone wall through which no hole could be drilled, and Davis went down in the pile-up. Two yards lost.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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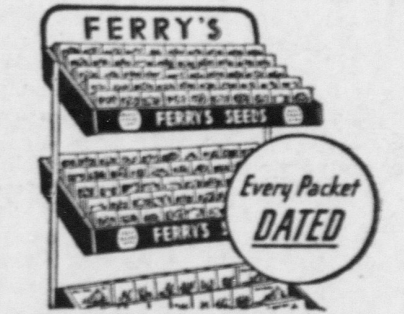
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