

Webster Frank V.

**Harry Watson's High School
Days: or, The Rivals
of Rivertown**



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Webster Frank V. Harry Watson's High School Days; Or, The Rivals of Rivertown

CHAPTER I – HARRY SHOWS HIS METTLE

“Hey, fellows, we’ve a new student at Rivertown High!”

“Who is he, Socker?” chorused a group of boys to whom their schoolmate had come running with his tidings.

“Don’t know. Nettie told me that she and Viola had met him as he was coming out of Principal Larmore’s office.”

“Yes, and you’d better watch out, Elmer. Nettie said Viola has been talking about nothing else but that good-looking fellow since she saw him!” bantered another of the group.

The boy, light and rather handsome, but with a weak face, to whom this last remark had been addressed was about to reply, when a warning was sounded.

“Keep quiet! Here he comes now!” declared Socker.

Instantly all eyes were turned in the direction of the schoolhouse where they saw a lad walking with a swinging stride. Apparently about fifteen years of age, he was well built and rather tall. Dark hair, which curled about his cap, and laughing eyes bespoke him as a jolly, handsome fellow, and the ruddy glow brought to his cheeks by the crisp winter air was evidence that he was possessed of health in abundance.

“Why, I know who he is!” asserted another of the group.

“Who?”

“He must be Harry Watson, nephew of the Widow Watson. I remember Mrs. Watson told mother the other day that her nephew, Harry, was coming to Rivertown.”

“Where’s he from?”

“Can’t say.”

“Well, let’s see if he’s any good!” exclaimed a big, hulking fellow, Pud Snooks, who was the bully of the school. “Hey, you, Watson, come over here!” he shouted.

Rivertown High School, a two-story brick building containing some fifteen class rooms and a large assembly room, was situated on a bluff overlooking the Conoque River: and the road leading from it to the village, in addition to being steep, made a sharp turn at the foot of the hill.

The spot was a favorite one with the scholars for coasting, and several of the boys had been in the act of placing a double-runner bob in position at the top of the hill, when they had been apprised of the fact there was a new student in school.

The boys of Rivertown High had a fondness for trying out new students, and Pud’s suggestion met with ready approval.

Accordingly, when the bully proposed putting Harry Watson to the test, the other boys sat down on the double-runner, taking good care to leave the steering seat vacant.

“When I shove off, everybody stand up!” whispered Pud. Then he exclaimed aloud:

“Hey, Watson! Can you steer a sled?”

Stopping as he heard his name, Harry looked toward the group of boys.

“Sure thing, if you’d like to have me,” he answered. “My name is Harry Watson.”

“And mine’s Pud Snooks,” announced the bully. Then bowing in mock seriousness, he continued:

“That fancy blonde behind me is Elmer Craven. He is the richest and most famous personage we have at Rivertown High. Twice a week he goes across the river to Lumberport, and he believes that Viola Darrow is never happy when – ”

“Oh, cut it out, Pud!” growled Elmer.

With a grin, the bully went on with his introductions.

“The next exhibit is Socker Gales, and the specimen with the ten-foot reach is Longback, whom his family calls Sam Dalton. Now just take the ropes and I’ll push off. We’re a precious load, as I hope I’ve made clear to you, so don’t tip us over!”

While Harry had been acknowledging these bantering introductions, he had also been looking at the icy roadway.

A glance at the sharp turn had told him it would require clever work to make it, and so, when he took the steering ropes, instead of sitting down on the sled, he gave them a quick jerk – to have one of them part near the runner.

“Good thing that didn’t happen on the hill!” he exclaimed, quickly cutting off the broken end and making a new knot, after which he again tested the rope and found it sound.

Pud and his chums, however, though they pretended to, did not share this opinion, and that there might not be more delay, as soon as Harry sat down and placed his feet on the bracers, the bully started the sled.

“We’re off!” he shouted, as he gave the double-runner a terrific shove.

As though eager for the fun, the first sled shot over the crest of the hill – and then all the boys put their feet down and let the sled pass between their legs!

Instantly Harry realized that he was alone on the double-runner.

With no weight on the hind sled, he knew it would bump and slew as soon as he got fairly started and especially when he struck the curve. But Harry was game.

“I’ll show these Rivertown High chaps that they can’t stump me by any of their tricks,” he said to himself, and braced his feet more firmly, leaning back to throw as much weight as possible on the hind sled.

As the double-runner gained momentum, it fairly danced over the icy roadway.

Behind, Pud and his cronies were hurrying as fast as they could that they might gain a spot whence they could see the spill they expected when the sled struck the curve.

But as Harry approached the turn, he leaned far out.

“Oh, you Pud! You guessed wrong when you picked Watson for an easy mark,” chuckled Longback. “That boy knows something about steering.”

The next instant, however, the disappointment of the boys at learning that they were not to have the fun of seeing Harry dumped, was forgotten in their alarm at hearing shouts of warning and fright beyond the curve!

Just as Harry’s sled dashed around the turn, he had caught sight of two little children starting up the hill, dragging their sleds behind them.

A group of high school girls, among them Viola Darrow and her chum, Nettie Masterson, were descending the hill, and it was they who, when they heard the rattley-bang of the double-runner, and saw the toddlers ahead, had cried out in terror.

One side of the road was banked by the hill, while the other dropped down toward the river; a fence with one rail some three feet from the ground serving as a guard.

What was below the embankment Harry did not know, but he remembered to have seen some bushes as he had walked up the hill.

In their effort to save the children, the girls had run out into the roadway, practically blocking it.

So great was Harry’s speed, however, that they realized it would be impossible for them to seize the toddlers and get them to one side in time to let the double-runner pass – and in such a manner were they spread across the road that Harry had no chance to guide his sled past them.

“Open out! Let him through!” shouted Longback and Socker; while Elmer and Pud, terrified at the impending tragedy threatened by their trick, simply stared at the scene in silence, their faces white, their mouths agape.

But in the instant that had followed his discovery of the little girls starting up the roadway, Harry had made up his mind what to do – and acted.

With a sudden pull, he jerked the sled from its course, headed it between two of the posts which supported the guard-rail – and the double-runner leaped over the embankment at a spot less than six feet from where the group of girls and the two children stood, panic-stricken and crying.

CHAPTER II – JED BROWN FINDS A PROTECTOR

Several of the other boys who were members of Rivertown High, among them Paul Martin and Jerry Post, had reached the turn just in time to see the sled as it took its mad leap over the embankment.

For a moment, they, as well as the girls, gazed in silence at the spot where the double-runner with its lone passenger had disappeared. Then, as with one accord, they broke into lusty cheers at the aversion of the tragedy which had seemed inevitable.

But their joy was quickly checked.

“Don’t cheer! You don’t know what has happened to that nervy chap!” shouted Paul Martin.

And as his words brought silence, he and Jerry rushed to the edge of the embankment, while the others followed.

Fortunately Harry had landed in a pile of underbrush, and as the white-faced boys and girls lined the rail he was picking his way out, none the worse for his experience save a few rents in his clothes.

The sight of the boy, safe and sound, brought a reaction from the terror, and wildly the scholars cheered, while Paul, Jerry and Longback ducked under the guard-rail and slipped and slid down to meet the hero.

“Hurt?” asked Jerry, anxiously.

“Nowhere, except in my clothes,” returned Harry – and again prolonged cheers greeted his ears.

Many were the willing hands that were extended to help draw him up into the road, and when they had succeeded, he became immediately the centre of an excited, admiring group.

“I think that was just perfectly splendid of him!” exclaimed Viola. “Some of you boys introduce me to him, won’t you?”

As she spoke, the girl, whose beauty and wealth made her the favorite of the school, looked straight at Elmer – but he gave no sign that he noticed her.

Their leader having thus given the stamp of approval to Harry, the other girls quickly pressed forward, all talking and chatting at once.

But no one responded to Viola’s request and, flushing, she turned away while the new student grew very red, as he looked from one to another of the boys who had invited him to steer the double-runner.

The situation was awkward in the extreme and Harry, diffident and sensitive as he was, felt it keenly. Yet he was the one to relieve it.

“Hey, you Snooks, you’d better go down and get your sled – or do you want me to do that?” he called.

“So it was one of Pud’s tricks?” exclaimed Nettie. “We might have known it, Viola. Pud, I think you’re perfectly horrid!” and with all the dignity of her fifteen years, the girl turned her back on the bully and, putting her arm through Viola’s, led her away down the hill. But as they went, both girls smiled at Harry.

During the embarrassing scene, Longback had whispered to some of the other boys who Harry was, and Jerry and Paul immediately took him in tow.

“If you don’t mind, we’ll walk home with you, Watson,” exclaimed Jerry. And glad of the chance to escape the attention of the other members of Rivertown High, Harry started off, accompanied by the two boys who were later to become his chums.

The story of Harry’s quick-wittedness and courage had proceeded him, thanks to Viola and Nettie; and as he walked down the main street of the town to the comfortable home of his aunt, many were the glances directed toward him.

“Rather a bad start, I’m afraid,” he said to his companions, with a feeble attempt at a smile.

“Bad? I should say it was a corking fine one!” returned Paul, sincerely. “It isn’t many fellows who can become a hero and at the same time get the best of Pud Snooks!”

The mention of the bully caused Harry to grow serious.

“I’m afraid it will make Snooks down on me,” he said. “He had no idea that those little girls would be in the road.”

Well did Jerry and Paul know that the outcome of the bully’s trick, sensational as it had been, would, indeed, arouse his anger against the boy who had turned the tables on him; and though they tried to disabuse Harry’s mind of the idea, it was with relief that they reached the gate of the Widow Watson’s house.

Despite Harry’s cordial invitation, both boys declined to go in, and he entered the house feeling strangely alone.

His aunt’s greeting and loving words of praise after she had heard of his experience, however, did much to restore his good spirits.

“Who is Viola?” he asked, as they were seated at dinner.

“She is the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in Rivertown,” replied the widow, a shade of sorrow passing over her face. “What makes you ask?”

“Because she said my steering over the embankment was perfectly fine!”

Again the cloud passed over Mrs. Watson’s face and this time it did not lift.

“She’s a very sweet and lovely girl, Harry,” she replied. “But she isn’t the sort you should choose for a companion.”

At the words, the boy looked up quickly at his aunt and what he read in her face made him flush.

“I mean, she is very rich and I think – that is, I have heard – her family intend her to marry Elmer Craven.”

“He’s rich, too, isn’t he?”

“Yes.”

Deeply did it grieve the good woman to speak the words she had, but she believed it would be best for her nephew to realize the social difference that existed between Viola and himself, that he might be spared the humiliation and embarrassment in the future. Though they allowed their daughter to attend the Rivertown High School, the Darrows were proud and arrogant people and always did all in their power to prevent the girl from mingling with her schoolmates.

But though Mrs. Watson strove to offset the sting of her statement, the rest of the dinner was eaten in comparative silence, and Harry set out for school with a heavy heart.

Not far had he proceeded up the main street, however, before he caught sight of a form he recognized as that of the bully who had been the ringleader in the trick which had so nearly ended in a tragedy.

“Hope he won’t come up and try to smooth things over,” said Harry to himself. But the next moment, his anxiety on this score was allayed.

Pud was busy making snowballs and storing them under his arm.

“Wonder if he’s going to vent his disappointment on me,” mused Harry, taking his hands from his pockets that he might be ready to return the bombardment, should the bully open on him.

Yet when he saw the bully’s victim, Harry’s anger at the fellow was greater than ever.

As the new student passed a cross street, he saw Pud jump behind a tree and then, peering from one side, hurl one of the half dozen snowballs he had under his arm.

Turning to see at whom they were aimed, Harry was amazed to behold a bent and aged man, hobbling along the sidewalk with the aid of a cane.

The snowball knocked the cane from the man’s hand and as it fell, the aged cripple tottered.

With an exclamation of disgust, Harry rushed up behind the bully and, seizing his arm, jerked it so that the remaining snowballs fell to the sidewalk.

The thought that anyone had seen his cowardly act in snowballing the aged man shamed the bully, but only for the moment.

“What do you mean by that?” he demanded, fiercely, whirling round to face the interrupter of what he considered his sport. And as he beheld the boy who had brought disgrace upon him in the morning, his face grew white with anger. “Oh, it’s *you*, is it?” he went on. “Who do you think you are, anyhow? Just because you couldn’t steer the sled and went over the embankment is no reason why you should think you are so much!”

“You know I could steer that sled, and only went between the posts to keep from running into the girls,” returned Harry. “But that has nothing to do with the present matter. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, to throw snowballs at an old man!”

“Oh, nobody cares about old Jed Brown!”

“Well, you can’t snowball him when I’m round!”

“Oh, is that so? Who’s going to stop me, I should like to know?”

“I am.”

“You?” And, after standing for several seconds, during which he looked Harry over from the top of his head to his feet, the bully burst into laughter. “So *you*, whom I could pick up and carry on one finger, are going to stop my doing anything I want to, eh? That *is* a good one. Why, kiddo, there is enough of me to make three of you and then some.”

The tone in which Pud spoke sent the color flushing to Harry’s face.

“Where I come from, it isn’t so much the size that counts as it is the heart!” he retorted. “And a fellow who will snowball an aged man can’t have very much real heart!”

An instant the bully glowered at Harry, then made a rush toward him.

“You’re getting altogether too fresh, young feller!” he hissed. “Because of you, I’m getting into all sorts of trouble – and I’m not going to stand it! If I want to snowball or do anything else to old Jed Brown, I’m going to, understand?” And as though to give more force to his words, Pud stooped down to pick up one of the missiles the new student had knocked from his arm.

Before he could reach it, however, Harry threw out his foot and crushed the snowball, then with more quick movements demolished the others.

Never had anyone so thwarted the Rivertown bully before and, for the moment, the big hulk of a boy stood gazing at his discomfiter in amazement. But only for a moment.

With a snarl, he shook his fist under Harry’s nose.

“You seem to be looking for trouble – and now you’re going to get it!”

Though the bully was much larger than Harry, the latter did not cower before him.

So engrossed had the boys been in their quarrel that they had failed to notice the approach of Principal Larmore. But he made his presence known just as Pud drew back his arm to strike.

“Snooks, go about your business!” he exclaimed. “I’m ashamed to think you should seek to pick a quarrel with the very boy who prevented your trick with the sled from having a very serious ending!”

As Harry had said, the bully was a coward at heart, and growling to himself, he slunk away.

CHAPTER III – SOCKER'S PLOT

With an amused smile, Mr. Larmore watched Pud as he slouched off up the street.

"Rather a strenuous introduction to Rivertown, you're having, Watson," he exclaimed, pleasantly. "Do you mind telling me what Snooks was saying to you?"

"Yes, sir; I do. It was only a personal matter."

Fate, however, decreed that the principal should learn the cause of the quarrel he had interrupted.

First with surprise, then with thankfulness, Jed Brown had beheld Harry's intervention – for the aged man, veteran though he was, and bearing the mark of his service for his country in a crippled leg, was considered fair sport by many of the young people in the village, and he was not accustomed to having anyone champion him.

Consequently, when he had seen the school bully threaten Harry, he had hobbled toward the pair as fast as he could, only to arrive just as Mr. Larmore had asked concerning the cause of the trouble.

"It was about me, Mr. Larmore, sir, the fuss was," declared Jed. "Snooks was throwing snowballs at me and this young man stopped him." Then, turning to Harry, he continued: "I'll not forget your kindness, my boy. My name is Jed Brown." And he extended a trembling hand.

"I'm Harry Watson," smiled the boy, as he shook hands.

"You ain't any relation to Amos Watson, of Lawrenceburgh, are you?" inquired the veteran, eagerly.

"He's my father."

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Jed, excitedly, again shaking the boy's hand. "I've known Amos ever since he was knee high to a grasshopper, and there ain't a finer man in this state, Mr. Larmore. Harry, whenever your skates need sharpening or you feel lonesome, just come around to see me; I live in a little one-story house down at the end of this street. You can't miss it."

"Thank you, I – " then, chancing to glance down the street, the boy caught a glimpse of Pud as he poked his head cautiously from behind a tree-trunk, evidently with the purpose of finding out where the veteran was, and he changed his words, saying, "I guess I'll walk along with you now. I have a knife that needs sharpening badly and I can leave it with you."

The principal had also seen the bully's action and he readily understood that Harry had made his knife the excuse for walking home with the old man, that he might protect him from any further attack by Snooks. Yet he feared the bully might waylay the boy and, as the other two set out, fell into step beside them, much to the embarrassment of both.

Arrived at Jed's house which, though small, was spick and span in appearance, Harry gave him his knife, and after promising to call for it the next afternoon, continued on his way to the school with Mr. Larmore.

The detour which they had made to escort the veteran to his home caused them to be a trifle late in reaching the schoolhouse, and Harry was very glad that none of the scholars were outside to see him walking with the principal, for he feared it might give them the impression that he was a "teacher's boy."

But when he entered his classroom, he was the centre of all eyes.

"Grandstand play!" growled Elmer to Socket. "He's got a swelled head, already, because he steered the sled over the bank. Anybody with any decency wouldn't have waited until school was in session before he came in."

"Never mind, we'll take him down a bit!" returned Elmer Craven's chum. "Just wait till after school!"

The eye of the instructor chancing to wander in their direction, the two boys buried their heads in their books; and Elmer was forced to forego asking his chum what scheme he was thinking out.

But when school was over for the day, he quickly learned.

“Play hockey, Watson?” asked Socker, joining a group of boys who had gathered about Harry.

“Yes.”

“Then come on down to the river and we’ll have a game.”

“It will depend upon whether my trunk has arrived or not. If it hasn’t come since I was at aunt’s for dinner, I won’t be able to play because my skates are in it.”

“I have an extra pair at the house you can take,” interposed Paul. “The rest of you fellows go down to the river; and Harry and I’ll join you as soon as we can.” And falling into step beside the boy who was soon to become his crony, Paul Martin started down the hill which had been the scene of the memorable incident in the morning.

To his delight, Harry found that his trunk had arrived, and it was but the matter of a very few minutes for him to open it and take out his skates.

At the river, they found a merry crowd of boys and girls, and quickly Harry and Paul sat down to put on their skates.

“Now Sam, you go over and bring Mr. Watson back with you as soon as he’s got his skates on,” commanded Viola, who, with Nettie, had been keeping a lookout for the boy whom she had been unable to meet in the forenoon.

None too willingly, the fellow started, but before he could reach Harry, the boy was on his feet, and hockey stick in hand, was skimming over the ice to where those who were to play were lined up, some quarter of a mile up the river.

“Isn’t that provoking!” pouted Viola, as she noted his action. “But I’m going to meet Harry Watson – even if I have to introduce myself. Come on, Nettie, let’s skate over and watch the game.”

With the arrival of Harry and Paul, Socker exclaimed:

“Watson, you’ll play on Jerry’s team. Let’s get the game started as soon as we can. It’ll be dark before long.”

Quickly the boys took their positions, and Socker and Elmer noticed with delight that the boy who had incited their enmity was playing “rover.”

After the puck was put in play, it was dribbled back and forth; then, as Paul noticed Harry was keeping well out to one side, he shot the rubber to him.

Nursing it carefully, he dashed in, that he might have a less difficult angle from which to try for goal.

“Get him! Block him! Don’t let him score!” cried Socker to his team-mates, and with a rush they skated down upon Harry with tremendous momentum.

For several moments, Jerry watched the strange play of his opponents – for they had left their positions uncovered; then it dawned on him what their purpose was and he charged down to Harry’s rescue, at the same time shouting:

“Shoot it across, Watson! Shoot it across!”

With a deft twist of his wrist, Harry sent the rubber spinning over the ice just in front of Socker and his players.

But instead of checking themselves and going after it, they continued straight at the new student.

Surprised, but believing that their speed was such that they were unable to turn quickly, Harry grinned at them, wheeled on his right skate with a suddenness that would have done a professional proud, and sought to go around them.

Clever as was his move, however, it came too late.

With terrific force, Socker, Elmer and another boy crashed into him – and as they all went down, there was a resounding whack.

“Pretty raw work, Craven!” snapped Jerry, as he caught the richest boy in Rivertown High School by the collar and jerked him off the pile.

“What do you mean?”

Jerry, however, was too engrossed in the task of getting the others off Harry to reply. But when he had succeeded, the new high school scholar lay on his back, motionless.

CHAPTER IV – HARRY SHOWS HIS GRIT

Abashed at the sight of the boy lying white and still on the ice, the other hockey players gazed at one another.

“He’s shamming!” growled Elmer.

“You know better than that!” retorted Jerry.

“What do you mean?”

“That you and Socker deliberately ran into Watson – and you know it as well as I do!”

“I saw Socker give him the knee!” interposed Paul.

Intense was the feeling between the two teams, and instinctively the boys who had been playing lined up with their respective captains. But before the argument became more bitter, Harry opened his eyes, gazed about him in a dazed manner, and then sat up.

“Got a bit of a knock, didn’t I?” he smiled. “I say, did I score a goal?”

At the question, all the boys turned to look toward the net of Socker’s team, having forgotten in their excitement to notice where the puck had gone.

“Jove, but you did!” cried Paul. “Good boy, Harry!”

Instantly the other members of the team with which Harry was playing took up the cry and Elmer and his companions skated away to hide their chagrin.

“Here comes Longback; we can put him in, and you can get out of the game!” exclaimed Paul, helping Harry to his feet.

“Not much – that is, if you are willing I should keep on playing,” returned Harry. “I’m all right now; and I should like to show those other fellows that I’m not a pillow!”

“But can you stand the handling?” asked Jerry, anxiously.

“Leave it to me – I’m no rag-doll,” retorted Harry. “If they are up to any tricks, I know a thing or two!”

The gameness of the new student appealed to all the members of the team on which he was playing, and without further comment they lined up for the next play.

Surprised to see Harry still in the line-up, Socker skated over to Elmer and held a brief consultation with him, but their whisperings were interrupted by the puck being put into play.

As luck would have it, the rubber was sent straight toward Elmer and, with a clever stop, he dribbled it along toward Harry, evidently thinking that he would be able to pass him easily because of his seemingly dazed condition.

But Harry realized his purpose and, with a burst of speed, he rushed in, snatched the puck, steadied his stick – and then drove it spinning toward the goal net, sending it past the tender.

“Good boy!” shouted his team-mates. And the cheer was immediately taken up by the boys and girls who had gathered to watch the game.

Smarting more under the thought that the fellow they had sought to humiliate had succeeded in turning the tables against them than in the fact that their opponents had scored two goals, Socker called his men about him.

“Play for Watson!” he cried through clenched teeth. “That fellow’s got to have his big head taken off him!”

“Ready!” called the lad who was acting as umpire; and with set teeth, Socker’s men took their positions.

Straight and true for the goal Paul sent the puck, but Snooks checked it just in time to prevent another score, and cleverly Elmer took the rubber through the opposing players until only Harry stood between him and the man at the net.

Gritting his teeth, the new member of the Rivertown High School determined to show that he was an offensive as well as a defensive player. With a terrific rush, he bore down on Elmer Craven,

and with a sudden twist of his stick, tripped the fellow, grabbed the rubber, dribbled it out of reach, then sent it spinning with a force that drove it through the net!

Loud were the shouts from the onlookers – but Elmer lay still and quiet.

“You hit him in the head with your stick!” growled Socker, starting toward Harry.

“Nonsense! *I* play a clean game! Leave it to me – I’ll bring him round in a jiffy!”

And while the others stood inactive, Harry scraped up some ice with his skate and rubbed the shavings on Craven’s face.

“Who’s doing that?” demanded the boy, sitting up.

But his only answer was a general laugh.

“Everybody ready, puck’s going to be put in play!” shouted the umpire, and without delay, the boys took their positions.

“You want to watch out, the whole team will be down on you this time!” warned Jerry to Harry, but the lad only laughed.

“I reckon I can give them as good as they send,” he replied. “It just took me a few minutes to get onto their game. I – ”

But his words were interrupted by the play.

While Snooks caught the rubber and started back with it, all the other members of the team bore down on Harry.

Not seeming to notice them, the boy hurried to the assistance of the goal tender, his pursuers in full cry. Then, with a suddenness that caused the scholars on the side lines to gasp, Harry turned, shoved his stick between the skates of the fellow nearest him, and sent him sprawling on the ice, causing the others to fall on top of him.

Loud was the laughter that rose from the boys and girls who were not in the game, while Jerry and Paul patted Harry on the back.

But several of the instructors happened to be among the spectators and, realizing that the game would soon be beyond the bounds of sport, they intervened.

“Vhy not ve all go and get kindling voods for a bonfire dis efening?” shouted Prof. Schmidt, the genial German professor.

“Yes! Yes! Get wood for a bonfire!” cried the boys and girls on the side lines; and forgetful of the hockey game, they skated across the ice, effectually putting an end to the contest.

CHAPTER V – THE RACE ON SKATES

In thorough good humor on account of their winning the hockey game, Paul and Jerry called Harry, and together they started up the river to where a big pile of brush lay on the bank.

In full cry, a score or more of the other boys and girls, among whom were Viola and Nettie, set after them, calling to them to wait. But the three boys only checked their speed slightly.

“Come on. A race for the brush-pile,” shouted Longback. “I’ll wager hot soda for the bunch of us that I’ll be the first one to reach it.”

“You’re on! You’re on!” shouted a dozen of the boys, among whom were Harry and his recent team-mates.

And as the challenge was accepted, the boys dashed away.

No more than a few yards had he gone, than Elmer Craven shouted:

“Oh, you Paul and Jerry! You’ve got the start of the rest of us. Come back and line up.”

“No. This is as fair for one of us as it is for another,” cried Pud, whose inordinate love for soda caused him to exert himself to the utmost, and during the checking of the speed as the result of Craven’s suggestion, he had taken the lead.

“Sure you think it’s fair now, Pud,” laughed Jerry, “so long as you’re ahead.”

“You’ll have to come back and line up as Elmer said or I won’t make good my offer,” declared Longback.

At this ultimatum all the boys who had started ahead checked themselves and then returned to where the offerer of the prize had scratched a mark on the ice.

With great good nature, laughing and joking with one another, the boys lined up, Harry and his two team-mates happening to be on the end where Viola and Nettie were standing.

“Who’s going to give the word to start?” demanded Snooks in a none too pleasant tone, for he was disappointed at having had to give up the lead which he had obtained over the others.

“I will,” cried Viola.

“That means Elmer’ll win,” declared Nettie.

“Why not let Prof. Schmidt start it?” suggested some one.

Readily the genial professor consented; and taking his position at the opposite end of the line from where the two girls stood, he cried:

“Eferybody get retty! You Schnooks, you get back onto the line. Don’t try to shtear a yard.”

Grumbling to himself, the boy obeyed.

“Now, vonce again. Eferybody retty! Von, two, t’ree —*Go!*”

Eagerly the boys dashed forward and for a few minutes they were all bunched together. Then Elmer, Snooks, Longback and Harry dashed ahead of the others, and for a few moments raced neck and neck.

“Go it, Elmer!” “Go it Longback!” shouted their partisans, and as though the good wishes of their friends gave them greater speed, the two boys forged ahead.

“Oh, why doesn’t somebody shout for Harry Watson!” exclaimed Viola, stamping her foot.

“Going back on Elmer so soon,” chided several of the girls who were with her. She made them no reply, but instead, skating after the racers.

“Come on, we girls will have a race, and the one who wins we’ll crown queen of the ice at the bonfire to-night!” cried Nettie.

“Fine! Dandy!” chorused a dozen or so of the girls, and one of them added:

“Let’s have a regular carnival, and we’ll make the boy who wins king.”

“Will you start it, Prof. Schmidt?” asked Viola, and again the genial old German complied, sending the girls off in short order.

During the preliminaries Viola had kept her eyes on the boys ahead, and it seemed to her as if Harry cut down the lead of Elmer and Longback. Instantly the thought occurred to her that if no one would introduce her to the new student, by winning the girl's race, she would surely be able to meet him at the mock coronation ceremony planned for the carnival. And, gritting her teeth, she bent forward, skating with all the speed she could summon.

After the start of the girls, the interest of the spectators had again turned to the boys and, that they might the better see the finish, everyone skated in the direction of the brush-pile.

When Snooks saw Harry taking the lead he grew furious.

"I'll get him! If I can't win, *he* certainly shan't," he growled to himself, and his anger at the boy who had so humiliated him on two occasions giving him increased strength, he quickly cut down Watson's lead, although in doing so, he swerved his course from the extreme opposite end of the line of racers close over to that of the boy for whom he had conceived such hatred.

"What's Pud up to?" exclaimed several of those who were following. But not long was the bully's purpose in doubt. Tiring from his burst of speed when he was almost abreast of Harry, realizing that if he were to carry out his mean scheme he must act immediately, he lunged viciously towards the new student.

"Watch out, Watson! Snooks is trying to foul you!" shouted Jerry.

The warning was unnecessary, because Harry had heard the sharp strokes of the skates close to him, and, although he did not check his speed by looking around, he intuitively seemed to realize that the approach of the skater boded him no good; and, just as the bully sought to throw him off his balance, he turned his skate out and shot rapidly to one side, putting himself a scant foot beyond Snook's reach.

"Pretty work! Good boy!" shouted the spectators, as they realized the bully's attempt and our hero's escape.

But his move had taken Harry several yards out of his course, and quick were Elmer and Longback to improve the opportunity to wrest the lead from him. Clenching his fists more tightly, Harry bent lower, and exerted himself to the utmost to recover the lost ground. Less than one hundred yards away was the brush-pile, and a stick held in front of the racers would have touched each one, so even were they.

"Oh, you Elmer! Get a move on! They're going to have a carnival and crown the winner king. The girls are racing to be queen, and Viola's leading!" shouting one of the scholars.

Thus apprised for the first time of the additional plans which had been made for the bonfire, the three boys bent themselves to still greater efforts.

To Elmer, the thought that Harry might win and thus share the honor of participating in the mock ceremony with Viola was bitter indeed.

"If there was no one else but Longback, I wouldn't care," he told himself. "But I can't let that scrub play king when Viola is queen."

Nearer and nearer to the finish the three boys sped, amid the yells and cheers of advice and encouragement their partisans hurled at them.

But though each of the trio was skating with might and main, not one of them seemed able to gain on the others – and the brush-pile was a scant fifty yards away.

"Shake 'em, Elmer! Shake 'em, Watson!" cried the spectators, according to their preference.

But another ten yards were cut from the distance to go, and Elmer and Harry were still abreast, having gained slightly on Longback.

With a sudden burst of speed Elmer forged ahead, amid the cheers of his supporters, but even as the air was rent by their shouts of "Elmer wins!" their hopes were dashed.

With no warning, the rich boy gave a sudden lurch towards Watson, struggled desperately to recover himself, then fell to the ice, sliding with terrific force toward Harry.

At the sight, the boys and girls who were following cried out in surprise and disappointment, while Jerry and Paul shouted warnings to their new friend.

“That’ll finish Watson as well as Elmer,” declared one student.

But his prophecy was not to be fulfilled.

When he heard the shouts of warning, Harry had turned his head to learn their cause just in time to see Craven’s body come sliding toward him over the ice with amazing speed.

Realizing that, should it hit him, he, too, would be knocked down, and the race go to the boy whom they had both outskated, Harry took a desperate chance and jumped, clearing Elmer’s shoulder by a few inches.

CHAPTER VI – THE GIRLS' RACE

Harry's action was greeted with shouts of approval by all the scholars, but just when it seemed that he was going to win without further mishap, he fell and Longback flashed across the line a winner!

In landing after his jump, Harry had leaned too far forward, with the result that, though he strove desperately to keep his balance, his centre of equilibrium was too far forward, and he pitched onto his face.

Little time did the fellows have to discuss the eventful race, when there sounded a cry: "Get out of the way! Give the girls a chance to finish!"

Quickly the crowd that had surrounded the fallen skaters, moved out of the way, as the girls bore down upon the imaginary line that marked the end of the race. Bent far down, her arms swinging like well regulated pistons, Viola was in the lead, a good three yards separating her from her nearest antagonist, Mildred Evans, while almost an equal distance behind Mildred, the rest of the girls were bunched.

His disappointment over his fall forgotten in the thought that Longback had snatched victory from the boy to whom he had taken such a dislike, Elmer cried:

"Look out for that crack in the ice, Viola, or you'll get tripped just as I did."

Although the girl heard the warning, she gave no evidence, either by thanks or by action, and could the richest boy of Rivertown High School have known what was passing in her mind, he would have worn anything but the pleased smile that enveloped his face.

So long as Harry had been in the lead, Viola had exerted herself to the utmost to leave the girls with whom she was racing as far behind as she could. With a little gasp of dismay, she had seen Snooks' desperate but futile attempt to foul Harry, and when the boy had jumped over Elmer, she had been one of those who had shouted their delight, and corresponding was her disappointment when Harry himself fell, and Longback won.

"I'll not be queen to Longback's king!" exclaimed the proud girl, indignantly, yet, aware as she was of the lead she had over the others in the race, she was puzzled to know how she could manage to lose it without her purpose being too evident.

When she heard Elmer's warning, however, she realized that there was a crack in the ice which would throw her. Quickly she formed her plans, and, with almost imperceptible slackening in her speed, she began to search the ice for the crevice.

For several seconds she was unable to discern it; then of a sudden her glance fell upon a zigzag depression, and she changed her course, though ever so slightly, that she might be the more sure to strike it.

"Look out! Look out! Keep away from that edge of the bank!" shouted Elmer and several of his companions. But as unheeding as before, the girl kept on, appeared to stagger a moment as she struck the depression, and then sank to the ice.

First, in blank dismay, and then in anger, the rich boy who had seemed to be the favored one among Viola's friends stared at her, and finally, with a mumbled exclamation, skated toward her.

"You did that on purpose!" he snarled, as, stooping over, he took hold of Viola's arm to assist her to her feet.

At the words, the blood flushed hotly to the girl's cheeks and indignantly she wrenched her arm from Elmer's grasp.

"How dare you say such a thing to me, Elmer Craven!" she exclaimed angrily. "Even if I have sprained my ankle, I am quite capable of getting up by myself," and forthwith she proceeded so to do.

In the excitement caused by Viola's fall, coming as it did after the two leaders in the boys' race had been put out of the running by similar accidents, those who had been watching the girls' race were too absorbed in their efforts to urge on their favorites, now that all had practically an even chance of

winning, for, in her endeavor not to meet a similar mishap to Viola, Mildred had skated so far to one side that she had lost the lead, so that none of them had seen the trick save Nettie and Harry.

Both of them, however, were too far away to hear what passed between the boy and girl, but as Nettie saw her chum limp when she tried to skate after picking herself up, she gave up the race and went to her assistance.

“What is it? Have you hurt yourself?” she asked, solicitously.

“It’s my ankle. I’m afraid I’ve sprained it.”

“Really?”

“Don’t be a goose.”

A moment the girl gazed at her chum and then the light of understanding coming to her, she exclaimed, significantly:

“Oh!” And the better to give the semblance of truth to the supposed injury, she put her arm around Viola to support her, and led her to the bank, where she sat down on a tree stump.

In the meantime, the race had been won by Annabel Hutchins, who was known among her classmates as the infant prodigy, because being precociously bright, she had entered the freshman class when she was only thirteen years old.

For a moment after the tall, awkward girl skated across the line in the lead of the others, there was a silence. And then, as the humor of the situation dawned upon the others, for Longback, a member of the senior class, had the proper contempt for the under classmen, the boys and girls yelled and cheered frantically.

“This will be some coronation!” cried Socker, with a grin. But some of the girl’s, noting Annabel’s embarrassment, prevented any more such remarks by surrounding her and skating her to the brush-pile. Then quickly seizing some of the dried branches, they started down the river with them toward the spot where the bonfire was to be built.

The boys, however, especially the freshmen, found it too great an opportunity to tease the haughty senior, and they made his life so miserable with their comment that in a rage he skated away by himself.

CHAPTER VII – THE RIVALRY BETWEEN HARRY AND ELMER

Their victim, having thus put himself beyond their torment, the other boys turned to the brush-pile, and each taking as many branches as he could carry skated down the river.

Viola and Nettie were still on the stump, and only Paul, Jerry and Harry were left at the brush-pile.

“You don’t suppose Miss Darrow hurt herself so badly she can’t skate back, do you?” asked Harry of his companions.

“Jove! I hadn’t thought of that,” returned Paul, and skating over to where the two girls were, he asked concerning the extent of Viola’s injuries.

“She’s hurt her ankle,” explained Nettie.

“My! that’s bad. Can you skate on it at all?” inquired Paul.

“I can’t skate on it, but I may be able to step on it,” dissembled Viola, and getting to her feet, started to walk, only to sink down with a little cry of well-feigned pain.

“Jerry and Harry, come over here! Viola’s hurt her ankle, and we’ve got to get her back down the river some way,” called Paul to his chums.

“Remember we haven’t met Mr. Watson!” exclaimed Nettie in a low voice, as the two boys left the brush-pile and skated toward them.

“Why, I’m glad you reminded me. I’d forgotten,” murmured Paul, and when the new student joined them, he was quickly introduced.

“We’ll have to go down the river and get a sled for you, Viola,” announced Jerry. “You wait here with Nettie and Paul, and Harry and I’ll go down.”

But after their manœuvring to meet Harry the two girls did not propose to lose his companionship so quickly, and Viola hurriedly exclaimed:

“I think perhaps if you boys will help me, I shall be able to walk down.”

“But that will only make your ankle worse, Miss Darrow,” declared Harry. “I have it. We’ll take a big pile of the brush and you and Miss Masterson can sit on it and we will pull you down the river.”

“The very thing!” cried the other boys, and without more ado, they returned to the heap of dried branches, picked out several big ones, which they placed on the ice, heaping smaller ones across them, until they had made a rustic nest into which the girls climbed, while the boys, with pieces of rope which they had found and with their skate straps, bound the heavy limbs together and made a leash by which they could pull the improvised sled.

But not without difficulty did the strange method of transportation advance. First some of the heavy limbs spread, letting the twigs and girls down onto the ice and frequently were they spilled from their nest, but all enjoyed it and with much laughter and merry chatter they approached the spot where the others were stacking the brush which was to be set on fire in the evening.

“My eye! Look what’s coming!” shouted Misery Jones, as he espied Viola and the others.

At his cry the rest of the boys and girls followed the direction of his gaze, and when they beheld the moving brush-heap with its two passengers, they shouted and laughed as they skated up to meet them.

“*Ach! die liebliche Schnee-fogeln!*” exclaimed Prof. Schmidt, laughing as he caught sight of the two pretty girls on the brush-pile. “Too bad it iss dat wir de coronation not now can have?”

As he heard the words, Longback took a hasty glance over the crowd assembled near the brush-pile, and not seeing Annabel, exclaimed:

“That’s a good idea, Professor. It’s getting so dark that we can have the bonfire now just as well as later.”

“Oh, no you don’t!” cried Misery. “You can’t get out of the formal ceremony by one got up on the spur of the moment. The real queen who won the race, you know, might object and cause you domestic unhappiness. Even kings are allowed only one queen.”

The result of the boy’s protest was a lunge from Longback’s hockey stick, from which he was able to dodge back in the very nick-of-time.

But the haughty senior was not allowed to get away with his caddish suggestion with only Misery’s reproof.

“Now look here, Sam Dalton! No matter if Annabel Hutchins is a freshy she won the race, and she’s going to be crowned queen when you’re crowned king!” exclaimed several of the older girls, gathering about Longback. “You wouldn’t have made any objection, you know, if it had been Viola, or even Nettie, and they’re only freshmen, too; so if you don’t want to regret it all the rest of the time you’re in Rivertown High School, you’ll be just as nice to Annabel as you possibly can be. The poor child went home crying because she thought we were all laughing at her.”

“If it’s going to make so much trouble, what’s the use of having the mock ceremony at all?” exclaimed Elmer, seeking to come to the aid of his chum.

“That’s it! Be a spoil sport!” cried several of the boys and girls.

“Then I’ll resign my honor in favor of any of you who desire it,” growled Longback.

“Let’s not have the bonfire at all,” exclaimed Viola, flashing a look of contempt at the senior. “Instead let’s go on a hay ride to Cardell – I’m sure I can have the horses.”

“Good! We’ll take along Nettie’s and Socker’s mothers and then we can have a dance at the Lake House!” exclaimed Paul.

The suggestion met with instant approval.

“Let’s have a great big sleigh-ride,” Socker exclaimed. “I guess father will let me take our horses, too, and we can fix up with hay, and it will be a great lark.”

“You all can do as you please,” declared Viola, “but I want Jerry and Paul and Nettie and Mildred and Sally and Elise and Dorothy and Mr. Watson and Misery and Jack and Horace and Annabel to be members of my party.”

Readily the boys and girls accepted, and their hostess requested them to gather at her house at eight o’clock. The omission of Elmer, Longback and Socker from her guests caused looks of amazement to be exchanged between the other boys and girls, while the three fellows themselves blushed.

“I’ll take the rest of our gang!” Socker exclaimed. “We’ll go up to Cardell, anyhow, and have a dance, and Viola, if you want to bring your little friends, we should be very pleased to see both you and them.”

“Will everybody whom I’ve invited go?” asked the proud girl, ignoring the remark.

One after another they accepted until it came to Harry, and he said, mindful of what his aunt had told him:

“I thank you very much, Miss Darrow. I should like to go, but I’m afraid it will be necessary for me to stay at home and study.”

“Wow! Wow! Listen to that!” moaned Misery. “On top of saving the kids and beating Pud’s hockey team, he’s a grind!” and skating over to the new student, he felt of his shoulders, murmuring “It’s just as I thought. I can feel his wings sprouting. My, won’t Rivertown get a reputation when people know we’ve got an angel among the freshies.”

“Well, if he stays in school until he’s a senior, there won’t be any angel left about him,” laughed Jerry. “Come on, Harry, you can go just as well as not. The only thing we have to-morrow, beside drawing and rhetoric, is Latin, and Old Grouch Plummer always flunks everybody in that, so it isn’t worthwhile to study the lesson. Besides, we want to initiate you into the delights of the dancing floor at the Lake House, it’s – ”

“Perhaps he doesn’t dance,” sneered Elmer. “I’ve always heard that a lot of people down at Lawrenceburgh were opposed to dancing, and maybe Watson’s family is among them.”

This utterly uncalled-for slur made even the rich boy’s chums look at him in amazement, but though Harry flushed hotly, the darkness concealed his confusion, and he replied in a steady voice:

“I’m very fond of dancing, but really, Miss Darrow, I must decline your invitation.” And quickly wishing his friends among the boys and girls “good-night,” he skated over to the bank, took off the ice-runners, and went home.

CHAPTER VIII – PAUL’S PARTY

The real reason for Harry’s declination of the invitation to form one of the merry party, was the fact that he knew there would be necessarily some expense attached to the dance, and his circumstances were such that he was obliged to watch his money carefully. Indeed, it had only been at a distinct personal sacrifice that his father had been able to arrange for the boy to go to Rivertown High School. Aware of this fact, he realized that it would not be right for him to start out by associating with those whose parents were in a position to give them liberal allowances for spending money.

For a few moments after Harry’s abrupt departure there was a silence among the boys and girls who were planning the sleighing party and dance.

“There’s no use in allowing a new freshy to interfere with our fun,” Socker exclaimed.

“Who’s going and who isn’t? I want to know, so that I can get the horses and the sled and the hay ready.”

The others sided in with this view of the matter, and arrangements for meeting were quickly made, after which the boys and girls separated, going to their respective homes.

“Don’t you think that was queer in Harry Watson to decline your invitation, Viola?” asked Nettie, as they walked along.

Before the girl could answer, however, a voice behind them exclaimed:

“He hasn’t got money enough to go, or to do anything the rest of us can. Father says he knows Watson’s father and that he’s poorer than a church mouse.”

Surprised to think their conversation had been overheard, the girls turned quickly and beheld Pud Snooks.

“Well, if that’s the real reason Mr. Watson declined to go with us, it’s nothing to be ashamed of. I’m sure it’s better not to go than to sponge on some of the boys who have money,” sniffed Viola. At this taunt, which was particularly stinging for the reason that, although the bully’s father had plenty of money, he gave his son very little to spend, with the result that he was always taking part in the pastimes of his schoolmates, and forcing his companions to pay his share, Snooks growled to himself and slunk away.

For several minutes the two girls walked along in silence.

“Well, if it is true that Harry Watson won’t be able to go to our dances and things, I’m going to be all the nicer to him at school and on the ice, because I like him. Honestly, I do, Nettie,” said Viola.

This frank avowal surprised her chum, but she discreetly kept the fact to herself, and it was not long before the unpleasant incident on the ice was forgotten.

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