

FOR EVERY BOY AND GIRL

"BABY" ELTON, QUARTERBACK

BY LESLIE W. QUIRK

BABY ELTON limped slowly away from the gymnasium in the fast-gathering darkness. He was proud of the limp, for it was an injury of the football-field, a symbol of the pluck with which he had lunched his one hundred and thirty pounds of muscle against some one hundred and eighty pounds of brawn in a successful "tackle," which laid to the ground a padded giant of the "gridiron." Moreover, it had been so common a player who was thus stopped with unerring skill, but the captain of the varsity team.

It was all in a practice game, to be sure, and Elton had been playing on the "scrub" or second eleven. But, for all that, the fact remained that he had stopped the burly full-back captain after half a dozen others had failed. And, to add to the glory of it all, the big player had slowly aisen, wiped off some dirt, gingerly stroked an arm, and had finally said, "Good work, old man!" which is as enthusiastic praise as a really good football-captain ever gives.

It left such a pleasant taste that Elton never once noticed a great bruise on his leg till he was taking his shower-bath a little later. Even then it failed to worry him. He knew bruises were no handicaps when once the turmoil and zest of a game ran through one's veins—always provided there was pluck on the part of the injured person.

As he walked slowly along the street he was conscious of but one trouble in all the wide world. That particular cause for worry was his one hundred and thirty pounds of weight. For football, it must be understood, is a game where weight well-nigh outclasses science; and when weight and science are combined in one man that person is a fit subject for the football-field, and, as readily follows, is given preference over a lighter man who may possess equal skill.

So it had been with Elton. He had donned a football-suit at the beginning of his junior year at college, and in one season had thoroughly mastered all the principles of the game. When his last year in college began, he came forth as a candidate again, with a few pounds more weight and a wonderful knowledge of football. But a new man, twenty pounds heavier, also tried for the same position, that of quarterback, and found no difficulty in securing a place on the team. This left Elton substitute quarterback.

He was thinking of it all now as he trudged painfully along. There was no bitterness against Saunders, the player who had won the coveted position, for he knew the heavier man possessed a decided advantage. Nevertheless it seemed wrong, somehow; he had been one of the few faithful who had never missed practice through all the weary days of rain and sunshine and snow and mud. And now, with the season about to terminate in the great championship game, it looked as if all his hard work were to go for nothing. Certainly there was injustice somewhere.

"Oh, Baby Elton!" Far back along the walk Saunders himself was striding forward with the ease of a man who boards at a training-table—and does not get hurt in practice. Elton was glad of the opportunity for a brief rest, and waited till the other had reached his side. Together the two walked, and recalled victories of the glorious eleven that bade fair to claim championship honors in the West.

"It has been a good season all around," declared Saunders, at last.

"For you it has," said Elton, before his brain fairly formed the words. Once spoken, he would have given much to recall them.

They walked on in silence for a few minutes; then Saunders suddenly stopped.

"Look here, Baby," he said: "I understand just what you mean. Had it not been for me, and for the fact that I am heavier than you, the position of quarterback would of course have been played by you. I'm sorry the way it is, and I'd give a lot if things were different. But I don't see how you can blame me."

"I don't," said Elton, decisively. "I am just sorry for myself." And he tried to laugh. There was a long silence. "You see," he went on, "I graduate next spring. The game Saturday is the last of my college days, the last I shall ever see from the sidelines, the last time, in all probability, I shall ever wear a football suit. It comes hard, old man, to think I shall have no part in it. I believe I would willingly give almost anything just for ten minutes in the midst of the broiling scrimmages, with men piling on top of me, and with the ball in my arms. It means more to me than you can imagine; and yet there is no possibility of my playing unless"—here he hesitated—"well, to be frank, unless you get hurt; and I know I should rather remain on the sidelines than see you laid up."

Saunders smiled. "Do you know, Baby, it is pretty nearly a case where I wish I might get hurt. Sort of suicidal view, is it not?" "Verily it is," said Elton, lightly, in an endeavor to assume his natural jolly nature before entering the dining-hall.

There was a great mass-meeting the Friday evening before the game. It seemed that every student in the whole university attended, and yelled and sang himself hoarse. Football songs of jargon ball

unintelligible were fitted to popular airs and repeated again and again. Then the members of the football team were called upon one by one, and stood upon the platform with great hulking figures and crimson cheeks, and chokingly told how on the morrow they would play the game as they had never played before. Finally the crowd called for "Baby—Baby Elton, the orator"; and he marched up the steps of the platform and grinned pleasantly at the cheering mob of students. And when the crowd had at last quieted, he told tales of other football games; and through it all ran his peculiar vein of happy humor, just as if he had never experienced a disappointment. Next the professors, ignorant of football, rose and told how the game should be won. And then, promptly at nine o'clock, the trainer bunched the great pink-cheeked babies of his and took them off to bed, and the meeting broke up amid the din of the varsity yell.

Saturday dawned bright and clear, with a crisp coldness in the air that foreboded snappy football. Early in the morning special trains began to arrive, each car crowded to its limits, until the staid little university city became a giddy metropolis, fairly swarming with people. And still they came on every train.

to the goal-line; he only grunted cheerfully when he saw Vanders, the fast little end, bring down the opponent who caught the ball before that person had shifted it under his arm. His enthusiasm did not exceed the habitual grin even when the full-back who wore the opposing colors hit the line with a dull thud, and fell back for a loss. Elton knew each man on the team, and good plays were no more than he had a right to expect.

It was a championship game, and to this day men who know all the arts and guiles of football speak of it with awe. Minute after minute the two teams struggled for supremacy. Neither could advance the ball appreciably, and both were forced to resort to kicking tactics. Back and forth sailed the ball with monotonous regularity. Where it was caught, there it was downed. Not a fumble marred the perfect playing; not a hint of undue roughness called the spectators' attention. Each of the teams was backed by traditions of college lore and that loyalty which is the inspiration of great universities.

So all through the first half they fought with dogged hopelessness. Neither side scored; neither team, in fact, was once within striking-distance of the taunting white goal-posts and the coveted line beneath. Up in the grand stand, between halves,

But at last he saw something that made him quiver from head to foot. It was a mass play—a confused tangle of suits and legs and arms; and when the different men had finally disengaged themselves, he saw, stretched full length on the ground, a form he at once recognized. It was that of Saunders.

Before the captain had a chance to beckon, Elton had stripped off his great woollen sweater and was trotting out upon the field.

"Where are you hurt, Saunders?" he asked anxiously.

Saunders smiled as if it were a huge joke.

But the quarter who came running up to examine his wrenched ankle said decidedly:

"Young man, if you are not careful of that ankle, I won't be responsible for the consequences."

Saunders looked at the doctor, and smiled again, as he began: "Football and risks go together, doctor."

But just then he caught sight of the eager face of Elton the substitute, and, with a heavy sigh, he went on: "Still, if you order me off, why, if I must go, I suppose! Come on, Elton!" Then, before the doctor could speak, the trainer walked him dragging off the field. Elton watched the trio till the captain called him to his side and spoke a few encouraging words that did much to quiet the nerves of the plucky little quarterback. Then the shrill blast of a whistle announced that time was up, and a second later the two teams were in position, ready for play.

Elton crouched back of the line, with his heart doing queer antics. He knew the importance of the game, and realized only too well the consequence of a single error. But when the ball was snapped to him, hard and true, it brought back his confidence, and he passed it to the runner with deft precision. And when the signal for the next play was called, his head was as clear and his hand as steady as though he were a veteran.

But still neither team was able to score, and the announcement, "Five minutes more to play," came when the ball was almost in the center of the field.

Just how it happened not one of the spectators could say. But there was a fumble somewhere, and the ball shot high in the air and far to one side, where it rolled lazily along. For an instant it seemed no one of the players had seen it; then there was a sudden rush. But Elton had spied it first, and it was he who reached it in advance of the others. With a quick dive he lunged, head first, straight at the wriggling leather; then, as he gathered it in his arms, he turned a complete somersault, and shot down the field with the ball clutched tightly under his arm.

With thousands of voices urging him on, and counter-thousands praying for him to fall, he ran

straight for the looming goal-posts. The chain lines shot beneath his feet till they looked like cracks in a sidewalk. Twenty yards ahead he could see a determined player waiting to tackle him. To the rear he could hear the breathing and footsteps of the horde which was pursuing him, eager to once get its hands upon him. Up in the grand stand and bleachers banners waved back and forth in a great blur of color, and stout men and women, some with gray hair, jumped up and down in the frenzy of their excitement. The game was in the balance.

Now he was almost upon the tackler, and it seemed he was to be brought down. He ran straight for the man, dodged suddenly, recovered himself, and swung past on the other side. The tackler dived and clutched Elton's mink-skin trousers, but his fingers slipped slowly down as he sought desperately to gain a hold. Elton plunged his open hand against the man, and managed to shake himself free. Then he ran toward the goal with redoubled speed.

They caught him just as he reached the goal-line, and, together with two tacklers, he slid over and scored the touchdown. Then he was allowed by the captain to try for the goal, and dropped the ball neatly over the white bar. The score was 6 to 0.

Time was called a minute later, and the game was won, together with the championship.

There was a sudden roar. Elton looked up quickly, and blushed with dismay as he found the whole crowd shouting his name. Soon the people began to pour out upon the field, and Elton was hoisted on willing shoulders and carried toward the gymnasium. As a body guard the university band closed about him, playing a strange mixture of rag-time and national airs.

Elton looked hopelessly at his captors. Then he gasped with astonishment. One of the persons carrying him was Saunders, who had been forced to go out of the game because of injuries.

"I say!" he exclaimed in Saunders' ear.

Saunders smiled broadly, but made no reply.

"Did n't you get hurt?" demanded the perplexed Elton.

"Get hurt?" said Saunders, vaguely. "Do you mean me?"

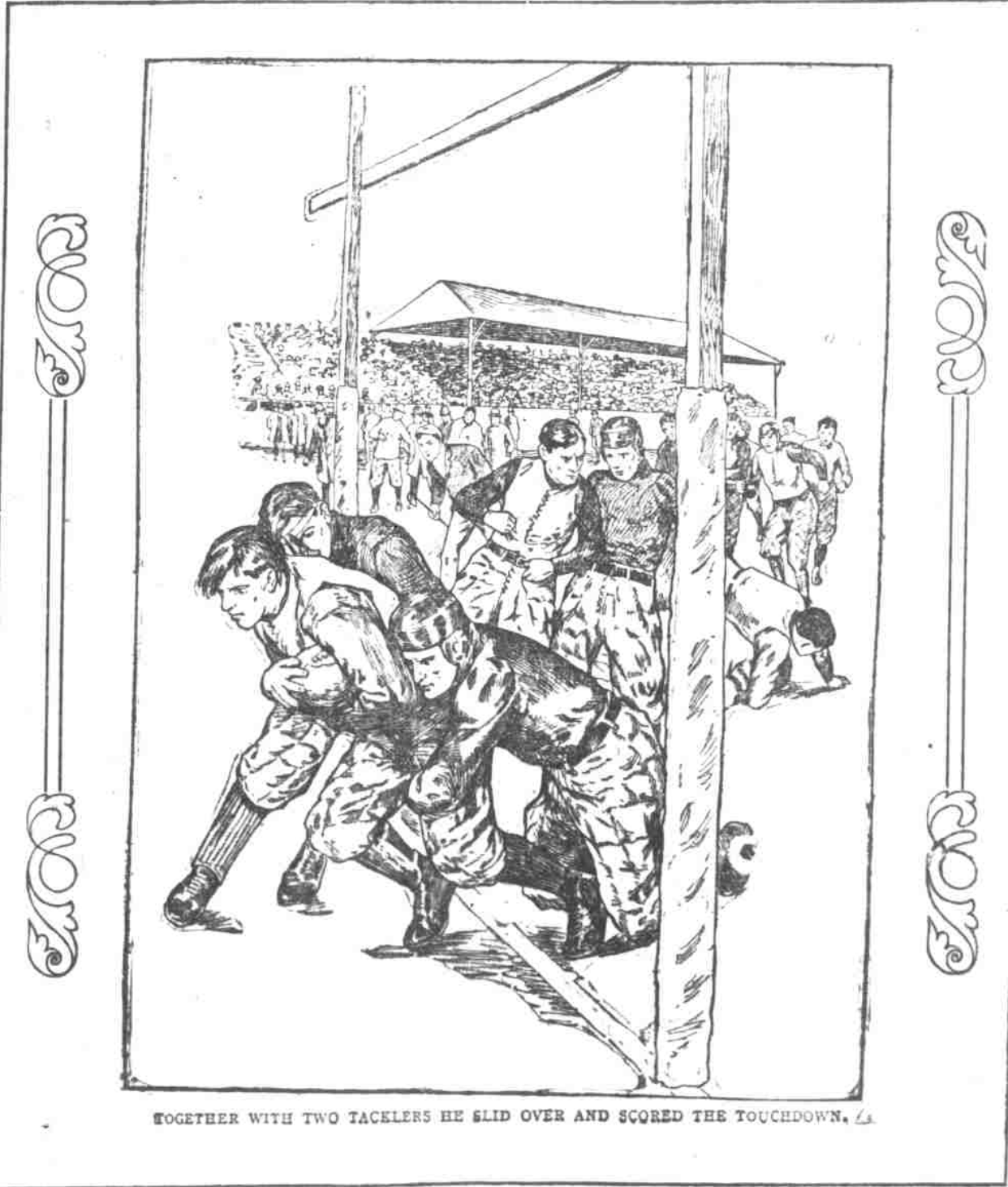
"Why—but—of course you did."

"My ankle was turned a little—but I am not an invalid, am I?" persisted Saunders. "Drop it, Baby; it is all over now."

An inspiration came to Elton. "Did you," he asked solemnly, "consent to leave the game that I might have a chance to play?"

But Saunders only smiled vaguely again, and yelled reprovingly:

"Oh, Baby Elton!"



TOGETHER WITH TWO TACKLERS HE SLID OVER AND SCORED THE TOUCHDOWN.

When Elton, near the rear of the little squad of athletes, trotted clumsily out upon the field a few minutes before the game was called, he emerged into a chaos of noise and people. On every side of the white-ribbed parallelogram great tiers of seats, circus style, slanted skyward. It reminded Elton of a huge funnel, with the broad expanse of blue sky above and the waving banners on the sides that narrowed down to the ridiculous little patch of sawdust cut into curious slices by the glaring white lines. Over it all hung the holiday air of unreality.

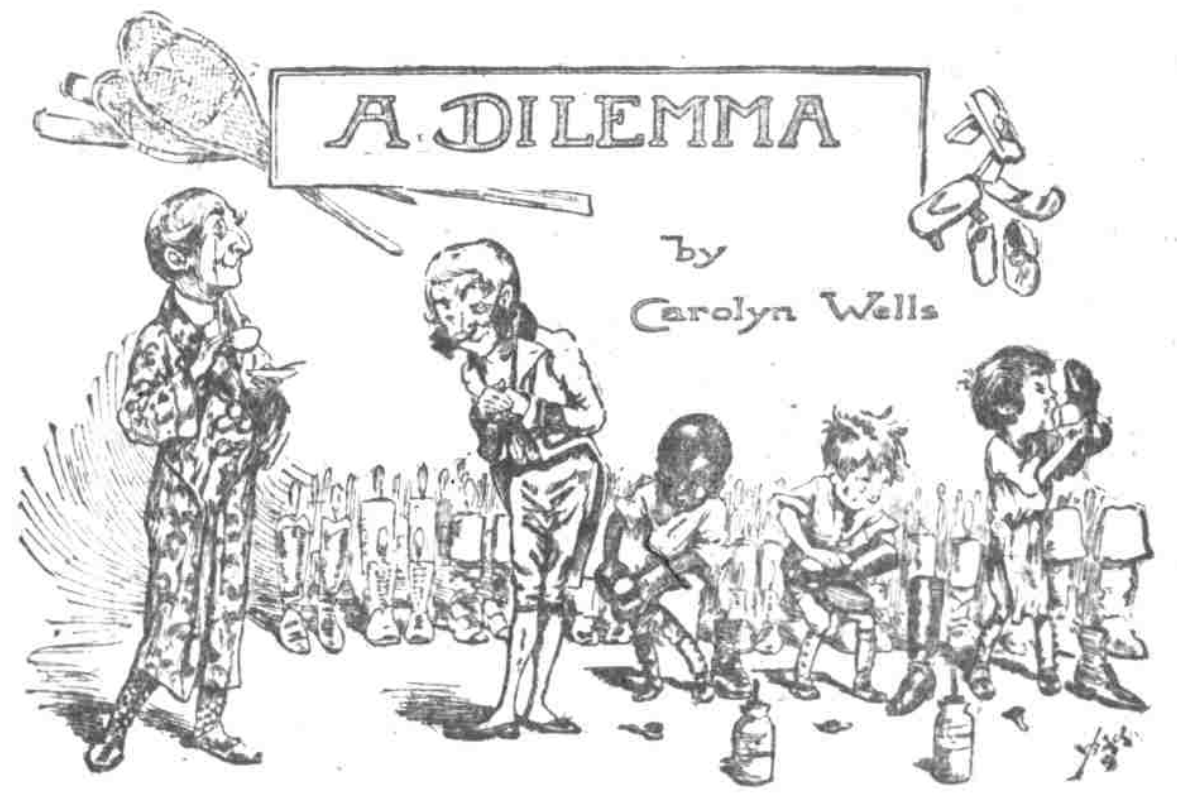
The rival university bands now woke to the occasion, and tried to outdo each other with their rollicking, inspiring music. The bleacher crowds fitted words to the tunes, and howled them forth with deep-lunged vigor. Wordy duels between the owners of megaphones added to the spectators' enjoyment. And last and by far the most pleasing were the varsity yells, one, snappy and short; the other, cadent and long drawn out. Thousands of voices in perfect unison made the yells reverberate and echo far over the little city.

The game started at last. Squatted near the sidelines with a blanket thrown carelessly about his shoulders, Elton sat passive and immovable, as became his stolid Indian appearance. He only grunted with high glee when he saw the captain of his team send the ball in a long, twisting kick almost

men talked of the Harvard-Yale games which had ended with scores of 6 to 0. The rival bands struck up gaily as the players retired for their rest of ten minutes. The bleacher crowd broke forth with its wild medley of yells and songs again, with an occasional new rhyme pertinent to the game. But, for all the noise, the suspense was almost unendurable.

In the dressing-room Elton busied himself rubbing soothing liniment on sore arms and legs, always with a happy bit of encouragement and a cheerful grin. The men were not disheartened over their failure to score, but despaired of doing more than preventing a touch-down on either side during the second half. The coach spoke very briefly; he knew his players and knew how to influence them. "Boys," he said, "you have been playing a perfect game. Try to play a better. Remember, it is to bring the championship to your university."

It seemed the second half was to go the way of the first. For twenty long minutes the two teams strained and tugged, neither winning, neither losing. The play was not as snappy and fast now, for the terrible strain was beginning to tell. Fresh men were substituted in a few of the minor positions, and Elton, each time he saw the captain glance toward the row of blanketed players, felt his heart thumping violently. But his summons failed to come. Saunders, he knew, would play till he dropped from sheer exhaustion.



Sir Lionel Stuyvesant Peter von Toots Had one hundred and ten pairs of beautiful boots: Blüchers and Wellingtons, Hessians and Jacks, Round toes and pointed toes, russets and blacks, High-lows and buskins, of each a full store, Top-boots and sandals and gaiters galore, Balmorals and Congress Strapped, buttoned, and laced; With the finest of silk they were tasseled and faced; Bathing, golf, tennis, and bicycle shoes,

Worsted-worked slippers of marvelous hues, Dancing-pumps, too, of bright patent leather— In short, he had foot-gear for all sorts of weather, For all sorts of places and all sorts of times, For all sorts of ventures in all sorts of climates. Yet Sir Lionel Stuyvesant Peter von Toots Was that kind of a person whom nothing quite suits; And all day he would sit in his large easy-chair, Uncertain which ones 't would be proper to wear.

