

# SPORTS NOVELS

JULY



*Jan 4, 1944*

15¢

MAGAZINE

DAVID CREWE  
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*MANY OTHERS*



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**THREE MINUTE SLUGGER**  
by WILLIAM R. COX



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# SPORTS 10¢ NOVELS



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VOL. 11

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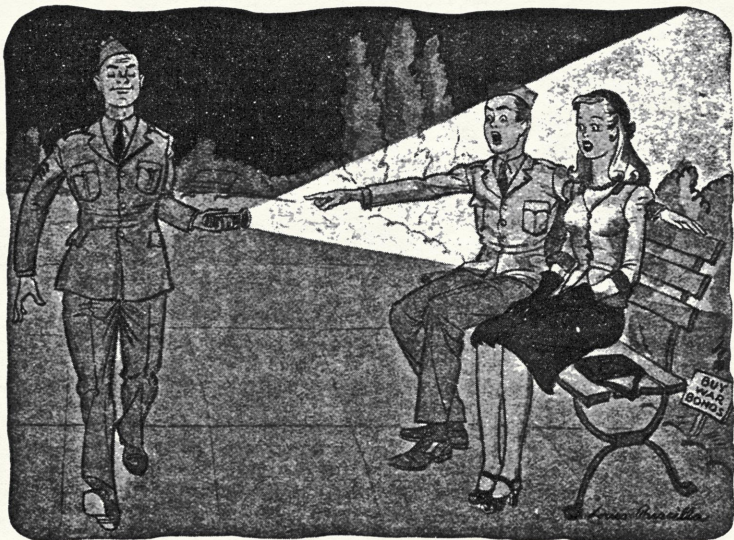
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## THE HOME PLATE

**J**OE GANS punched with his left—in such a true straight line that it seemed as if he used a rapier with his glove at the point.

Sam Langford took the punch without blinking. And well he might. Sam could knock a heavyweight over the ropes with a single punch. No man ever took the full force of one of Sam's blows and stayed on his feet.

No one among the fans expected the lightweight Joe to last long. They had come to witness a foot-race, with Joe doing the running and Sam the chasing. Before the fifteen rounds were over, Sam would wear Joe down—so went the betting—catch him in a corner and knock him silly.

But here it was the third round, and Joe had yet to show the slightest sign of running. Instead, he was hanging just out of range of Sam's short, muscular arms, slipping punches, landing plenty.

The bell rang for the fourth. Joe stepped across the ring, his feet in perfect rhythm. Langford was coming on, too, his scowl showing that he was tired of all this and wanted to get it over. All his fighting life Sam Langford had made dates which he could not keep if his bouts went the limit. Tonight he had an early one.

Joe poked out that left again. Sam pulled back his right shoulder to get his own left closer, then uncorked one of the murderous Langford left hooks for the jaw.

No lightweight, and very few heavyweights, could have picked off a Langford left hook in mid air. Or leaned out of range of the Langford right waiting to break his midsection in two.

It looked as if Sam had him. But Joe stopped his own left halfway to the target. He waited until that left hook was inches away from landing, then with his open right glove he slapped the outside of Sam's

left wrist. It was the famous bear paw block, a trick which Bob Fitzsimmons learned when boxing with a pet bear club and which none but he and Joe Gans ever mastered well enough to use in the ring. Joe moved his right hand on across his face as if he were flicking off a fly. Sam's own strength was working against him then, for Joe was forcing Sam's fist to go faster in the very circle in which Sam had swung it, and the bear paw slap had shortened that circle.

The punch did reach Joe's jaw. But Joe turned his head with it, letting it slip on by.

Now Sam Langford was out of line, his left arm going across his body with the force of his wasted swing, tying him up so, that his left held his own right helpless. Joe Gans swung a wicked right hook to the side of the jaw. Langford tried to twist around as Joe stepped to his right. While Sam's left foot was making the pivot step, Joe snapped another right just below the ear. Sam half tripped over his own right foot, spun into the ropes. Joe caught him with five left hooks before he could get his balance. Sam tried to clinch.

Knowing that in a clinch the superior strength and weight of the other man would soon wear him down and take the speed from his punching, Joe danced back out of range. Sam came on again. The bell ended the round.

The bell rang for the sixth. Sam came on again, faster this time. Still in perfect rhythm Joe danced forward. But he stepped just a little faster, stepping up his speed to the faster pace of Langford. Joe Gans was betting everything on his perfect timing. He was moving in perfect rhythm with Langford, neither outspeeding him enough so that Sam could crash a haymaker through a flurry of swiftly thrown punches,

*(Continued on page 67)*



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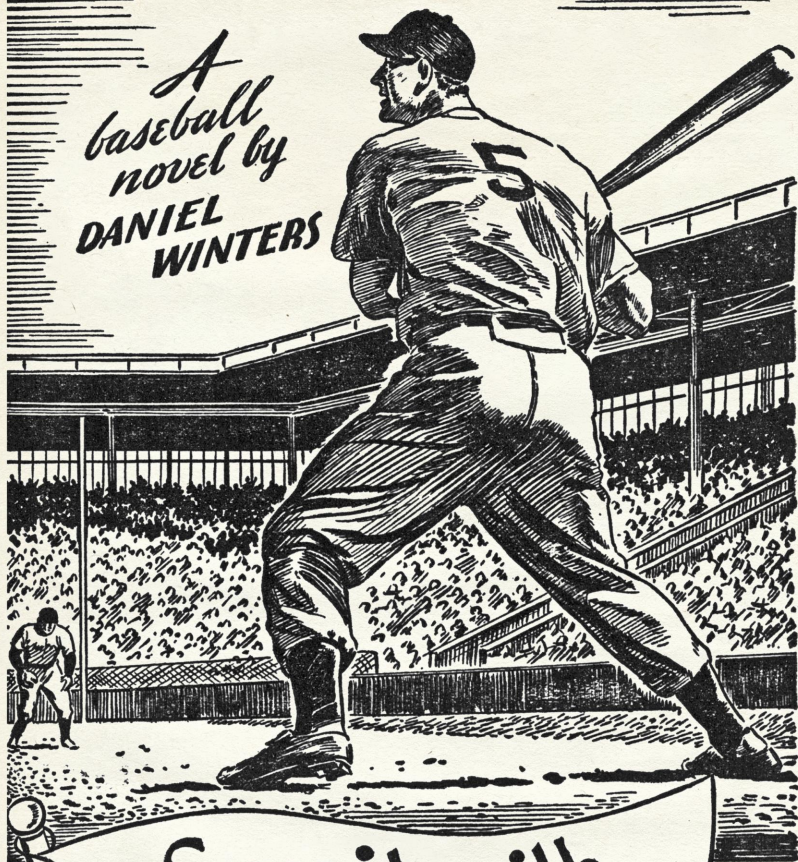
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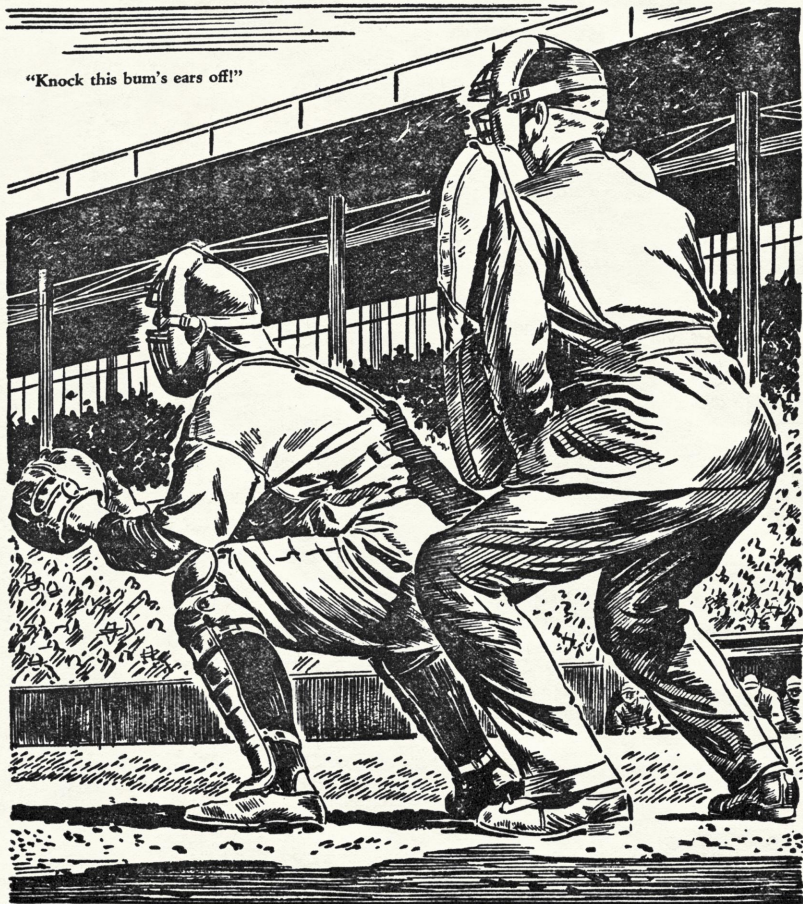
*A  
baseball  
novel by*  
**DANIEL  
WINTERS**



Say it with  
**BASE HITS!**



"Knock this bum's ears off!"



## CHAPTER ONE

### A Fighting Team

*You can own a club and still not be good enough to manage it—unless you're willing to carry the fight to your own team—nine men wearing bargain price tags!*

JOE WALLACE walked around, out at short, then set himself for the hitter. He told Lenny Lake, "All right, Lenny boy. Get it in there. Make it be good." He didn't shout. He spoke the words in almost a conversational tone. It was doubtful that Lake heard him.

And if Lake heard him, he certainly didn't pay any attention, for the next pitch

was high and the Cub hitter walked, filling the bases. It was a bad moment. It was the end of the sixth, and the Cats had tied the score the inning before. Joe wondered whether or not he should take Lake out of there. The big skinny kid was probably tired, for this stay in the West had been tough on the chuckers. But there were only other tired men to put in there. Lake might just as well stay.

"Make this guy put it on the ground," he told Lake. There was one away, and a double play would salt the Cubs for the inning.

Lake pitched, and Morton, the Cub first sacker, laid into it. It was a ground ball, between first and second, and young Tippy Baker went over for it fast. Joe covered second, going over for the throw.

It was a hard-hit ball, and Baker trapped it in his big glove and turned for the throw. There was plenty of time. It was the perfect double killing. But Baker didn't take plenty of time. He came up with the ball, threw from an awkward stoop, and the peg was wide. Joe had to go far off the base for it. The play at second was dead, and he threw to first to get the runner. Morton was out by a step, but a run had scored. The man on third had gone in like a rabbit. It was too bad. That run would be hard to get back.

But there was nothing you could do about it now. The play was over. He called to young Baker, "It's all right, kid. Forget about it. Just take your time on those throws."

And Baker stared at him. He stood there, just off the grass, with his hands on his hips. He said, "Me forget about it? Hell, that throw was right in there! You oughta stretch once in a while, just so you'd remember how it's done. We're not playin' bean-bag, Wallace." He spat and turned away, and Joe heard him saying, "If we didn't have a lot of old men on this damned club, we might win a ball game now and then."

Joe Wallace was twenty-seven, and he thought of this as he started towards Baker. But then he stopped. This was no time to be stupid. When you were manager of a club, you couldn't go brawling around the field, taking a punch at every guy who got under your hide. Baker was twenty. It was his first year up. You could forgive a

lot of lip in a raw kid. Particularly when he was as potentially good as Baker. Joe shook his head and went back to short. The hell with it.

Lake pitched to the next man, and the Cub lofted a long fly to centerfield. Walt Yardley took it without moving.

Joe went into the bench and took a drink from the cooler. He heard Manny Stein, the blocky catcher who had been with the Cats even longer than himself, say to Baker, "Why don't you look alive out there? Take a little time and stop trying to be an acrobat with those pegs. There's no newsreel camera in the stands today."

Joe turned and saw Baker start down along the bench towards Stein. The big kid said, "Who asked you to open your mouth? You old men do a lot of talkin' and damn little ball playin'. Maybe a punch in the mouth—"

"All right," Joe called. "Break it up. We won't win any ball games this way. Forget about the thing. Sit down, Baker."

Baker turned slowly and walked back to his customary place on the bench. Joe walked down to the end and plumped onto his cushion beside Manny Stein. He was tired.

Manny said, "You oughta paste that punk, Joe. He makes more errors than a blind bookkeeper, then shoots his mouth off all over the joint. A punch in the puss would do him a lot of good."

"He's all right," Joe said. "He's young. He'll be good."

"He'll be good for nothing," Manny snarled, "if you let him go along like this. He's more erratic than a cross-eyed southpaw. You step on him fast once in a while and it'll steady him down. You let him run wild like this and you'll ruin him."

Joe said, "I'd look nice, wouldn't I, rollin' around on the grass with him? 'Manager and player fight on field'. Look pretty in the papers."

"It'd look a lot better than seein' the Cats down at the bottom of the league, which is where we'll be in a very short time, if things go on like this."

The Cats were in third place, behind the Sox and the Blues. They had won the pennant and the series, the season before. That had been when Sam Blake was still running the club. There had been only a few changes. Blake was gone and he was



running the job. Baker was at second in place of Larry Wells. They'd acquired big Pete Wilson from the Browns in a trade. Otherwise things were unchanged. But they were in third place. And Manny expressed Joe's fears when he said, "The middle of July, and here we are in third place. And sliding. Fast. If we stay in the first division it will be a miracle. I don't know what the hell's the matter with this outfit."

Joe told him, "Keep your shirt on. The season has a long way to go. We haven't been getting the breaks."

It was true. They'd been losing a great many one-run games. Games that could have gone either way. They weren't playing bad ball, but there was something horribly mechanical about it, and those extra, winning runs that come to a driving, fighting team wouldn't fall their way.

The Cubs held the one-run lead going into the ninth, and the Cats got a couple of men on in the first of the inning with a walk and a nice hit. Manny Stein went up there with his big club, and Joe kept his fingers crossed. There were two out.

Manny fouled one and had one called, then watched two high pitches go by for balls. On the next pitch something funny happened. Joe couldn't tell exactly what it was. Manny moved awkwardly, hitching through a choked swing at a ball that was high and inside. The ball dropped suddenly from the handle of his bat, and the Cub catcher took the tip. The ump waved his hand and yelled, and it was all over.

The Cubs started to leave the field, but not Manny. He turned to the ump and started shouting. He waved his right hand under the ump's nose, and his face was mottled with anger.

Joe started out there. He didn't know what the shouting was about. He had had an idea that the pitch had hit Manny in the hand, but it seemed unlikely. Grady usually had his eyes open.

As Joe came on the scene, Manny turned and said, "This guy is robbin' me. The pitch hits me on the hand and he says it's a foul tip. The bum is blind."

He showed Joe his right hand. There was a bruise at the base of the little finger.

Joe said, "How's about that, Grady?" His voice was merely inquisitive, not hostile or indignant. You had to go about

things easy when you were a manager. You couldn't make a spectacle of yourself. You had to have a little dignity.

The umpire said, "Wallace, that's an old gag. A catcher hurts his meat hand workin' behind the plate, then he comes up to bat and says it wasn't a foul tip. The ball hit him in the hand." He told Manny, "Try working that one on some new kid, Stein. It's got whiskers."

He walked off, and Manny followed him, bellowing indignantly and insultingly. Joe took him by the arm. "Okay, Manny. Cut it out. It's all over."

Manny looked at him in amazement. "Listen," he said. "The ball hit me on the hand. It's my hand. I know. And that blind bum is gettin' paid to see those things. He gets very good money. Why should I stop squawkin'?"

"It's all over. The game's gone. What good does it do to yell?"

Manny shook his head disgustedly. "I don't know what the hell's the matter with you lately. You were never a guy to let something like that slip by. He gets away with this, and the next time there's a close one to call, he's gonna call it against us. Why? Because he knows there's not gonna be any rumpus. It'll be less trouble to call it against us. It's natural."

THEY walked to the clubhouse, and Joe was silent. He was thinking about getting home. He wanted to see Alice and the two kids. And the new apartment. It wasn't new, exactly, but it was so damned big and glittering that he wasn't quite used to it yet.

Manny was simmering down. He said, "Tomorrow we'll be home. You and Alice want to come over and play some cards tomorrow night?"

There had been a lot of that, in the past years. Many evenings of rummy with the Steins and Walt Yardley and his wife. Sandwiches and beer. It had been a lot of fun.

Joe shook his head. "I'm sorry, Manny. We'll be busy. We have a date."

Manny looked at him. "You been busy a lot this year. You've had a lot of dates. I don't think you been over once. What's that new joint look like? They chain you in at night?"

Joe said, "It's just that there are things

to do, Manny. Alice has a few friends in the neighborhood, and I have work to do. Things like that."

Manny said slowly, "Yeah. I kinda get the idea." He didn't speak again, and the discomfort was strong in Joe. He didn't know just what to say. A lot of things had changed.

That night, on the train going back to the big town, he passed Tippy Baker in the aisle. The kid looked at him but made no effort to speak. There was a sullen expression on his face, as if he were waiting for Joe to say something about the afternoon's game, but Joe kept his mouth shut.

He sat in an empty seat. Baker was a problem. Any other time he would have known just what to do. He would have taken the punk under the stands and beaten his ears off, and after that there would be some harmony out around second base. But he couldn't do it now. He was the manager. Things were different.

He was having trouble with big Pete Wilson, too. The guy had a reputation for carrying trouble along with him wherever he went, but he was a hell of a ball player when he stayed in line. Joe had taken a chance on him. And Wilson wasn't turning out so good. He was inclined to be lazy. You had to keep after him all the time. Joe had given him a growl, once, but Wilson had said, "What is this, a plantation? Where's your whip, Simon Legree? I do what I get paid for, no more."

There had been a crowd around, and Joe had been forced to leave it like that. He had felt like belting the guy, but when you ran a club, you had to preserve some dignity.

He sat in the train, and he thought of the time he had come to the Cats, almost nine years ago. He'd been a raw kid, but old Sam Blake had worked on him, blustered him with that rasping tongue, until he had become the best shortstop in the leagues. Strangely, he had never resented the old man's tirades, though he had blasted his way through the league with his hands as well as his big bat. He had played ball all the way, as Sam had taught him to play it, and it suited his fancy perfectly if some other player wanted to continue under the stands when the game on the field was finished. He took lip from no one, regarded every umpire as a deadly enemy.

But things were changed, now. Sam Blake was old and ill, too tired to run a ball club. He had seen that Joe got the job he'd held for so long, then had retired. That had been in the previous winter. Since then, things had been different.

Joe heard the voices, now, up ahead of him. Manny Stein and old Doc Kenny, the club's trainer. He couldn't help overhearing them.

"You know what he was like," Manny said. "He was a ball player. He wouldn't take any lip off no one. Hell, a year ago he would've beaten that Baker kid's ears off at least twice. And Wilson's. And we'd have a ball team. The way things work now, you can't say even 'boo' to an ump."

The Doc agreed with him. "There was never a tougher guy on umpires. They hated to see him come on the field. He's changed."

"Changed?" Manny said. "I think he's died."

They got up and walked off, and Joe grinned sheepishly.

There were some drawbacks to being a big shot.

But he couldn't think of them the next morning, when his cab dropped him at the house. The doorman gave him a big "Good morning, Mr. Wallace," and the foyer was huge and impressive, the elevator that took him to the fifteenth floor shining and amazingly fast.

Alice was well, slender and lovely, and the kids made a big noise when they saw him. He played with them for awhile, then took a walk through the large, expensive apartment. Alice hadn't wanted to move, but he had known it was necessary. You meet a different class of people when you're running a club. You have to do things differently.

He asked, "Anyone call lately?"

Alice nodded. "The Nolans. They knew you'd be home today. They want us to go out tonight. Dinner and a show."

Joe said, "Fine. It'll make a nice evening." The Nolans were all right. They were the sort of people you met in this job. Big dough. Big house and car. Exciting, sort of.

Alice said, frowning, "I don't know, Joe. I thought we might have the Steins over. They haven't ever seen this place. We haven't seen them for a long while."



Joe explained to her as well as he could. "I can't have the players up to the house. Things have changed, honey. There'd be trouble, maybe. Someone would feel slighted. They'd think I was playing favorites, or something."

She looked at him. "That never bothered you before. You never cared what other people thought."

He nodded. "That was before. Now it's different. It's hard to explain. I'll call the Nolans and tell them it's okay."

They had dinner with the Nolans in a small and exclusive restaurant. The menu was in French, and Nolan ordered for them. The food was excellent, the wine exactly right.

Joe had met Nolan at the ball park, after one of the games. He didn't know who had introduced them, or if he had known, he'd forgotten. Nolan, he guessed, was about forty-five or fifty—tall, heavy set, well and expensively dressed. His wife was a bit younger, fashioned in the same mould. They gave an impression of well-being. They knew all the angles, all the right people. The doormen and the headwaiters of the best restaurants and nightclubs knew them and welcomed them. They were good company.

Nolan knew a lot of little stories about prominent characters, and he told them well. The dinner was splendid, and the show they saw was fine and amusing. They had a fine evening. Nolan sympathized with Joe about the way the club had gone in the West. He agreed that their lack of success was temporary, and that as soon as the breaks started to come their way, the Cats would climb.

Going home by themselves, Joe said to Alice, "You wouldn't want a nicer evening. Nolan gave me a tip on a stock he's interested in. I think I'll sink a little dough in it tomorrow. It pays to know people like that."

Alice agreed that the evening had been nice.

Joe expanded. "It's a change for us. Instead of beer and sandwiches and rummy, we spend the night eating in a fancy restaurant, seeing a good show. You climb the hill, you make changes as you go. You can't keep everything the same."

Alice nodded. "I suppose you're right. I don't particularly like the idea of the changes, but I suppose you're right."

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Classy Manager

THE Cats dropped a tough game to the tail-end Bears the next day, and Joe bought five hundred shares of Mid-West Steel. The loss was hard to take, but buying the stock took his mind off baseball for a moment, and that was a good thing.

For as long as he could remember, Joe had thought of little but baseball. It had been on his mind, in his heart. It was that way still, but there were some changes. There was the new apartment to take his mind off things. There were the Nolans, and the new world they represented. There was the new sense of dignity he had to maintain. There were many things to take his mind off the particulars, the minute details of baseball that were its heart, its breath.

The next day it rained, and the game was called off. The Nolans telephoned, wanted Joe and Alice to come out to the track with them. It seemed like a good idea.

Alice didn't want to go, but Joe talked her into it. The clubhouse porch was a crowded, cozy place throughout the afternoon, and Joe had a fine time. He had a few drinks, made a few bets on Nolan's advice, won himself three hundred dollars. They made a date with the Nolans for dinner, and while they were dressing, Joe said, "What have I been doing all these years? Why didn't I learn about these things? You take a taxi ride, you have a few drinks, and now and then you see a horse galloping. Then you go over to a window and a guy hands you three hundred and twenty bucks. It's wonderful."

Alice looked at him, and he said, "What's the matter?"

She shook her head and turned away. "Nothing. It just seems to me that you've forgotten something. I looked at the paper a while ago. The Cats are only a game and a half out of fourth place. Have you noticed?"

"Hell," Joe said. "A guy can't spend twenty-four hours a day worrying about a job."

"You used to," she said. "It seemed to agree with you. I think I liked it that way."

They met the Nolans, and the Nolans

had some other friends along, and it was a gay evening. Joe shoved to one corner of his mind the little worries that were gnawing at him.

The club's two-week stay at home was pleasant. They held onto third place by a half game, for the Browns were having a run of hard luck and couldn't catch them even though they were practically standing still. The evenings were fine. Joe barged around with the Nolans and their crowd, and everything was very jolly. Joe's stock went up a couple of points and he had a paper profit of three thousand dollars. Everything was fine. Everything but Alice, Joe thought. Occasionally he caught her glancing at him in a slightly peculiar way, and there was no longer the old laughter, the old merriment in her eyes. It nettled him. He was having a good time, and he resented the fact that she didn't seem to be enjoying herself. He said, "Look. What's the trouble? There's something on your mind."

"How long has it been since you've been out to see Sam Blake?" she asked him.

Joe figured quickly. "Three weeks ago."

"Three weeks ago you were in St. Louis, losing a game. You had it won until the last inning, then the Browns pushed over three runs. The final score was five to three."

"Okay," he told her. "I'll go up to see him tomorrow."

Sam lived in the suburbs, just outside the city, and Joe went up in the morning. The Cats were playing the Cubs in the afternoon, before hitting the road again.

Sam did not look well, and Joe remarked to himself once again that his illness, combined with his many years, had changed him greatly. It was difficult to realize that this thin, small man, almost lost in the depths of an easy chair, was the same chunky, intense person who had lashed the Cats to a flag last year.

And that had been one of the strange things about Sam Blake. He could burn you with his sarcasm, his vitriolic speech, his biting phrases, but Joe had never seemed to mind. Blake had always been right, and the bite of his acid had quickly worn off. Joe realized now why that had been so. He was so wrapped up in baseball that anything he said in its name you automatically excused, if you were of

the same heart yourself. You took the bitter, ribald advice and went out and acted on it, because you knew that here was a man who knew what he was talking about.

On the way up here, Joe had dreaded the interview. Sam might have plenty to say about the current position of the Cats.

But apparently the old man was too tired, too spent. He was glad to see Joe. He sent for a drink for him, excused his own abstinence. He said, "You're having a little tough luck, eh, Joe?"

Joe nodded. "Losing the tough ones, the close ones. Not getting the breaks."

The old man waved a hand and smiled. "It's all right. Every club is like that once in a while. For a month nothing comes your way but trouble, then all of a sudden you get a hit here, a walk there, and the ball games start falling into your lap. As long as a club is in there hustling all the time, you can be sure of your share of the breaks, sooner or later."

"That's what I tell 'em," Joe said. "It just isn't our week."

Sam asked him, "How's that Baker youngster? You haven't any trouble with him? I heard he was a little lippy."

Joe shook his head. "He's fine. Young, but good. He makes some plays I've never seen anyone else attempt."

Sam nodded. "I know. A little erratic. He'll steady down."

And when it was time to leave, Sam said, "Take care of yourself, Joe. And I know you'll take care of the Cats. I know how you feel about baseball. You played for me long enough for me to find that out. You just stay in there swinging and the games'll come your way. The Cats are better than a third-place team. You'll walk 'em up there."

On the way back to town, Joe felt better. Sam understood about things. The breaks come your way if you wait long enough. . . .

Then, suddenly, it was no longer the middle of July, but the middle of August. The days had gone by with incredible swiftness, and the end of the season was plainly in sight. Joe was just a little frightened. The Sox had a five-game lead on the league, with the Cats and Browns tied for third place, a game and a half behind the Blues.



There had been no miraculous change in the fortunes of the team. They were a good club, smart and experienced in the field, and they had plenty of power at the plate. It was difficult for them to fall into the second division. They really had class, Joe knew.

And that was almost all they had. Few breaks came their way. A great many close games went against them, and no one seemed surprised, and no one seemed to care very much. Manny Stein was out there squawking all the time, and Walt Yardley was leading the league in hitting. A few of the others hustled as they had hustled under Sam Blake, but most of the club was just out there playing ball in their superior fashion. They weren't playing bad ball, for that would be almost impossible for them. But there was something lacking.

Joe realized this fully one day in Chicago, when he sat on the bench with an ankle that had been twisted the previous day. He saw a bunch of fine ball players, only a few of whom seemed to give a damn which way the game went.

He looked at them hard and long, and one truth was apparent to him. This team would never win the pennant. They certainly wouldn't win the flag, and unless they were careful, they wouldn't finish with the first four.

He digested the unpleasant fact slowly and with great difficulty. Up until now he had been nursing illusions. Always, the next day, the next week, had been about to bring a turn of fortune. Now he knew that he'd been kidding himself. This outfit, his Cats, would not be in the money when the season ended.

HE WENT back to town with this knowledge wrapped up in his heart, and it was a bitter burden. That was the evening Nolan told him, "Drop around to the house in the morning, Joe. I've got a good thing coming up, and tomorrow I think I can give you some information on it."

They were playing a double-header with the leading Sox the next day. Joe said, "I have to be out to the park early. Lot of work."



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Nolan smiled, "It won't take long. Just a few minutes."

"Okay," Joe told him.

The next day at eleven, he was at Nolan's big, quietly expensive place. A maid showed him to a room that was a combination study and office. Nolan was there, behind a big desk, upon which Joe was surprised to see four phones. There were two other men in the room, and Joe did not remember ever having seen them before. Nolan came across the room to meet him. He introduced the two other men. Dorgan and Mills. Joe refused a drink and Nolan poured one for himself. He waved Joe to a chair, looked at the two men briefly, then said, "Joe, there's no reason why we should waste any time. I know you're a busy man. I won't keep you long."

There was something strange, something tight and unnice, about the atmosphere. Joe began to sweat a little, though the room was cool enough. He had a stupid, sudden thought that he would rather be some place else. He had a feeling that this was not to be a happy hour.

Nolan leaned forward across the heavy desk. He said, "Joe, we're not children. There's no reason we shouldn't be able to talk to each other like smart people. We know each other pretty well."

Joe didn't say anything. He knew he wouldn't like what was to come. He didn't know what it was, but he knew he wouldn't like it.

Nolan looked at him for a long moment before he went on. "A long time ago," he said, "in the winter, a lot of smart people thought the Cats would be right up in there at the finish. The club looked good. Maybe they looked like winners."

Joe stared at him, his eyes not moving.

"There was a lot of smart money out. On the Cats. Big money, at very nice odds. I took a lot of it. It was too nice, too cheap to pass up. I took a lot of it merely as a speculation. The Cats looked good to me, too, but I say that a man can never afford to pass up a bet. Particularly if the odds are right. You could get almost anything you wanted, seven or eight months ago, that the Cats would finish in the first division. Smart guys were giving that away. You know that."

Joe didn't feel like speaking just then.

Nolan took a sip of his drink. His eyes had never left Joe. "It looks now," he said, "as if those people weren't so smart. It looks as if the Cats have a pretty good chance of finishing in the second division. A very good chance."

Joe said, "So what?" He wanted to get this straight. He knew what Nolan was going to say, but he wanted to hear it. He wanted to be sure. Good Lord! What the hell had he been thinking of all this time?

"But what there's a lot of money on the line," Nolan went on, speaking swiftly and steadily now. "It's smart to help things along. It's smart not to depend too much on chance. Give things a push, if you can. Keep the old ball rolling. See what I mean?"

"I think I get the idea," Joe told him grimly.

Nolan said, "Okay." He was smiling, now. "Here's what I thought would be a good idea. The Browns should win today. They're playing the Bears. The Cubs are just half a game in back of you, and they're coming along fast. If the Sox beat you twice today, you're in fifth place. And the way things are going, you'd probably stay there. Just in the natural course of events. The way the teams are playing, the way the rest of the schedule works out. And you could make that a pretty certain thing—" he leaned forward—"by doing nothing. Just give the Sox the breaks. Don't make it even slightly tough for them. Just pitch Dusty Evans in one game, and maybe Eddie Doyle in the other." He shrugged his shoulders. "You're just giving the rest of your pitchers a day's break. They've been working hard."

Joe thought a lot of things. He thought of the months he had known this man, without knowing anything about him. He thought of Sam Blake, and what the old man would say about a little talk of this kind. He thought of what baseball meant to Sam, and to himself, and how little it meant to this man across the desk. In a day, this Nolan would cast away all the efforts of a Blake lifetime. In an afternoon, he expected Joe to betray all the truths he believed in. For a few dollars, he had an idea that Joe would throw his principles, his ideas, out the window.

And a cold anger invaded him. Anger at



himself, for having become mixed up with this louse, anger at this man who presumed so much.

Nolan seemed to read his thoughts. He said, "After all, Wallace, you're slightly indebted to me, you know. That stock I had you buy—a few thousand you won at the races. You owe me a favor."

Nolan was a big man, but when Joe reached across the desk swiftly and grabbed him by the lapels of his coat, he came off the chair and slid across the desk easily enough. He was stretched across the desk in a strained attitude when Joe hit him, and the impact knocked him off the desk to the floor.

Joe turned, and he noticed then that Mr. Dorgan and Mr. Mills were both large gentlemen, and had evidently been brought here for that reason. Dorgan came toward him now, and one hand was in his pocket. Joe brought his knee up sharply against the man's groin, grabbed him as he slumped. His hand went into Dorgan's pocket, closed around the gun that was there. He held the limp figure in front of him and faced Mills, the gun steady, if strange-feeling, in his hand. Mills' hand was just emerging from his pocket, and Joe caught the flash of metal. He said, "Take your hand out of your pocket, Mills, and be sure there's nothing in it."

Mills cursed him in a cold monotone but raised his hands. Joe said, "Turn around." The man turned slowly, and Joe stepped over to him and belted him over the head with the gun. Mills fell like an axed tree.

Joe stepped back. Nolan had come off the floor, now, and was watching him warily. Joe said, "And that's the way it goes, Nolan. You know what I think about your little idea now. We might lose today, but if we do, your hand won't be in it. About those stocks, and the tips on the horses. Thanks. A little money always comes in handy. Consider yourself a sucker. You say I owe you something. Maybe this will square things."

He hooked his left to Nolan's head and the man went down again. Joe surveyed the three men on the floor and was aware of some surprise. Things had happened swiftly. He threw the gun down and walked out of the room. He found the door easily and the warmth of the sun-filled street went into him again.

He had just about enough time to get to the park and dress. He called a cab and relaxed on the cushions. He found that he was trembling. He lit a cigarette with a bit of difficulty.

So here he was, big-shot manager and everything. He had walked along like a kid, taking Nolan without question, without curiosity. He'd been led as though he'd had a ring through his nose. All the good times, the fine evenings, the days at the track. Bait, to lead him up to this moment. He had never thought to inquire fully as to Nolan's business. It was a fine business, all right. A wonderful business. A big gambler. A sure-shot guy. A sucker trap.

**M**OST of the club was out on the field when he got to the park. He dressed quickly. Just as he was going out, young Baker came in.

Joe said, "You're late, kid. Snap it up." Baker looked at him. "What's the rush? There's plenty of time. I had a big night. Take it easy."

Joe looked at him for a moment and said nothing. Then he went out on the field. A man had to watch himself. A manager owned some dignity from which he should not too abruptly depart.

He lost his nervousness in the infield drill. He worked hard, and in a little while he was loose and easy. Manny said to him, when they were in on the bench, "What the hell's the matter with you today? You gallop around out there like you was eight years old."

Joe grinned at him, and it was good to smile. He said, "I'm nine years old. Today's my birthday. What are you gonna give me?"

Manny shook his head. "A butterfly net. I always do. Remember?"

Joe pitched Ken Morgan in that first game. He talked to the club on the bench before they went on the field. He said, "We been goin' lousy. We take these two games and where are we? Four and a half games out of the lead. That doesn't sound bad, does it?"

"It sounds like a little fairy tale," Baker said scornfully.

"Two games from the Sox. With them pitchin' Quilan and Warner."

Quilan and Warner were among the first

four pitchers in the league, and they would be in there today. Joe knew that the Sox could use these two games.

He looked at Baker, then told the bunch of them, "I want you to hustle out there today. Move as if you weren't anchored. Get Morgan a few hits."

But for the first five innings, they couldn't touch Quilan. The tall left-hander was having a good day, and on his good days Quilan was a tough man to beat. Joe opened the sixth with a long single to right, and Manny Stein, following him, smashed a hard hit ball over second. Joe made third on a lovely slide, for the ball came in fast from the outfield. Harry Lash poled a long fly to centerfield, and Joe walked in on the catch. It was the first run of the game. Wilson grounded to third, and Morgan popped up a foul that Forio, the Sox catcher, took.

But they had a run. It wasn't much, but the way things had been going, it looked mighty fine to Joe. Morgan was pitching nicely, steadily. He was making the Sox hit into the ground, and in five innings Joe had six chances. He was working for his money today.

And he loved it. A weight seemed to have been lifted from his shoulders. He shouted encouragement to Morgan with a full voice, and once, going into the dug-out, he found Manny looking at him in a puzzled manner.

But now the Sox came up there, and they wanted that run back. Cotton, the right-fielder, got a scratch hit down the third base line that Harry Lash could do nothing with. Aryes flied out to Joe, a terrific hoist that Joe took back on the grass. Then Orden hit the first pitch, and it came bolting down to Joe as if it had been shot out of a gun. It was off to his right, and he went over and made the play, the ball fighting his big hands. He turned for the throw to second, saw Baker coming over, and let it ride. It was a nice peg, a trifle low, and Baker took it. He was off balance somehow, and when he turned for the throw to first, Orden was almost to the bag. It seemed to Joe that the play could be made, but Baker held it up. He didn't make the throw.

Instead, he held the ball and looked at Joe. His face was twisted with annoyance. He said, "Get it up in the air, will you?

Get it where a man can put his hands on it. Get it up." He turned away and threw the ball to Morgan, and Joe felt anger rising in him like a tide. The side should have been out, but now there was still a man on base with the tying run. He held himself in check.

But Morgan pitched carefully to Forio, and the burly catcher grounded down to first. George Sax hardly had to move. He stooped down for the ball and stepped on the sack.

They went into the bench, and Joe walked to the door that led under the stands, a sheltered road to the dressing room. He said, "Baker. Come here a minute."

Baker was at the fountain, and he looked up and said, "Whadaya want?"

"I want to talk to you," Joe told him. "I'd like to tell you a little story."

The kid came, then, mingled anger and scorn on his face. Joe stepped away from the door, into the cool and shadowed world under the stands. The big kid followed him and said, "What's on your mind?"

Joe hit him with a right hand to the side of the head, and Baker staggered under the blow. Joe hooked the left, and he went down. He was up cursing, his big hands moving, and Joe slashed him with a left and right, then knocked him down again with a right. He got up slowly this time, and Joe gave him both barrels again. He went down like a falling house.

He lay on the ground, supporting himself on one elbow, and Joe squatted on his haunches just in front of him and said, "The honeymoon is over. From now on you play ball or you go so far back into the bushes that they'll *never* find you. You loaf on me or give me any more of your lip, and I'll beat your brains out every time. You get the idea?"

Baker's face was beginning to puff up. He looked at Joe for a long moment. Then he said, "I get the idea."

Joe went back into the dugout. Baker had closed the door after him when he went under the stands. A couple of guys looked up when Joe entered, but no one said anything. Joe took a drink from the cooler, then sat down at the end of the bench, in the seat next to Manny. Baker came in, then. He had a handkerchief to his lips, but it could not hide the livid



bruise that was beginning to swell on the left side of his face. There were a few startled exclamations along the bench at his arrival, then the talk stopped suddenly. Manny whistled low, even between his teeth, and said, "Well, what do you know about that!"

He looked at Joe. "So this is your ninth birthday."

Joe said, "Yeah."

Manny said, "Remind me to give you something besides the butterfly net. Remind me to buy you a beer. It seems you've come of age."

They made their one run stick. The Sox tried hard, but Morgan just wouldn't let them get a piece of it. In the ninth inning it looked bad. The first two Sox went down quietly enough on a strikeout and a ground ball to third, but Willis, the Sox third sacker, got hold of a high hard one and lofted it out to right. Joe watched the ball anxiously. It was high and long, and Wilson went over for it, close to the wall. At the last minute he sheered away, and the ball fell, hit the base of the concrete, and rolled away. Willis got to third before the ball came in.

The stands were in an uproar, and the Sox were making a lot of noise on their bench. Quilan came up, and Joe was worried. The pitcher was a bad man with a bat. He laced the first pitch on a line between first and second, and Joe cursed. But the oath turned to a shout of joy in his throat as Tippy Baker went up into the air from no place at all, his glove in exactly the right spot. The ball rocketed in and almost turned him in the air. He came down with it, grinning, and held it up for Joe to see. It had been a beautiful play. Joe waved a joyous glove at him and headed for the clubhouse. It had been a nice game to win.

There was another one coming up that he wanted badly. It would be even tougher to take, he knew, for the Sox would fight for it furiously, enraged at having been denied the first one. They'd have Warner in there chucking them, too. The big guy hadn't worked in four days, Joe knew, and he would be hot, a tough man to handle.

And he had no one to throw at them but Slip Dess, and Slip was a tired guy, for he had been working hard. But he'd be in there trying. You could always depend on

Slip to peg them right in there until the arm gave out.

The clubhouse was a little noisier than usual. Most of the time it was quiet. Too quiet, Joe knew now. But today, while the guys took their showers and had a sandwich and a glass of beer, there was talk, and a little laughter. Tommy Wells, who patrolled left field, stopped young Baker and asked him, "What the hell happened to your puss?"

Baker looked at him. "I ran into a door. Why?"

Wells grinned at him. "Nothin'. I was just wondering."

It was a good moment for Joe when he saw the kid grin back at Wells. The Baker department, he knew, would need no further attention.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Exit the Crook

IT WAS almost time for them to go out for the second, and he told them, "This one is important. From here it may not look like much, but I'll promise you something. If we take this game, we take the pennant."

He looked at them, at each man's face. He said, "That's a promise. If we beat them this time out, we'll beat them all the way. They'll be four and a half games ahead, but we'll be playin' ball and we got a little more than a month. You win this one and we'll be in the series."

There was a snort from the corner of the room, and Joe looked. It was big Pete Wilson. The guy had a funny smile on his face, and Joe said, "Oh, yeah. I almost forgot. What the hell was the matter with you on that fly ball, Wilson? You afraid of that wall? You think it was gonna reach out and bite you? You had a foot to spare."

"I haven't got a head to spare," Wilson told him. "I don't get paid for running into a chunk of concrete."

"You get paid to catch flies," Joe told him. "To move around once in a while. And from now on, you better move."

Wilson laughed at him. He said, "What are you trying to do, Wallace? Scare me? Like you scared that punk?" He nodded toward Baker.

This was the time. It could not be fur-

ther delayed. Today was the day to have done with all this sort of trouble. Joe walked to Wilson, and his intention must have been clear in his eyes, for Wilson threw the first punch, a high right hand that caught Joe full in the mouth and banged him up against a locker. He was hurt, for the big guy could hit, but he walked back, his head low, and he threw both hands to the head. He hit with the left, missed with the right, and was punished with a steaming right hand to the side of the face. He belted Wilson with the right hand, hooked the left, and saw with pleasure the crimson smear that spread across the other man's face.

Joe clubbed with the right again, twice, then hooked the left viciously. Wilson was on his way down when Joe hit him with the full right hand. He bounced off the floor, then settled back. He wanted no more. He rolled onto his face, then got to his knees. Joe waited, but Wilson made a funny little motion with his hand, and it was all over.

Joe told Doc Kenny, "Fix him up, Doc." He turned to the rest of the club. "Let's get on out there. We have a little work to do." He went alone to his little office and made the necessary repairs to his face, then went out on the field.

It was a ball game. The Sox put Bill Warner in there, and the man was terrific. His high hard one had a hop on it today, which meant that a man hardly had time to get the bat off his shoulder. He poured the heavy thunder down the slot for seven innings, and there was not a Cat who could get a piece of it.

Slip Dess had never seen the day when he could pitch like Warner, but he was a smart hurler, a hard worker. And he had a ball club in back of him that was really working. They made all the easy plays, and they made some plays that looked impossible. The Sox got three scattered hits in seven innings, and no runs.

But in the eighth, Dess tired. Joe had seen it coming, and he had Dusty Evans down in the bull-pen, warming up. For a couple of innings Dusty could do a job, and there was no one else to put in there.

Joe wrapped an arm around his shoulder. He said, "It's all right, Slip. You had a good day. We'll save this one for you yet. This is a game you will not lose."

Dusty Evans came in, then. Dusty was a long and lanky man who had been in the leagues when they still had to chase the Indians out of the outfield grass before a game. He drank too much and his arm was gone, but he knew the hitters like a book. He had a fine head and he pitched with it and almost nothing else. He took his warm-up pitches and the Sox were wild on their bench. Joe stood beside him, and when Dusty was ready to pitch, Joe said, "Take it easy on those boys, Dusty. Let them hit that thing."

Dusty grinned at him. "What else can I do, Joe?"

He pegged the first one in there, and Orden hit it. The pitch was low, on the outside, and the ball was on the ground. Joe went over to cover the sack and Tippy Baker made the play. The ball was slow, and Baker went all the way into the grass. He grabbed it and threw from some impossible position, but the peg was perfect. Joe threw to first for the double, and the Sox were a sore and sorry crowd as they came out onto the field.

Joe led off in the eighth. Warner burned one past his letters a bit too close. It might have been a strike. Umpire Joe Galish, behind the plate, called it a strike. He called it calmly, methodically, and he was totally unprepared for the roaring, wrathful figure who contested his judgment. Joe hadn't railed at an ump all season, and Galish was astounded. But he was not so astonished that after a moment he could not say to Joe, "Just say another word, Wallace, and you're out of the ball game. Just say another word!"

Joe stuck his face close to Galish's and said slowly, and with emphasis, "Another word!"

Galish looked at him speechlessly, and Joe returned to the plate, grinning. He hefted his stick and called to Warner, "Come on, you spraddle-legged bum. Throw one in here I can reach and I'll paste it down your throat."

He could see Warner start to simmer, and he swung on the pitch, playing the hunch. He was right. It was in there, right down the slot, riding like a cannon ball. He hit it cleanly, and it roared back at the mound, bound for centerfield. Warner couldn't get out of the way. He tried to throw himself to one side, but the ball



whanged him in the left shoulder and bounced out past second base.

Joe made first and took a turn. There was confusion out near the ball, and no one was close to second. He kept right on running, and he cut the legs out from under Javin, the shortstop, who had come over to take the throw. Javin went one way and the ball went the other. Joe stood on the sack and dusted his pants. He called to Warner, "You're through, you bum. Go home while you got your health."

At the plate, Manny echoed his sentiments. He asked Warner if his poor shoulder hurt, and the big right-hander tried to fool him with a slow curve. Manny belted it on a line against the left-field fence, and Joe scored trotting. He yelled at Warner all the way down the basepath from third. When he crossed the plate, Galish, his face white and strained, said to him, "Watch your language, Wallace. There are ladies in the stands."

"If they can't hear any better than you can see," Joe told him, "they have nothing to worry about." He told Harry Lash, up at the plate, "Knock this bum's ears off. He's through, washed up." He was sure Warner heard him.

The man was enraged. He threw three balls that were wide, then grooved one in his anxiety. Lash hammered it over first base for a lovely double, and Manny came panting in from second. He said, "All this running is no good for a man my age, but I like it."

Warner was finished. Pete Wilson went up and smashed a single through the box, and even Dusty Evans scratched out a handle hit that scored Lash from third. The head of the Cats' batting order was up, and the Sox threw Ernie East in to attempt to stem the flood.

It was hopeless. The Cats did better than bat around. Every time the guy at the plate moved his bat, the ball was right there waiting for it. They got eight runs before the side was out. It was murder.

They took the field for the first of the ninth, which was a large and hilarious joke. The Sox were so beside themselves that Old Dusty struck out the first two men. He turned to Joe and said, "What the hell goes on here?" He didn't average ten strikeouts a season.

The last hit a dribbler through the box,

and Dusty snagged it and threw to first. It was all over and it was lovely. Joe ran for the showers.

UNDER the cool, refreshing water, he examined the idea. The rest of the club was shouting in the other room; his ear was accustomed to noise like this, and he could define it. This was confidence, and the joy that comes with winning, the laughter of men who are masters at their trade. This was the sound of a fighting ball club that believed in itself. Joe grinned, for he had no worries about the rest of the season.

He dressed slowly in his office, and yelled to a kid to bring him a dozen bottles of cold beer and Manny Stein and Walt Yardley. He called Alice on the phone, and he said, "What are you doing tonight, hon?"

She took a little time in replying, as if she were thinking about something. When she spoke, there was a strange little note of happiness in her voice. She said, "I don't know, Joe. What am I doing to-night?"

"How's about Manny and Walt Yardley bringin' their wives over? Some sandwiches and beer and some rummy. Sound all right?"

Her laughter over the phone was a swell thing to hear. It fitted in well with the happenings of the day. She said, "It'll be fine."

Joe said, "Okay. I'll be home in a little while."

Then she asked, with amusement in her tone, with the happiness still part of her voice, "Joe, you been fighting?"

He was surprised. "A little bit. Why? How did you know?"

She really laughed, then, and Joe had to grin.

He said, "Okay. I forgot to duck a couple. You mind?"

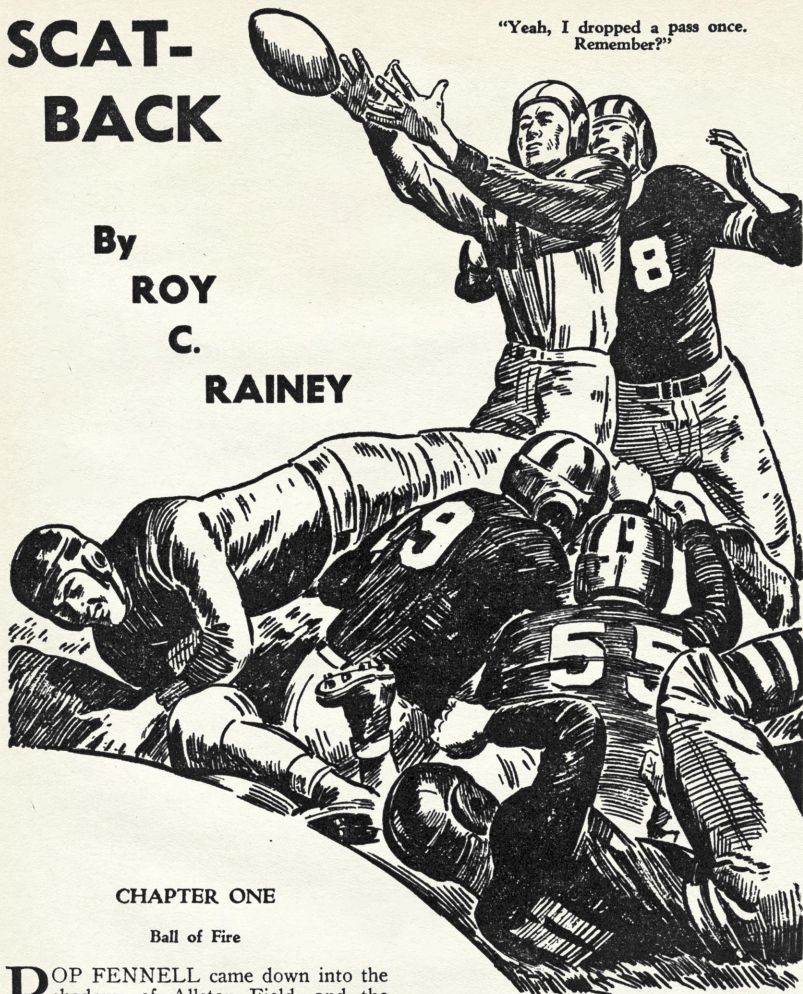
He could almost see her shaking her head. She said, "If you can talk at all, it isn't bad, and I don't mind at all. In fact, I'm glad, Joe. I've been waiting for a long time to hear you talk in that funny way. I know now that things are right. That it will be like old times."

Joe thought about the matter, before he hung up. He said, "I guess you're right." He sat there, then, and the kid came in with the cold beer and Manny and Walt.

# SCAT- BACK

By  
**ROY  
C.  
RAINEY**

"Yeah, I dropped a pass once.  
Remember?"



## CHAPTER ONE

### Ball of Fire

**P**OP FENNELL came down into the shadows of Allston Field, and the smell of the turf was good to his nostrils.

Everything was the same, he was thinking. The cleat-marked sod out there, with the memories of the roaring thunder that had been and would be again. And the faces that were a part of the pattern of remembered glory, the glory that would always be a part of Allston, as long as he lived.

*"You got touchdowns in them legs, pal. But I'll tell you one thing. We'd be a better ball club if you didn't exist. Because we'd be playing for eleven guys we liked—instead of one we hate!"*



Everything was the same, save one. There wasn't a single face out there that he knew, even by reputation.

Some thirty giants in football monkey suits were out there, lolling on the grass. They were big men, powerful guys. They looked at the newcomer, and a couple of them started to grin and kept their faces straight, with an effort.

Pop walked straight past them. His eyes had narrowed a bit, but apart from that he was impassive. He had seen that sort of thing for many bitter years now. Once it had hurt him, fired him to heights that were beyond his natural ability. Now he could take it in stride.

But when he had almost passed the line, a big grizzled giant shouted, "Pop Fennell! I played against you in the Ohio game. It's gonna be good havin' you on the same side of the line, for a change!"

And after that they clustered around fast, and the half pitying grins were gone. In spite of the war, Pop Fennell, the pocket-sized All-American who never carried a ball, was something of a legend.

Pop looked around, at the ring of wide-eyed faces. They looked like a good gang. There was Moose Alfredo, the mastodon center from Oregon. Turk had described him so vividly that he'd never miss that ugly puss. There was Ink Diamond, the tall string bean with the snake hips. There was dour Polly Porter, the Brown transfer who was supposed to be strictly hipper dipper and then some. The rest of them were guys named Joe, but they had the indefinable look of football players about them. It was going to be quite a year, in spite of a thug named Hitler.

A whistle shrilled stridently, and a broad-shouldered man came out of the locker room, pushing his cap up on his head. He looked at Pop and said, "Hyah, keed. Can we make anything outa these monkeys?"

Pop gulped, a little startled. And then he remembered. He was supposed to be captain of this ball club. And that was a funny one. Because he was the only man left, out of a team that had made football history. The war had taken the rest of them.

"Let's find out, mister," he said.

And then Turk Anderson had them squatting in front of him.

The big Allston mentor didn't waste any time.

"Okay," he said, a little bored-like. "So you joined the Navy to see the world, and they sent you here for your lumps. You played your football at other schools, and you wanna see what makes Allston lick them all. Well—I'm here to show you. If you can take it." The big man spat, and there was a harried look back of his eyes.

"I had a hell of a club," he said. "They took it away from me, an' you're supposed to make up the difference. Personally, I don't think you can carry the shoes of the guys that are gone."

There was a pause, and a choked half growl, half snicker came from the back row.

Turk looked up. It was Moose Alfredo. The big center's eyes were hard and uncompromising. Turk nodded, a little thoughtfully.

"But there's only one way to find out," he said. "Pop, take these alleged football players out there an' give 'em a slice of hell. Me, I can't stand to look at it. See you later." He wheeled and went into the clubhouse again.

There was a dead silence. Out of it, Pop said, "All right, gentlemen. Let's kick that ball around and see what we have."

Pop was a funny guy to look at. He was all of five feet six with his shoes on, and he weighed one-fifty soaking wet. His hair was curly and his cheeks were pink, and he had a little schoolboy voice that still squeaked a little. Which was why a big man said, a little querulously, "What the hell, sonny? We been around—an' I don't like little boys bossing grown men much."

Pop Fennell stopped in his tracks. He had expected it. It wasn't fair for Turk to make him do it, he was thinking. But it was there in front of him, and there was only one thing to do.

He walked over, pushing a bigger man aside. He said, "What's the name, mister?" Somehow, the adolescent break had whipped away from his voice. The man who had spoken blinked.

"Name of Morris," that worthy drawled. "Rube Morris to his friends. An' a hell of an end, if he gets interested."

Pop said, "Yeah. Texas A. and M., Navy transfer. Two years' varsity experience. One year All-Southern." He nodded. There was something in back of his mild blue eyes that was a little like unleashed murder. "You fumbled a pass in the fourth quarter

of the Texas game," he said. "You were on the ten-yard line, with a clear field ahead of you. Right?"

Rube Morris mumbled, "What the hell. I—"

Pop said, "You lost that ball game. It was a human error, the papers said, and every man has a right to a couple of mistakes in his career. Well, my friend? Texas A. and M. ranked sixteenth nationally. Allston ranked first. We don't make human errors at Allston. Sonny, you called me, I call you—Jerk. Come out here and learn a few things, Jerk. If you catch on fast enough, maybe you can last through the first cut. But I'm making no promises."

And this time there were no smiles, and the friendliness was gone. Because you can call a guy a lot of things, but when you remind him of a football game he has lost for his college, you've stamped yourself as a certain type of gent. And when, in addition, you're too little to take a swing at, you've added a smelly angle to that picture.

They went out there, and the looseness was gone, and they showed Pop Fennell what they had. But there would be no more half friendly looks from these kids, not for many a long day.

**H**E CAME into the private office, and Turk was waiting for him. Turk took one look at his eyes and said, "You did it. Don't tell me how. The man they love to hate. Whadda we got, kid?"

Pop threw his helmet in the corner and sat down, a little wearily.

"Green stuff, most of it," he said. "This Polly Porter is good, and Ink Diamond, maybe. There's an end named Rube Morris who looked like Larry Kelly, but he was so blamed mad I don't know whether he was himself or just out of his head from wanting to sock me."

Turk nodded, grinning his crooked smile.

"Yeah," he said. "I remember the first time you did that. You were a lousy little pint-sized third stringer, an' I stuck you into that Yale game. You didn't have a thing but that swagger, but even the band stopped playing when you went out there. You said something to Hank Ferry on that first play. I don't know what it was yet, but he stopped being a run of the mill ball player an' became an All-American from that day."

Pop shrugged, a little bitterly.

"You just forgot one thing," he said. "Hank Ferry never spoke to me for two years off the ball field."

Turk said quickly, "Now what the hell good is this palsy walsy stuff? So you're not queen of the campus. Baby, they'll remember your name in the record books long after the good guys are forgotten. You bring me home them ball games, kid. The hell with the rest of it."

Pop grinned bleakly and went into the shower room. It was sweet stuff, in a way, the sure knowledge that out of his mannerisms and his size and his lashing tongue he could fashion the stuff of which greatness was made. But there was the memory, too, of the thing Hank Ferry had said to him, the day he had shaken his hand.

"I cried myself to sleep," Hank said, "because I wanted to sock you so much and couldn't. I took it out on the other guys, and we went down that field because of it. Now I can understand why you did it. No hard feelings, Fennell. You made me what I am. But—I had my fun at Allston, an' my friends. I think you're the greatest football brains that ever hit this campus, kid. But I don't envy you none."

He knew what Hank had meant. And in that knowledge was bitterness and loneliness. . . .

They went out there against State to open the season. It was supposed to be a breather, but in this year of transfers and the draft every game was a toss-up. Pop won the toss, nodded to the bench, and trotted off the field. But just before he left, he turned around, as though by afterthought.

"If you can get off that dime, Porter," he said, "I'll sit on the bench and see how good you are. But if you smell the place up too much, I'll have to take it into my own hands."

Good-natured Polly Porter choked and spat on the grass.

"That's all right by me," he said, a little thickly.

State kicked off against the wind, and Polly took the ball underneath the goal post, swiveled through a wedge of State linemen, and carried to the forty before they knocked him out of bounds.

Pop sat down. He was shaking, he discovered, and it was not from the cold. Always before, it had been for Allston, and



that was something worth a lot of lumps. This was different. This was his team. They'd remember him with these guys out there, as long as Allston remembered football. For good or bad. And he desperately wanted it to be for good.

It seemed odd, watching eleven strange men in Allston gray carrying the mail out there. This club was ten city blocks away from the Allston he had known. But they were big and fast and they knew their way around.

The only trouble was, State had a ball club out there too. They had a guy named Swanson in the tailback spot. He was a loose-limbed Swede with a busted nose in a brace, a Marine transfer from Slippery Rock Teachers. He had awkward sloping shoulders and a stupid-looking puss. But when Allston lost the ball on downs at mid-field, he took the ball from center, feinted to the left, reversed his field on a dime, and broke through the middle of that big line for thirty yards. The massive Allston forward wall was split wide apart at the seams. Young Ink Raymond's gallant diving tackle just managed to knock Swenson off his feet, with a clear field ahead.

Turk said dourly, "There goes your ball club!"

That State transfer list must have been good. The boys from the mountain country were really chunks of men. When they came out of the huddle, Pop could see how they towered over the rangy Allston line,

in itself more than average hefty. Swenson went back into a fake kick formation, sucking the defensive ends out wide. A chunky little half took the ball on a spinner and went for eight off tackle. Swenson waded almost negligently over Moose Alfredo for the first down.

Pop said, "The hell with this! Lemme in there!"

Turk held his hand up.

"Wait," he grunted. "I wanna see what we got. If they're that bad, nothin' you can do will save 'em."

They went down to the four. Nothing spectacular, after that first run. Just down the middle power plays. But they worked. Fat Casey, the State signal caller, was mixing his plays, keeping the Allston forward wall on the guess. Swenson went back behind center, and this time Soup Train came raging in from nowhere and pulled him down from behind. But they had gone for two. Little Casey calmly faked to his scat-back, spun on a dime and walked through a big hole in tackle to score standing up. It was that easy. Swenson converted and State led seven to nothing.

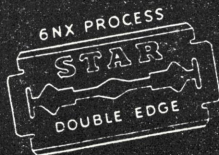
A big guy sitting beside Pop said plaintively, "So this is the Ivy League!"

Pop said, "This *used* to be the Ivy League, pal. Before a lot of jerks fouled it up."

He was, he discovered, shaking with a cold rage that all but consumed him. This was to have been his year. The year he

**YOU'RE NEITHER  
TOO YOUNG  
NOR TOO OLD!**

**I GET THAT  
"JUST RIGHT" LOOK  
FROM SMOOTH  
STAR BLADES!**



had slaved and torn himself apart for. And he could see it sliding away from him.

State kicked, deep under the posts, and Polly Porter took it over his shoulder, disdaining safety measures. For a second he juggled the ball, and Pop jumped to his feet, holding his breath. It was a sure State score if he lost that thing. Two ends were right on top of him. And then, out of some minor miracle, he pulled it down, slithered between the converging wings, and broke clear.

The big guy was deceptively fast. He angled for the sideline, with the entire State forward wall hemming him in. And then, giving a maroon arm a hip and taking it away, he streaked for the center, with his interferers picking him up.

It was like a man running through a funnel. The walls were closing in on him with every stride. But he snake-hipped down to the State forty before they fought him down.

Turk said, "The guy can carry the mail. If he can take it—"

Polly answered that question himself. For a moment he lay still out there, after a couple of tons of elbows had ground him into the sod. And then, shaking his head, he got up, cursing at the rough play. His legs, Pop noted, were steady and strong at the knees when he crouched in the huddle.

**TOPPER RAY**, the sub signal carrier, called for a pass, and Pop groaned hollowly. It was the old thirty-eight, a smart fake screen pass with two men going down into touchdown dirt. But it was too early, and they needed that first score bad. If it failed—

Ray took the ball from center and faded back. The State line broke through, and for a dreadful moment the kid was slithering back on his heels, fifteen yards behind the scrimmage line. And then, falling backward, his arm shot up and out and a ball arched lazily against the sky.

It was a bad pass. It hung up there like a balloon, with six men going down, sighting for Rube Morris, the tough guy from A. and M. The big guy played it smart. Over-running the ball and diving back at the last minute, he suckered four men past the play. He went into the air at the last split second, batting the ball gently out of a State end's fingers.

Turk said, "Okay, Pop. We may need this one."

Pop pulled off his wind-breaker and ran on the field. His knees, he discovered, were shaking a little, and he cursed himself for it. But you'd never know it from his swagger.

He went straight into the huddle. Unfriendly faces looked up at him. He said, "You can even catch 'em once in a while, I see. Lookit, guys. I don't want no more of this paper line stuff. I'll make this kick anyway, because I don't miss. But if you hold for just a second before you let 'em run over you, it'll look better."

Soup Train grunted, "Okay, Superman. We're watchin'."

Calmly, almost disdainfully, Pop swung his right foot, never bothering to look at the uprights. He could tell from the way it left his foot that it had been good. He picked up his helmet.

"If you need me again," he said, "just let 'em through you. You always got me to save your hides."

He walked calmly off the field, got inside the blanket and sat down. His face was hidden for a moment in the folds, and he looked like a grumpy little gnome, brooding over the fates that had saddled him with such a burden.

Which, he told himself wryly, was all to the good. Because they couldn't see the stark panic in his eyes. He had never been so scared in his life. . . .

## CHAPTER TWO

### Wrong-Way Back

**I**T WAS still deadlocked at the half. They came in the dressing room, and there was a baffled wonder behind the cheers. Pop said, "It's just the war. We can't help it. But we scored eight touchdowns against this club last year."

They were a battered crew. Soup Train had a huge gash over one eye and the dried blood had congealed on his whiskers. Moose Alfredo was limping, but there was something behind that Spaniard's eyes that no bodily hurt could ever touch. Topper Ray and Larry Rich and Hunk Amos—each of them, in his own way and according to his stature, had taken his lumps. But they were still full of the old pepper.

Rube Morris drawled, "So we Rebels



send half our best men up here. Of course you'll feel the difference."

The big end had a beautiful shiner, and there was blood across a front tooth. But there was nothing wrong with his grin.

Pop knew, even then, that this was his kind of ball club. Maybe not the best in the world. But they would be all right to cross the river with, until a better gang came along. They didn't have the power, nor the savvy, of the Allston greats he had led. But they had a kind of gallantry and moxie that was better than the cold genius he had known. He looked at Turk, but the big coach's warning frown held him down.

"As a matter of fact," Rube Morris drawled, "some of us, we're kinda unreconstructed. We think this brand of football stinks."

Turk nodded curtly.

"I was afraid of that," he said. "Pop, as soon as these goons get inside the fifty-yard line, I want you to take over. I want you to run twice. The first time, you will go off right tackle and score. The next time, after the kickoff, we will get the ball on a kick, and you will take it about on your own twenty, if this lousy line will hold. Take it across mid-field and go offside. The other ten men have to do something to earn their letters. After that, if they can play like an average Ivy scrub, we ought to have this game in the bag."

It was, of course, insane. There are too many facets to the big business called college football to be dismissed by such airy nonsense. Pop could feel the chill unbelieving anger go across that circle of faces. He said, "If that's the way you want it. But I'm a little tired today."

They went out on the field. Going down the runway, Pop could see them look at him, trying to see what made him tick. He went back to the bench and it began all over again. The State quarter kicked off, and Polly, the faithful, took it in the shadows of the coffin corner and bulled his way to the thirty. He was hurt on the play, but Ox Eghard, the trainer, came back with the water bucket and announced, "That guy can take it. Just his wind."

Topper Ray called for the off-tackle play, and somehow Polly staggered through to the middle stripe. It was not a good run. The interference piled in front of him, and the headlong dive of Rube Morris, intended

to take out a State secondary, knocked him down, just as he was in the clear. But they were in the middle of the field.

It was the time, Leisurely, almost indolently, Pop peeled off his blanket. This had to be good. All the heartaches, all the plans of that long summer hinged on it.

He went into the huddle. The kids were looking at him expectantly—with a challenge behind their strained eyes.

He managed to say airily, "It's the eighty-two, of course. Get out of my way, little boys. You heard what Turk said."

The ball came sweet, leading to his right. He took it, loafing until he could see the interference form—not to his right, but to that vulnerable left. It wasn't fair, that play. It was the perfect sucker shift, and you couldn't blame the best team in the land for falling for the fake. It had been given to the kids as one of forty others, and they hadn't had a chance to see the brilliance of it. Any good scatback, with proper interference, could go to pay dirt on it, if his line held and the rest of them carried out their assignments. But it wasn't for him, right now, to tell them about it.

He bulled into tackle, almost. Saw the State line swing wide, wary of the speed he had flashed, remembering what he had done against them in the past. And then, just as Rube swung in, taking out the State tackle, he wheeled. Not on a tangent, but at right angles. It was a curious freak of motion, that ability he had to brake and swing on a dime. For a moment he was running parallel to the two lines. And then, with a little prayer, he saw that Topper Ray had opened his hole, not wide but enough. He went through there, felt the rasp of a hand against his moleskins, and then he was in the clear. The State safety man came in slowly, trying to pin him to the sidelines. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a black-haired giant running beside him. He said, "Take him away, A. and M." And then Rube Morris exploded into that lone maroon figure and there was nothing ahead.

He trotted across the last white line, under the cheers. He kicked the goal, almost automatically. He went back into position, and the guys were open mouthed. Topper Ray said, "That was a run, mister."

"Yeah." Pop made himself say, hating the sound of it. "So what?"

Ink Diamond kicked off, a high arching

boot that went down to the ten-yard line. The State key man, Swenson, took it over his shoulder and came up the sideline. Ray dove at him and missed. The guy had a marvelous sense of timing. Coming in late, just abreast of the phalanx, Pop could see the other man's feet shift, getting ready for the old hipper dipper. He dove from nowhere, and his body deflected against Ink Diamond's shoulder as he hit the air. For a moment he thought he had misjudged the play. And then, just as he was falling, he saw Swenson fall to the side, and there was just time to close his eyes and hunch his shoulders before the impact blacked out the world and everything.

He sat up. Swenson was out cold, twitching feebly on the grass. He made himself get up. The sky was forming strange patterns across his brain, but his voice was steady enough. He said, "So Turk said the twenty. I think these guys aren't that good. You take that ball away from them, slow wits. I'll do the rest, an' then I can sit down the rest of the day."

**M**OOSE ALFREDO looked at him curiously.

"Thanks for the buildup, sour puss," he said, grinning wryly. "Maybe we will, at that."

It was, of course, an outright steal. The ball went back to Swenson, and the big guy wasn't quite on the button from that last play. He hesitated, just long enough to have Rube's rakehell tackle catch him between strides and unprotected. The ball shot up in the air like a vagrant flower. Not a State man was within three yards of it, and Pop had come in fast, through the hole Topper Ray had made. It hit him on the chest. It was crazy, like a kid's dream of glory. He totted across the two white lines and touched the ball solemnly to the ground. He said, "I gotta go now. Keep your shoelaces tied, little men. For a minute there, you looked like a ball club."

He went off the field, and this time the band really gave it the works.

They didn't score another point. It was only twenty to seven when the last whistle blew. But it was one game down and six to go. And that was more than he had dared to hope for. . . .

They took Vale. The light blue was woe-fully undermanned and inept. But for all

that it was close. They came down to the last quarter with the score deadlocked, thirteen to thirteen. Pop hadn't played that day. Turk had said, "The hell with it. We gotta find out, kid."

But when Topper fumbled a kick, giving the blue the ball on the Allston thirty, with ten minutes left in the ball game, he had pulled off his cap and kicked it into the bench.

Pop ran out on the field.

Topper said, "All right. I muffed it. I been playing my fanny off. I got slug nutty knocking down them guys an' I couldn't find the ball in the sky. I won't be no All-American an' you are strictly the nuts. Take over, chum."

The kid was crying. The wet made a little rivulet of mud from the dirt on his cheeks. He had played his heart out. But Pop remembered his role. He took the proffered helmet.

Pop went into the huddle. The Vale line was not so much, but they had a hell of a set of running backs, perhaps the best in the East.

He said, "I'll tell you. Hold them for downs. Not always, just this once. I'll guarantee you a touchdown the next time we have the ball."

There was a little silence, punctuated by the gasping breaths of the line. The guys had really been catching it this day. Rube Morris said, "Like that, huh? Me, I'm just a country kid. But those tramps are plenty tough."

It was like a challenge. It was as though these war-worn youngsters had taken all they could of blood and sweat and insults. There was a curious dignity about the way little Hank Amos dug himself into the dirt, getting ready for the play. The youngster was almost out on his feet. The Vales had been running those power off-tackle sweeps through his spot all day.

It came again. Pop went in fast to back up the play, and then stopped. Somehow, tunneling under the heart of the fracas, Roy Cadigan had piled it up for no gain.

There was a huddle in the blue backfield and a thin corner of Pop's brain told him that the pass was coming. He was shorter than Topper, and he had played way in that last play. In order to pull them more into the idea, he came way in again, almost behind the line, ignoring Ink Diamond's



warning yell. And he saw the hurried shift of signals in the Blue backfield, and was glad. It was a crazy gamble, but these boys had taken all the hammering they could handle. They had to get that ball away, and fast.

The instant the ball was snapped, he had backtracked and was streaking for the safety zone.

Looking over his shoulder, he knew that he had been right. The Vale quarter was already faded back, poisoning the ball, and two Blue ends were coming down there, converging on him.

There was only one thing to do. The guy on the right was the shortest, and Pop made for the man on the left, until he saw that the Vale quarter had seen the feint. Then he turned and went back where the ball and a giant blue jersey were racing to meet and converge. For a dreadful moment he thought that he had been too slow, and then, leaping to the top of his strength, he felt the ball touch the tips of his fingers and stick. A giant hand knocked him into the dirt, and the sky pinwheeled above him. But he still had the pigskin when the pile untangled.

He swaggered back into the huddle. The unfriendly looks were masked, and something like awe had taken their place. And that was a joke, because that play, Pop knew, had been just about the luckiest gamble he had ever taken in his life.

He said, "Okay, I can't do it all. These guys know what I can do. They'll be layin' for me. I want that spinner. And Ink, you fake that ball to me and go through tackle. You don't look so hot in there today, kid. But maybe you got one run in you."

Rube Morris said, "You lyin' son! That guy has been playing plenty of ball out there!"

The awe was gone, Pop noted, and a cold fury had come over them. It was the time. It was one of those things.

Pop Fennell was a mighty name to Vale, and he was back in the running slot. Luke had designed his plays cunningly. The ball was snapped and Pop came in there fast, feinting for that wide raging end. He saw the Vale line shift frantically, just as a massive tackle broke through and wrestled him earthward. He said, "Nice eye, pal. Maybe we better sit up an' see who's got the ball."

Hearing the shrieking insanity rising

from the black-massed thousands, he got to one elbow. Ink was away. The tall man was going down the east sideline, with Rube and Topper Ray running interference. The Blue safety man came in, trying to bull the play offside, and Rube's big frame went right over him like a General Sherman tank. It was that easy.

Pop kicked the conversion and the game ended shortly afterward. In the clubhouse, Turk said, "I dunno. They're raw and they're dumb, but they—and you—manage to squeeze through. Maybe we got a ball club."

**I**T STARTED the day before the Tiger game. Pop had been riding them hard. The timing was just enough off to slow up the spinner plays. The running guards were wheeling out either too slow or too fast, and the ends were piling up the interferers. Turk's plays needed two years' experience to master. And they had had only eight short weeks.

From the tailback spot, Pop was trying to go. The scrub line was rough but porous. It was, of course, dangerous to scrimmage on the day before a game, but the kids needed a lot of work, and bad weather had grounded them most of the week.

Ink Diamond came around right end on a delayed spinner and Rube Morris, counting audibly, took out the scrub tackle. It was a good block, but it had been delivered a slip second too soon. The hole had filled by the time Ink's interferers reached them, piling up the play for a slight gain.

Turk blew his whistle. Pop said, "Damn it, I can't take it. Look. You count three. One—two—three. When you say three you go to town. I know it's awfully hard, pals. But we even got plays where you have to count up to five. I was hoping we could use them, but I guess it's too difficult."

His voice, even to his own ears, sounded unpleasant and petulant. He had always hated that voice of his, with the icy lash in it. As a matter of fact, he was feeling pretty good. The boys were working like hell. Moose Alfredo's rugged shin was scraped and bleeding all over his jersey. They were sweating and sore, and they had been catching hell for over an hour.

Rube Morris sat down. He said, slowly, "So we're not the Allston heroes of old. We're a pickup bunch of yokels that a war

let us come into your exclusive gates. So we go to engineering classes all day and study all night. Get in the Navy, Fennell. Maybe you won't be our little hero quite so much, but you'll be starting from scratch with the rest of us. I wonder how good you would be then."

Turk said quickly, "That's enough, Morris. This man's—"

Ink Diamond said, "Yeah, we know. He's our captain. He's the guy who never makes a mistake. Me, I'm just a guy who likes his football enough to play it in between a war. We'll pull plenty of boners, mister, like Morris said. But we'd play a lot better for a man we liked."

Little Topper Ray said harshly, "We do the dirty work an' you come in an' hog all the glory. You got magic in them legs, pal, but I'll tell you one thing. We may need you to win. But we'd be a better ball club if you didn't exist. Because we'd be playin' for eleven guys we liked."

Pop got to his feet, a little pale. Topper was walking toward him. The little second-string quarter's fists were balled, and there was a kind of unleashed murder behind his eyes.

And then Pop stepped back. He said, "I won't fight you, Ray. I can't."

His eyes were blurred a bit, and he knew that his lips were trembling. Hating himself, he saw the anger fade into incredulous comprehension in Topper's eyes.

Topper said, "No—I guess you can't." He spat on the turf and walked away.

Rube Morris laughed, a little bitterly.

"So that's that," he said. "Okay, Simon Legree. We'll take our lumps out there an' try to set 'em up for your touchdowns. But remember one thing, my friend. You can drive us and be damned to you. But you'll never lead us."

Turk had his mouth open, and Pop said quickly, "That's okay by me. Let's try that play again. And get the lead outa your britches."

But he knew that what Morris had said was true. And there was nothing he could do about it. . . .

Somehow they struggled through to that Linford game undefeated. It was a combination of luck and pure miracle. In the Brown game, it had been a safety in the last two minutes, when the Brown quarterback had foolishly tried to handle a wet ball

instead of calling for a safety catch. Against Penn, an underdog Allston eleven had slogged it out in the snow against a heavy Red and Blue line, pushing them back into pay dirt for a single score and digging in to hold it the rest of the way. Ink Diamond had been playing nice ball in there. The kid had a white hatred in his eyes, and he never spoke to Pop off the field. But he was a great ball carrier when the chips were down. Turk had said, "Okay, so you don't want Pop in there. You play good enough to handle this alone, and it's your ball game."

Sitting on the bench, watching that Linford squad stream on the field, Pop thought bitterly that he'd done what he'd hoped. Somehow, out of the granite of his will and the lash of his voice, he had whipped this hodgepodge assortment into a hard hitting unit. Topper Ray was handling them like a veteran. Rube Morris was high on the "All" lists. The guy was terrific. Everyone, he thought, was the nuts. This team had everything. Everything except a captain to fight for.

He went out for the toss. It came down tails. It was the first time he had called wrong all season. It was a bad omen. But not as bad as the looks of that massive Linford line. The guys must have robbed a beef wagon. They had been piling up huge scores all year.

He went into the bench and the game began. Polly's kickoff arched against the sky and a guy named Bump Farrell took it on his twenty and bulled straight up the middle of the field for twenty yards before Ink could pull him down. They went into the huddle and Farrell stepped back on the first play and threw a slingshot pass for sixty yards. It broke all the rules, and it caught Topper completely by surprise. Anders, the great Linford end, took it over his shoulder without breaking stride and went the rest of the way in the clear. They kicked the point after touchdown and it was seven to nothing.

Pop looked at Turk. The big man shook his head. It was maddening, sitting there watching your team go down the wire in the game you wanted most in life. But that was the way they had agreed to play it. Turk was tough, but he knew the answers. He had built up the fable about the eccentric Pop Fennell, the guy who was too good



to play except when they needed a score. The conceited loner who made impossible boasts—and then made them good. It had made him a national figure. But it had cost him, he was thinking, a lot more than he had gained. For a panicky moment he wanted to run out there and tell them the truth about the thing that had kept him apart from other men. But, just then, Polly burst into the clear for a twenty-yard run off tackle and he forgot everything else.

Somehow, out of that slough of panic, Allston had rallied. They couldn't dent that huge line, but they were fighting it on even terms. Lafe Riordan slammed into center for no gain, and on the next play Topper cunningly switched to a screen pass in the flat and it went for a first down on the mid-field stripe. The Linford secondaries were completely suckered out of the play.

They kept on marching. Two, four yards at a clip, chipping away at the heavier Gold line. They made their mistakes. Once, on the thirty, Topper called for an off-tackle sweep and the whole Linford forward wall smashed through and nailed him six yards behind the scrimmage line. Moose Alfredo had tipped off the play by starting to shift even before he put the ball in play.

But on the very next signal Topper, feinting for the same spot, went around the right flank behind perfect interference and was only thrown out of bounds on the two.

Pop stood up. His eyes, he discovered, were a little wet, and his hands were shaking. That gallant, crazy attack against the greatest team in the East—

This, he knew now, was his team. They didn't have the class, but they had something that was more important. They weren't afraid of hell and all its inhabitants. They would make plenty of mistakes in their raw courage. But out of those mistakes would come greatness. And he wanted suddenly to be a part of them, wanted it with a deep humility.

**POLLY PORTER** smashed three times at the center of the line. The last pileup was like the battering of two mighty fortresses. There was a sudden yell and Ink Diamond's helmet went high in the air. They had scored, with an inch to spare.

Turk said, "This is yours, kid," and Pop ran out on the field.

They were waiting for him down on the ten. Topper said, "When you need me, I'll be waiting." The kid look had gone from his eyes, and the awe. What was left was tested steel.

Alfredo said, "Make it good, Fennell."

He went back to the kicker's spot. Alfredo snapped the ball and that line held, for once, like a mighty wall. Not a Linford man was within sight when his foot went down and up.

And—it was a bad kick. The worst he had ever made in his life. It slewed far to the right of the crossbars, bouncing across the running track.

There was a dead silence, under the groans from the stands. Polly Porter said, "That will cost."

The Allston line hunkered wearily back and sat down. It had been a tough one to lose. It could mean the ball game.

They fought off a belated Linford scoring threat, just long enough to have the gun save them.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Fighting Hearts

**THEY** went into the locker room. Turk was waiting for them by the door. They were utterly spent, and they carried the marks of the fight they had made. And there was a bitter pride on them that no words would ever erase again.

Pop stammered, "I—I'm terribly sorry, of course. I don't know how it happened. I guess—"

Rube Morris said, "Yeah. I dropped a pass once. Remember?"

There was plenty of malice behind the remark, but Pop was too miserable to care, somehow.

Turk said, "It's time to get a few things straight around here. Pop, peel off that jersey."

With a kind of stony detachment Pop obeyed. There was a lump under his third rib, just under his heart.

Turk tapped it.

"You've been yelling about the Pop Fennell legend," he said. "The guy who was too good to carry the mail. The bric-a-brac kid who did his playing with his brains and his mouth, and made the other guys do all the work. He wanted it that way. It made

men hate him, but out of it they became great ball players."

Rube Morris stammered, "I don't get it. What does that—"

Turk said, "That, my loud-mouthed friend, is only what a bum doctor did to a broken rib. There's a piece of the bone touching his lung. One hard blow there and the kid would be dead."

Moose Alfredo said, "The little fighting son of a gun!"

Pop shook his head wearily. "I guess I've been pretty tough on you," he said. "But I had a team, and I saw it taken away from me. I wanted to go out with a winner. I don't blame you guys for hating my guts. But you needed it to find yourselves. Well—" he took a deep breath—"you're a ball club now, and I messed you up. I'll always be proud to have been your captain, even if you lose this game by thirty points. I—I guess that's all I have to say."

Topper Ray said, "Who the hell's gonna lose this game, Fennell? You watch us go this half. And if we can't we got the guy on that bench who can finish the job. Keep your powder dry, kid. We'll want you to bring this home for us!"

They went out on the field. The kids were awkward and halting. But Rube Morris boomed out, "We'll win it for yuh, kid." And that was good enough.

Linford took that opening kickoff and really turned it on. They had been supposed to take this game by three touchdowns, and they didn't like it. They had Bump Farrell hammering at the tackles and around the ends. The superior weight of the Linford line was beginning to tell, Turk pulled Alfredo out. The big man's face was like raw hamburger and his eyes were blank. He had taken a fearful pounding out there. Young Curt Wright took his place and they stiffened.

Relentlessly, like the march of a huge sprawling army, the Gold crossed the mid-field stripe and came into paydirt. It had been a shockingly brutal march. The Allston line was bending but not breaking before that fury. . . . They called for time out twice, while Hunk Amos had an ankle taped. On the next play he was knocked cold, but insisted on staying in the ball game.

They came down to the twenty. Alfredo, beside Pop on the bench, was crying sound-

lessly. "The bums ain't human," the big center said dolefully. "If we don't stop 'em soon, I guess—"

It came, the turning point, like a miracle. Bump Farrell went around right end. Rube fought off the play, fending the interferers with his hands and elbows, until the third surge of interference ploughed him under. But out of nowhere young Topper Ray dove straight over the spot where Morris had fallen. He hit the fast, plunging back like a bomb, careening him into his own blockers. The ball shot out of his hand as he fell, and there was a pileup.

Turk said, "If it's our ball, I won't touch a drink for a year!" It sounded like a prayer.

There was a silence, and the lineman's hand hesitated and pointed to the Linford goal. Scarcely daring to believe it, Pop stood on the bench, straining into the shadows. Rube Morris was lying there grinning, hugging that precious hunk of leather to his chest.

The cheering stopped abruptly. Little Topper Ray was writhing ten yards past the play. The little man's foot was bent at a grotesque angle. He would play no more football in his lifetime.

Pop knew what he had to do. Heedless of Turk's yell, he was peeling off his wind-breaker. He went on the field. Pop Fennell, the last of Allston's greats—and the massed thousands gave him its tribute, even while they were carrying Topper off.

The kids were waiting for him. And then there was another yell from the stands and Alfredo was running out. The big guy's legs seemed okay, but he had an horrendous gash across his face.

Rube Morris said, "But you can't, Pop! There's over a quarter left to play!"

Alfredo rumbled, "If the kid can take it, I guess I can. Let's take these monkeys apart!"

They went into the huddle, and Rube Morris broke out of it and asked for time. They sat down again on the shadows and the cleat-marked grass and Rube said, "Let's not kid ourselves. Nobody's takin' that gang apart. But we can do one thing. Fast, while we still got the last of our sawdust. You take the ball on the old seventy-one, Pop. An' any guy who doesn't block his man outa the play will have to talk to me afterward!"



Ink Diamond said, "It's crazy. But I like to be crazy. Let's go!"

The ball came down there, and Pop saw the hole open just over right tackle. Topper Ray had somehow driven straight through. Pop came in there and the jaws closed, so fast that a hand tore his jersey off his back. The tough Bump Farrell was in there like a cat, and Ink calmly knocked him completely off his feet and sat on him. The road to the left sideline was open and Pop turned on the juice and ran. For a terrible moment it looked as though the safety man had him. There was a last nightmare picture on the corner of his eye of a diving gold jersey, completely blocking his way, too close to pivot away from. And in the same instant he heard a grunted, "The brakes, Pop!" and skidded short, just as Alfredo's lunging dive magically opened the way to the promised land.

He ran across, almost reverently, and touched the ball down. The kids were there, slapping his shoulder.

He kicked, and this time the point was good. The gun ended the quarter. They were six points ahead, and fifteen minutes of hell left in the ball game.

IT WAS said of Linford that they had four varsities, and each was as good as the other, so that they flipped a coin to see who would start. In a couple of minutes, Pop began to see how the rumor had started. They were sending in replacements so fast that he couldn't keep track of them. Bump Farrell had gone his way, limping, and a powerful creature named Sloppy Joe Ferguson was lugging the leather. He wasn't as fast as Bump, but he had the beef to hurt any line. He was bullying through there and the Allston line was be-

ginning to feel the pressure. He lugged the ball past the mid-field stripe, and Shea, the Gold substitute quarter, threw a lovely lateral to Spike Lang, almost in the clear. It went for ten more precious yards. They held for downs, but Ink Diamond's kick was hurried and short, only to the thirty.

Pop began to lose count of things. He knew that he had been knocked down at least a dozen times, and each time hurt more than the last.

The Linford tailback went back, and Pop knew it was going to be a pass. It was a long one, almost over his head. He jumped, automatically, but the Linford end was a rangy guy. He took the ball right out of Pop's hands and started for the sideline. Twenty yards to go, and not a gray jersey in sight. Pop left his feet, sighting for those scizzoring cleats. For a moment he thought that he had missed. And then a giant fist slammed him squarely under the chin and the world went away. . . .

He sat up. There was a lot of noise, and for a moment he thought he was playing again. Turk said, "Relax, tough guy. They're tearin' down the goal posts, that's all. They lost the ball on that tackle of yours. A play later the game ended."

Pop tried to be tough about it. The swaggering little martinet act had been a part of him for so long that it was hard to lose, even when he wanted to.

He said, "I wish I hadda year or so to show you guys how to play this game. I wouldn't have to bust my neck this way."

He looked around. The Allstons were grinning admiringly. And the wet in his eyes didn't go so good with the tough act.

"But since I haven't," he said, "you'll have to do. Bring on that Rose Bowl, chums. I guess we're ready for them now!"

SEEING-BELIEVING

THIRST-RELIEVING

What happens when you look at the circles and move your head from side to side?



ANSWER. The circles spin like a wheel.



# THREE MINUTE SLUGGER

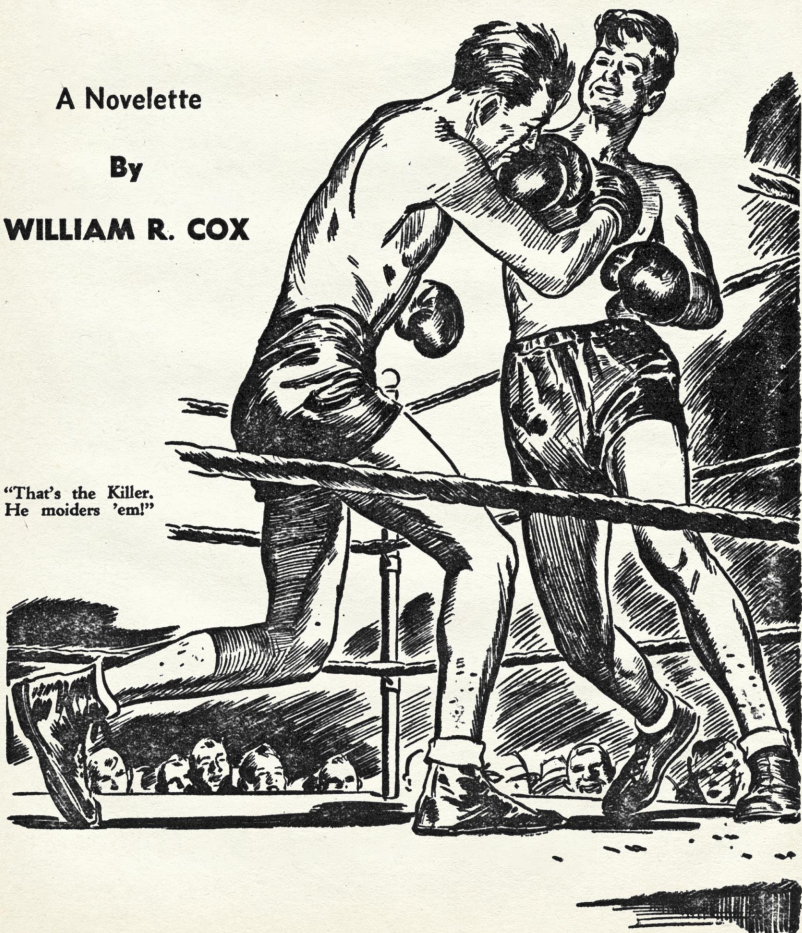
*"I'm a shadow, see, and you're the real Killer. I'm from nowhere—and going into a war . . . But before I go, I'll see you hanging on the ropes, saluting me!"*

A Novelette

By

**WILLIAM R. COX**


"That's the Killer.  
He moiders 'em!"





## CHAPTER ONE

Punch, Brother, Punch!



PATSY sort of liked to hear them say it. He punched Bobo Mintz again and the acclaim rose up to him from the floor of Spellman's Gym. "That's the Killer. He moiders 'em! Looka poor Bobo!"

Patsy dropped his hands to the thick and weary body of his sparmate and Bobo sank onto the floor. Patsy's teeth were white in a thin smile, a cruel smile. He walked to his corner and Silver said, "Attaboy, Killer!"

Nick Torrio, the guy Silver had to see, was there. Silver's man, Ozzie Melton, had refused to meet Patsy and the time was growing short and the draft board would not wait, so Patsy had put on the show for Torrio. Walking to the showers, Patsy thought with growing exultation that now Silver could make the deal with Torrio. There would be a fine gate for the Melton fight.

A wide-shouldered young redhead with freckles and a grin stopped him. The kid said, "Nice goin', Killer. Do you always ruin your sparring partners?"



Patsy scowled. It helped build him up as the Killer. He said, "Whatta you want with me, bum?"

He took note of the tiny scar over the kid's left eye, the slightly flattened bridge of his nose, and knew he was a fighter.

The kid said, "I'm Red Marbry. I'd like to punch your ears off sometime, but Silver Mattson won't hear to it."

Patsy growled, "Outa my way, cream puff. I'm too busy. I got no time for children."

The kid didn't move and he kept grinning. Patsy walked around him and went to the dressing room. Peeling off his trunks, he thought that maybe he should have taken a sock at the redhead. The nerve of him, he thought fretfully, bracing me like that. Silver woulda told me to knock him on the nose. . . .

Then Patsy had to laugh. He remembered that he was alone, with not even Mose Fine to watch him, and that he was not a Killer at all, but Patsy Dane, once a ranch hand, once a miner, once a bouncer in a western boom town joint.

Silver had discovered him and had brought him to the Big Town where he matched him with such as Soldier Beezil and Manny Bosniak. Patsy had ruined them with his hitting. Or, so it had seemed, although Patsy had some doubts. Characters like Soldier and Manny went down very easily under any kind of a blow. . . .

But later there had been One-Time Jackson and Kayo Mendel, and those guys were not kidding. Patsy had triumphed because he was tough and because he could move around and because he really could punch with either hand. The kayos piled up and Silver, who was smarter than seven bears, had named him "Killer" Dane and had challenged the world.

So now they were chasing Ozzie Melton, number one contender. And, Patsy laughed, here was Red Marbry, the upstart kid from the Bronx, chasing Patsy Killer Dane! That was fight business. That was very funny. A hell of a lot of right he had to get sore at the boxing red-headed kid.

He let the water cascade down his brown, trim body, sloping shoulders, trim waist, slightly knocked knees, graceful, lean shins. He whistled, but not too loud, lest someone hear him and know that Patsy Dane was happy.

OUTSIDE in a corner of Spellman's Gym, Silver Mattson, his gray hair slicked back, his double-breasted suit the latest in Broadway tailoring, talked with Nick Torrio. Mose Fine, the best second in the business, leaned close, cornering Nick. Torrio put his back against the wall and sneered, "You got a bum, so what? You built him up with tankers, you let him meet a couple washed-up palookas."

"Palookas!" screamed Silver. "One-Time Jackson! It took Ozzie ten rounds to murder him! Kayo Mendel! Ozzie got lucky in the twelfth with Kayo! My boy kicked them both over in less than six!"

"After Ozzie softened 'em up," said Nick indifferently. "You are a very smart gee, Silver. You build your boy up good. But I have got a piece of property in Ozzie, y'unnastand? Louis, if he was not in the Army, would have to meet my Ozzie. You know what that means, chum. Why should we fight this bum of yours?"

Silver spread his arms dramatically, "For the best interests of the game, that's why!" He saw Andy Watts of the *Herald* and Jay Boyce of the *Clarion* near at hand. "To prove if Ozzie is better than Killer Dane! To give the public its due in red-blooded action—to determine the real challenger!" He poured it on and the newspapermen, starved for copy, gave ear.

Nick shifted uneasily under the tirade, but Mose Fine had him cornered with his bulk and Nick could not get away. When he could edge in a word, he said, "All right! All right! Ozzie'll murder your bum for you if you get some publicity for the thing." He shoved Mose away as Silver turned, smiled benignly upon the reporters, and stalked toward the dressing room.

Red Marbry stepped out. He placed a large hand upon Silver's chest. He said, "That was a fine, phoney speech. Now how about meeting me before you get to Ozzie Melton?"

Silver looked up and down the lean length of the youth. He said acidly, "Who did you ever fight? I know you, Marbry. You're a fancy dan. You're a damned spoiler. Who did you ever really lick?"

"One-Time Jackson and Kayo Mendel," said Marbry. "Neither of them ever touched me with a right hand."

"And who wanted to see it?" asked Silver sarcastically. "You're no fighter, Mar-



bry. You're a boxer type. Nobody wants to see heavyweight boxers. Go dig up Pastor. Go box a shadow."

He went grandly on to join his prize piece of property. He had fourteen fighters out around the country, but he merely booked them from town to town and spent his time upon Patsy Dane. He was an old-timer, but never a big timer before. He was feeling his oats now.

He had only one real worry, he thought. The Army was after Patsy, and Patsy was more than willing to go. In fact, Patsy would have been gone now if it hadn't been for a girl named Nancy Ware. Patsy wanted to make a chunk of dough for Nancy before he entered the armed services. Silver frowned, thinking that he would have to speak to Nancy. It was necessary to keep Patsy sharp until after the bout with Melton. Patsy could go into the Army, then. It was all right with Silver and he would wish Patsy luck. . . .

Patsy fought that week in Jersey. It was an exciting occasion because he had finally convinced Nancy that she should come to see him fight. He was as nervous as a cat.

Silver came into the dressing room and his face was a thundercloud. Mose looked up from the bandages and murmured, "We been jobbed. I know it. I feel it in me bones!"

Silver was not acting now. He went close to Patsy and peered into the mild, pale eyes of his fighter. He said in low, savage accents, "I got to tell you, Patsy. Nick Torrio don't mean for us ever to meet Melton. They switched fighters on us tonight. The original Zeno's name was 'Zabrowski' and he was a trambo. This Zeno is 'Zanowski,' a new, tough boy from Chi. I hear he has got plenty. I hear he murdered One-Time Jackson last month."

Mose muttered, "One-Time must be slip-pin'. Everybody beats him, even this Marbry!"

"Shut up about Marbry!" snapped Silver. "You will have to be very careful, Patsy. You will have to box a little and watch this Zeno. If we slip tonight—"

Patsy said cheerfully, "I will murder this Zero! Get it, Silver? Zero! He's nothin'!"

Silver said, "Stop clownin'! You're a killer and don't forget it!"

The call came and they went down to the

ring. It was a packed house and the Jersey bugs were bellowing for blood. Nancy Ware was crowded in the press row and Patsy paused to look at her. She had corn-colored hair piled on top of her head and her nose tilted the tiniest bit on the end and her eyes were blue. She was beautiful.

And then Patsy stopped and stared, frog-eyed. For Nancy was beside a tall young man with red hair. She was looking up at him and smiling merrily and she did not even know that Patsy Killer Dane was approaching the squared circle! The frown which dented Patsy's blunted nose ceased to be a masquerade. He climbed through the ropes and his gaze did not leave the spectacle of Red Marbry and his girl together. They looked up at him at last and Nancy waved a graceful hand. Red clasped his fists above his head and grinned his youthful, reckless grin.

Patsy jerked back to life. He watched Zeno, the ringer, and saw a shock-headed young man with the face of a troglodyte. He saw a young man who was indubitably a killer—a real killer. He clenched his tough fists inside the gloves and a bristling thrill ran up his spine and across his scalp.

Nick Torrio was burning a big cigar and sneering, like always. He saw that Ozzie Melton was with Nick—a huge man with a jaw like iron, a superb boxer, fast on his feet, with a deft left to match his powerhouse right.

Patsy went out and got instructions. He came back and heard Silver say, "Feel him out this round."

He stretched the ropes and looked down at Nancy. The girl was intent, now, watching him. Red Marbry's head was tilted to one side and the kid was serious, too. Patsy's frown deepened. The bell clanged off-key and then this new guy, this Zanowski, was winging across the canvas with his hands held low.

Patsy stuck out the long left. He had learned the hard way and he never fought by the book. He had to stave off the hooks, keep them away from his body. But he worked fast, planting his glove where it would send Zeno off balance, not seeking an immediate opening. He walked around, not moving very fast, but staying within the limits of boxing balance at all times, stabbing the eager, plunging, tough Zeno. He slipped momentarily and the black head

came under his chin and two bombs tore at his middle. He tied Zeno up and turned him away, but the boy was strong and came back like a tiger.

The round ended and now Patsy was sweating nicely and his muscles were oiled. Silver was cursing in a voice that sounded like prayer. "This is murder. You got to box him and pray. If he opens once, or tires, slip him the right. Drag your laces over his puss, Patsy. Act rough. Heel him a little. Make him mad, then shoot him dead."

Patsy spat out water and looked down, at Red Marbry, rather than at Nancy. He tried to read the other's expression, to see how Red thought he was doing.

He got up at the bell and slid out, crouching a little, altering his style. Zeno seemed to ignore it, rushed in. Zeno pitched his hooks with all he had each time he came in. Patsy boxed him, fiddling with the long left.

He caught one on the face and went back a step and blood was salty in his mouth. He slipped another, but his head rang as it caught him on the neck. Zeno plunged and snorted like a bull, charging to attack. Patsy ducked and weaved and made him miss, but still the stocky lad came.

The clock said twenty seconds. Zeno moved up the tempo. He was a ringer, all right, a lad toughened to go the route with any man, a fighter born and bred. Patsy met him, gauging the time. Once, in Silver City, he had fought a miner in a barroom in just such a brawl as this. Patsy's knuckles were still pushed back because of that bout.

He stepped back now, pretending to give ground. He let a right go past his nose. He saw the left hook coming and stepped back in. He caught it on the peg of his right palm.

His own hook flashed, the first time in the bout. It ranged across and sped flashing to the side of Zeno's face. It raised a lump as large as grapefruit on the instant and behind it Patsy stepped lightly. The right cocked on his chest dropped out. It was an inside punch and it travelled scant inches. It clopped and banged on Zeno's chin and the brave lad from Chicago turned and seemed to run away, but running stumbled, measuring his length, sprawled, gasping, kicking.

The referee was counting and Patsy, in

a neutral corner, stared down, seeking. He saw Marbry's grin, saw again the raised, clasped hands. Then he had to go and help them gather Zeno from the floor, where he was plastered like an old, wet dish rag. Silver was screaming in his ear and Mose was capering and thumbing his nose at Nick Torrio and his near-champion.

It was a big moment. It was a moment to treasure and remember. But something was wrong with the picture, Patsy thought, and went back and dressed with Silver walking up and down, repeating, "Nick can't do these things to me! I'll show him who he is! The double-crossing wise guy! I got friends, too. We'll get that Ozzie in the ring and moralize him! I'll show the big-shot smart guy!"

Patsy said cheerfully, "We won, didn't we?"

"That ain't the thing," Mose cautioned him. "This Torrio, he is perzon. If he has got it in fer us, we are marked lousy. You do not understand these things, Patsy."

Patsy laughed, a little off-key, and went outside to meet Nancy. The girl was waiting in the lobby. She said, "You were terrific. You fought smart and well."

Patsy took her hands and said, "Red Marbry told you!"

She flushed. "He was very kind."

"Yeah," said Patsy. He smiled upon her. "He is also very handsome, huh? He is a boxer. He is smooth, with almost no marks on his puss." He touched his own flattened nose, the scars above his eyebrows.

She said seriously, "You are making good, Patsy. I can see that you are coming up to the top. But Mr. Marbry says that Ozzie Melton will not fight you."

Patsy said, "Mr. Marbry says! Fine thing. . ." But he grinned. He said, "Look, Nancy. It's no secret I want to marry you. Now, don't say no . . . and you needn't say yes. I'm a tough guy, see? I'm from nowhere—and goin' into a war. I'm not even askin' you to marry me before I go."

Patsy struggled, found the words he wanted. "You and me, we know what it means to lack a dollar. We ain't the very poor. But we never had too much. We want some security, you see what I mean?"

The Tube train thundered into Grove and Henderson. Her voice was very low. "Yes, Patsy. I know."



"Well . . . I love you." He paused, marshaling his thoughts. "If I can leave you a bit of security—then it'll prove somethin' . . . You see what I mean, Nancy?"

She said, "Patsy, I . . . You. . ."

He turned around and left her before she could refuse. Hell, he'd always known she was out of his class, he thought, and left it at that, not thinking about the rest.

## CHAPTER TWO

### On the Ropes

OZZIE MELTON fought Burnside Jones, the big colored boy, that month, in the Garden. Patsy and Silver and Mose were there, with thousands of other people. And Red Marbry was there, and somehow he sat next to Patsy. Silver glowered and refused to be nice to him, but Patsy said, "I hear you've been datin' my girl."

"She's a fine gal," said Red. "When are you going to box me, Patsy?"

Silver snarled, "Never, you bum. . . There's that Nick Torrio. Looka him, swellin' around like a damn turkey!"

Patsy said to Red, "Think you can lick me, Red?"

"I'd like to try it," said Red. "You're such a killer."

Patsy reddened. He said, "Lay off that stuff."

Red persisted. "Watch Melton. He's a real killer. You'd better fight me. I'm cleaner. What can you lose? You're going into the Army, anyway. I'm going into the Navy."

Patsy said, "I'd fight you any time—" He clammed up. There was something about Red Marbry that goaded him, not to anger, but in some deeper way.

He turned his attention to Melton and the fight.

Ozzie wasn't as big as the colored boy. He had a pole-like left which he kept high. He stood up, contemptuously, and took what punches he could not ride or evade with unconcern. He elbowed Jones in close, turned him and spun him with ease. He battered the colored lad's face with lethal punches that stunned and left no mark.

In the seventh Jones collapsed. He was not knocked out, but he could go no further. The fight ended with Jones on the floor, weeping from rage and exhaustion,

half-blinded by the repeated thumping. Silver was muttering curses, but there was a subdued note to his ravings, Patsy sensed. Melton had given his most impressive performance yet. Jones had been a real comer, but he had proved ten-to-one against the sturdy Melton.

Red said, "You see? I'd like to fight you for Nancy!"

Patsy said, "You shouldn't talk like that, Red. Go play with the nice boys. I wouldn't want you to stop seein' Nancy—" His smile flashed for an instant. "It will make her appreciate a reg'lar guy that much more!"

"Wow!" said Red. "Right on the button! All right, Patsy. You chase Melton. But as for Torrio—I think he'd rather have me than you for his man. And Silver has made him mad by putting him on the spot."

They parted and Patsy was thoughtful. Marbry had no manager. He had learned the game in the Boy's Club, in the Bronx. He knew everyone in the business, he had gone to college for a year on Rose Hill, he was able to handle his own affairs. He was a clever boy in and out of the ring. He was fighting all the time, in small clubs, wherever he could get on. He was winning consistently. The papers were mentioning his name more often as time went by.

On the street Patsy said to Silver, "How about meetin' that Red Marbry? I'd like to get hold of some scratch and Torrio is off us—specially since we kayo'd his ringer, Zanowski."

Silver snarled, "Are you nuts? You're not fightin' again until we get Melton. And I'm gonna get him. I'm goin' right down the line with the Commission and the promoters and every other damn body in the business until Torrio squeals for mercy. I'll get him outdoors and we'll clean up! Marbry! You're a hoople head!"

"Okay, Silver," said Patsy slowly. "You go ahead." He paused a moment, looking at the man who had picked him up years ago and made him a heavy contender. Then he said, "Do it right, Silver. And don't get too tough with me, will you?"

His mouth opened to howl, Silver caught a glimpse of the pale eyes of the young Westerner. He swallowed hard. "Don't get sore, Patsy. I'll get you in there—no matter how!"

Patsy went away. He had a late date

with Nancy, just a few moments in a little side street restaurant called "Tim's" where they often ate a steak sandwich and drank a beer. She was waiting for him, smiling, her eyes shining with excitement.

Patsy sat down heavily. "Silver's blow-in' his top as usual," he said, "and I'm not sure I like Silver any more— What's with you to make your eyes so bright?"

"I had a phone call today," she said. "I went down this evening to see Hurley—the big model agent. He hired me!" she said triumphantly. "He said I was a type! He said I was the type Hollywood wants!"

Patsy sat stunned for a moment. "But I don't want you showin' your face on every magazine page—" He started over, "No! I shouldn't have said it. It's good, Nancy. You'll save your dough. You're a good girl. It's wonderful, Nancy."

"Oh, Patsy, now I can be somebody! I'm so happy. Red Marbry got me the chance—"

He sat and listened to her plans. Numbly the realization came to him that now she wouldn't need him—or the few thousand bucks she'd get in case he got killed. She had climbed up herself and was on the threshold of her own success.

He said, "It's fine . . . fine!" but his words were half-hearted. He took her home and on the doorstep he said, "Don't let it spoil you, Nancy. Please keep your head. I love you!" He left her and tramped the streets, his head whirling.

**T**HE next day he was in Spellman's, working out. Silver was somewhere chasing down a lead that would make Torrio allow him to fight Ozzie Melton. Red Marbry was hitting the light bag, slim in his tights, clever and swift with his hands. Red called, "How about going a round or two with me, Patsy?"

Mose said, "The guy's short in the brain!"

But Patsy stopped dead, surveying the ever-smiling Red. He said, "Why not?"

Red's eyes gleamed with mirth. "You wouldn't dare!"

Patsy said shortly, "Climb up there, sonny boy."

Mose bellowed, "No, Patsy! You're makin' a mistake! This joik is lookin' fer trouble!"

Red was already running for the ring.

The mob in Spellman's stared, then with one accord plunged for ringside seats. Mose wept, wringing his hands as Patsy tore away from him and scrambled through the ropes.

They stood together, two very different young men, waiting for the mechanical clock to strike the three-minute interval which would time them. Patsy said, "It was nice what you did for Nancy."

Red shrugged. "She deserved it. She's too good for small-time modeling."

"Too good for me, too," said Patsy.

Red said impudently, "You're a nice guy, but you haven't got the class, Patsy!"

Patsy shook his head. "You can't get me sore, kid."

Red said, "Watch your face, Patsy." His green eyes glinted and Patsy guessed what he meant.

The bell sounded and they touched gloves, squared off. Red had an upstanding, boxer's style, with long left arm extended, like Jack Delaney, with the phantom gliding feet of Jimmy Slattery and the flashing unorthodoxy of Tommy Loughran. He moved seven times to Patsy's once. He came in with the big gloves and planted them where he liked for thirty seconds.

Patsy moved, enjoying it. The kid was mighty good. Patsy had met many a boxer but Red was far the best. He kept his own hands on defense, trying to solve the problem of Red's style. He worked up a sweat and turned loose a punch in the second minute and missed. He laughed and boxed away, swift and easy.

The round ended. Patsy sat down for the rest, but Red walked around, inhaling deep breaths, without attendants. Mose said, "This guy's a loner and he's dangerous. I seen him kayo Joe Nimrod over in Brooklyn. This guy's a comer, you lunk-head."

Patsy got up and moved out. Red slipped out of reach, was back, tantalizing him with powder puff punches. The ringside bugs were oh'ing and yowling at Red's cleverness. Patsy speeded up, trying a right cross behind a left jab, not putting any steam on it, just smoothing the corners off his style. Alongside the picture boxer he seemed very crude, but he knew what he was trying to do.

He grunted a little and remembered Zeno as a left hook suddenly swung into his body.



He weaved away, sidestepped and tried to land the right as Red followed.

Red was coming fast. He changed direction, herded Patsy to a corner with bewildering speed. Patsy backed to the ropes and made ready to shove Red gently away. A big glove hurtled through his apathetic guard. It landed on his chin and suddenly he knew that he had never been hit such a hard punch and he knew Red was fighting hard, trying to make a monkey of him by outboxing him.

He pulled away, his brain shocked by the blow. He sent a left winging and caught Red on the jaw and spun him half around. But Red came back from it, recoiling with a short right to the same spot, the chin. Patsy shook his head and staggered.

Everyone in Spellman's was howling with glee at the Donnybrook which had sprung up so suddenly. Patsy tried to get his hands up and failed. Red said audibly, "I'm sorry, Patsy, but blame it on Silver."

Patsy stumbled right into it. The blazing punch was not deadened enough by the pillows to nullify its effect. The third punch on the button, delivered with amazing accuracy, drove him into the ropes. The fourth caught him bouncing off, wide open.

He went floundering down to the ground as Mose came piling into the ring with both fists going. "You lousy double-crossing bum, Torrio put you up t' this!" Mose screamed. Red laughed and danced away, toward the showers.

Patsy lay still for half a moment. Then he got up and leaned against the ropes. He held out his hands and Mose, weeping, removed the pillows. A voice below said, "The Killer got killed, Silver. Your joke fighter's washed up as of now."

"You better sign Marbry," said a well known fight hanger-on.

Patsy looked down into the narrowed eyes of his manager. Silver was ghastly white. He grated, "You said somethin' brother. I'll certain'y never handle that bum again!" He turned and marched to the dressing rooms, on the trail of Red Marbry.

"I warned ya, you joik!" mourned Mose. "In a fight you mighta had a chancet! You ain't no killer! You're a dumb bunny!"

Patsy went to the lockers. Three tiers away he could hear Silver talking. "I got Torrio in a corner. I can put you there in-

stead of Patsy, now. Sign with me and you're it, Marbry."

"What about Patsy?" asked Red's young voice.

"Let him join the Army," said Silver disgustedly.

Patsy threw on his clothes any old way. He went out on the Avenue and the sun, amazingly, was shining brightly. He walked down the street with his hands in his pockets, shambling, beaten. There were things he did not understand. He tried piecing them together, but it was no good.

On an impulse, he turned into a public telephone booth and called his draft board. He said, "How about gettin' into the Army right now? I'll take the exam, waive everything and go tomorrow if I can."

The man said, "That's good enough, Dane. The Army'll be glad to have you."

He didn't call Nancy until the last moment. Then he said, "I'm in the Army now. Red's gonna fight Ozzie Melton. Let's forget it. I'll see you after the war, if we're both around. Maybe we can catch things up—"

He hung up, quick, so he could leave it like that.

**I**N THE early spring the ball park was jammed for the fight between Red Marbry, the sensational new challenger and Ozzie Melton, the aspirant to the throne of the Brown Bomber. At the ringside the notables preened themselves. Resplendent in furs against the cool air, Nancy Ware sat between a commander in the Navy and an Army major. Up in the bleachers, a soldier in ill-fitting G.I. khaki said, "I got fifty on Marbry."

A wizened gambler did a double take and said, "Patsy Dane! You bettin' on the guy that beat you and stole your girl?"

Patsy said, "I'll bet you a C note."

"It's only seven to five," said the gambler.

"That's good enough," nodded Patsy. On one side of him was a bored fan who seemed to think both battlers were bums. On the other was a militant Melton fan. Patsy sat straight in his chair and fastened his eyes on the ring.

His hands clenched, his jaw hardened. His pale gray eyes were slits and a fine perspiration stood upon his lip. He had thought that it was all far behind him since

he had been in the Army. But now he knew that he would give ten years of his life to be in there. He made himself unclasp his hands and exhale. He watched Marbry like a hawk.

He saw Melton, big, gloomy, business-like, the sleek black Torrio in his corner. He saw Silver's gray thatch, saw Mose with the bucket behind Red Marbry. The bell rang and he almost came to his feet with the tremendous excitement within him.

Melton was quick, rushing, knowing that his man was clever, younger, that the longer the fight, the better Red would be. Melton leveled that left like a pole, banging it around Red's ears, trying to make a quick finish. Red was a ghost, a phantom on wheels. Patsy whistled between his teeth, watching Red glide and duck and roll, the grin ever present upon his impudent face.

Melton slammed an overhand right which would have felled an ox. It caught Red on the shoulder and neck and drove him through the ropes. Melton rushed, intent on pinning him there. Red tincanned, hurt, slightly surprised, Patsy felt. Then he was back in ring center, boxing superbly, and for a thrilling few seconds actually forcing the fight.

The round ended and Patsy was aware that his fingernails had marked his damp palms. The bored fan was saying, "Joe'd lick the both of 'em in one ring." The Melton rooter was screaming, "He almost had the red-haired bum!"

Patsy said, "I'll bet either of you fifty even that Red takes him."

They glanced sideways and were still for the moment. The bell came again. Red was fast out of his corner this time, wielding his left like a lance. He was going about the bigger man, making the fast Melton seem slow in comparison with his great speed. He was scoring with the left, again and again. His right hand was as though lashed to his body, he was using it only for defense. Jarred, but not really hurt, Melton took the punches. He kept boring in, attempting always to use his superior weight and strength.

Patsy's elbows moved with the blows. When Melton put a left to Marbry's body, Patsy grunted. When Red stabbed four lefts to Melton's jaw, Patsy weaved as though his own bulky shoulders were slamming those punches in. They exchanged for

a moment, but no damage was done, Patsy saw, although the Melton fan yelled murder for his hero.

The rounds marched by. At first it was very close, but Patsy felt his blood run cooler. Now he could gauge the pattern with his fighter's eye and mind. He found himself glorying in the job that Red was doing. He found himself applauding silently, but with all the sincerity in his fighter's soul, the beautiful tactics, the shrewd cutting edge of Red Marbry's game.

In the sixth Melton felt the tide strong against him and speeded up, although he knew that if he did not land a kayo this would be fatal. He chased the elusive Red, trying to corner him, working every trick of indirection and evasion, backtracking from fake retreats, playing the ropes with utmost skill. Still the nimble feet of Red eluded him.

And then there was a moment when Patsy's heart stood still. Melton, assiduous, sincere, had found the spot. In a neutral corner, Red was penned, and Melton's left was out, his right cocked. The big, game man was bleeding from cuts about the eyes, from the nose. Red had hammered him, had made him miss, had blocked him at every turn. But now, in one absolute moment of supremacy, Ozzie Melton had his chance to even all in one swift blow.

The Melton fan was already bawling, "He's got him! It's all over, you yellow-bellied track runner, you Marbry!"

Even the bored character was coming erect, eyes wide at the sight of a climax for which every fight bug prays. Patsy muttered, "I'll bet my last dime. . . ."

The Melton punch shot out, and in it Melton put all he had or ever hoped to have. His shoulder drew back an inch, his fist receiving that extra impetus of the dropped right from the chest, straight as a string, a pretty punch, a punch to end any fight the world had ever seen.

But quicker than light, a split second ahead of any thought, a thorough and complete reflex sent Red Marbry's right inside. Patsy almost cringed, remembering that punch. And Melton never saw that blow. Intent upon his own blow, he never saw the right hand which had rested upon Red's chest as meek and humble as a mouse, never seeking Melton's jaw one time in this bout until now.



It beat upon Melton's chin. The force of his own terrific smash was nothing as Red bounced off the ropes, his left winging with the skill and soundness of a Garand on the range, exploding alongside Melton's jaw, knocking him sideways, as Red came on and lifted the uppercut which banged on Melton's button.

Patsy was standing now, with all the thousands, and Patsy's voice, bull-throated, joined in the mighty cheer.

They could have counted to a million, Patsy knew, shoving his way past the crest-fallen Melton fan, leaving the bored guy mouthing to the unhearing that Marbry could lick two Brown Bombers. Melton was finished for that night.

Torrio's face was paler than ashes, for he had believed in Ozzie, and had connived for him and had thought Red Marbry and his cream puff tactics merely a workout. And Silver was insane with glee and Mose did handsprings about the new hero and Red was mitting the crowd. Nancy, among her uniformed escorts, smiled brightly.

The little gambler caught up with Patsy and said, "The wise money took a lickin', but I got off when you bet on Marbry. Tanks, pal. If I can ever do you somethin'—"

Patsy said, "You can do me this: Tell Red I was here and that he was great. Tell him I'd like to fight him one more time."

**P**ATSY folded the money and went out, one of thousands, lost in the crowd. He could have made his way into the dressing rooms and everyone would have been glad to shake his hand. He was Patsy Dane, ex-fighter, soldiering for his country. He could have wandered into Stage Door Canteen and been introduced and taken a hand of his own. But Patsy walked, anonymous, among the crowds which make each New York night seem Saturday and Mardi Gras. Shoved here and there, he wandered with the throng. In his head was the cinematic sight that he had seen, registered forever. Never would he forget a move made by either man within that Garden ring.

He turned aside to the little steak place where once he had come with Nancy. He

sat down in the booth and the waiter said, "Patsy! Yer a sojer!"

Patsy said, "Have we got a steak?"

"They ain't what they were," said the waiter. "But I'll get you the best we got. How about that Marbry, huh? I heard it on the raddio. Some slugger, huh?"

Patsy said, "He comes in here? With Miss Ware?"

"Uh-uh!" said the waiter. "No! Once she comes in here alone, mebbe twicet. But not with nobody else!"

Patsy drank his beer and grinned again. Early in his turbulent life he had learned to take things as they came. He expected little. He felt that he deserved little. He was not bright, like Red Marbry. He was not sharp, like Silver Mattson. He had only his two hands, but he was not unhappy. . . .

When he looked up and saw her, without uniformed officers, without escort, but wrapped in her furs, her piquant face a little pale, her lips parted, he said, "Why, Nancy! You shouldn't 've done it!"

She sat down and said, "Where did you go? I tried to get to you before you left. Why did you do it, Patsy?"

He said, "Have a steak sandwich, Nancy!"

"It wasn't fair," she said. The waiter came and brought a beer and she sipped it, through habit. "You ran away, Patsy. You left us holding the bag."

Patsy said, "It was an idea I had. Red—He's smart and I kinda like him. He knows how to get places. He even got you some place. I hadda give him a chance, you see?"

"Red!" she said. "He walked all over you and you let him! He tricked you and went with Mattson and they forgot you were alive."

"Red's got a right," said Patsy. "I walked into it. Red wasn't wrong—I was dumb."

"But Silver," she said. "That hurt you, when Silver threw you down."

"Yeah," said Patsy, dropping his eyes, "but so what? I don't have to bother with Silver no more."

She said, "Patsy—" And then she looked away. "No," she said. "You don't have to bother now. . . ."

## CHAPTER THREE

## The Glory Be Damned!

A YEAR can be an eon, or it can be a little time and Patsy could not have told you which it was, but the year went by. Men died around him and Patsy's eyes had grown a colder gray by the time he won his stripes in Italy.

One day he stormed a hill alone, with withering shot about him, because Captain Grey lay on the slope, his leg a bloody rag. Grey had been a kindly man, without too much G.I., and Patsy loved him. The bullets of the enemy meant no more than minor difficulties to be avoided. So Patsy gathered the captain tenderly and ran back down the hill while seven infantrymen fired rifles in his defense.

They took him back to Africa then, to rest awhile. They brought him out before the regiment and pinned a ribbon on his chest.

And then the ships came in and one was listing badly and the crew was put ashore. Thousands and thousands of men, wounded, weary and war-shocked, who hated the African scene. The old Army-Navy rivalry cropped out and there were brawls as always.

Captain Grey was sports-minded. He spoke, and soon a challenge went around. The Army would produce a man to fight any Navy champ.

And that was where Patsy came in.

He was sitting at a table in one of those sidewalk *bistros* when the rolling figure approached with a cavalcade of sailors. He saw the jaunty white cap athwart the red hair and leaped like a wild man, so that the gobs drew back their fists in self defense.

But the redhead roared them down and threw both arms about the sergeant and cried, "Patsy! I've been looking to hell and gone for you, you damned hero!"

"Red!" chattered Patsy. "How is Nancy? Have you been home lately? What makes on Jacobs Beach? What in hell you know?"

"Nancy!" said Red. "Nancy! Look—come with me!"

They rushed down to the dock. There was a new boat. People were about, admirals and generals and foreign guys in pretty uniforms and diplomats in mufti.

And there were a half-dozen pretty women come all the way from Hollywood to entertain the armed forces.

Patsy said, "Nancy!" in a roar which shook the earth.

She came running, through them all, arms outstretched.

Nancy said, "You're thin! You've been hurt!"

"No," said Patsy. "Who could hurt me?"

She said, "You're decorated! You're a hero!"

"I'm a bum," said Patsy. "Look, here's Red."

"It's going to be all right," said Red. "I've seen the admiral, and I'm going to give Patsy his chance. I hate to do it, because I am very sharp. I box every day with good men. The Navy gives you time to box."

Patsy said, "Huh? What do you mean, you character?"

"We fight," said Red gravely. "You for the Army, me for Navy. We fight. The boys will love it. For the good of morale."

Patsy said, "A week! Can I have a week to get sharp?"

"Two weeks," said Red. "Special permission. On account of your medal."

They sat and talked, and then Nancy had to rejoin the five Hollywood beauties and the welcoming committee. Before them all, she kissed Patsy.

The two men stared at each other. Red said, finally, "I did you in the eye, Patsy. Funny how different things seem when you're out of it—away from the mob."

"You got words," said Patsy. "I only got feelings."

Red said, "Look, Patsy. I'm ambitious. I expect to live and go home when this is over and beat Joe Louis. I feel it in me. I'm a great fighter, Patsy. Let's face it."

Patsy said, "That you are. The Melton fight— How you fooled him with the right, holdin' it back!"

Red said earnestly, "You're too easy, too generous. I foxed you. But you never squawked. I'm too good for you, Patsy. But I know how you are. I agreed to this match only if they got you. Because I knew you wanted your chance. A funny little gambler gave me your message."

Patsy said, "I won some dough on you—"



"I promise you now," said Red solemnly, "that I will take you and take you good. I'm not like you, Patsy. I'm tougher. I wanted Nancy and you got her. I'll lick you, Patsy, for the satisfaction of it, without tricks, like in Spellman's."

Patsy said, "Why, sure, Red. We'll put on a show for them. They'll love it. Don't feel bad about it. I got Nancy, and when I get back there's a few bucks to start me in somethin'. Why, I'm fine, Red. Don't feel bad."

The redhead got up and leaned his freckled hands upon the table. He said bitterly, "You're a great man, Patsy. But I'm a great fighter. Well, at least I've got that."

"G'wan, Red," grinned Patsy. "You're a tense guy, you know what I mean? Up inna clouds. Get down to earth. So we'll fight for the guys—"

Red said dully, "Yeah. What a laugh!" He turned and walked away, his back straight.

Patsy looked after him, wondering. He had always known that Red was good. He had always felt, with that fine instinct which was his natural gift, that Red was sound. He plainly understood that Red was giving him his chance to even things, and that Red in his heart did not believe that Patsy could do it, but could not live without extending that opportunity. It was very simple to Patsy, but to Red it was a complicated thing.

Captain Grey made arrangements and here came One-Time Jackson and Kayo Mendel, soldiers both, and middleweight Boysi Coe, the colored flash for the speed, and even lightweight Jesus Menendez from Mexico, but now a bombardier in a ground-ed Fortress.

They labored under the hot sun, sweating, snorting, struggling. The little men were the best, because Red had speed galore. Patsy followed them patiently, taking a thousand taps upon the head from Boysi and Menendez, watching their feet, trying to anticipate their moves. It was his life's work, it was the thing he did even better than soldiering.

**B**UT at fight time, with the thousands assembled in the natural bowl where the banked uniforms set off a scene a man could never in his life forget, Patsy shivered

just a bit and said, "He's the best in the world, I think. And two weeks was short time."

The handlers, Boysi and One-Time Jackson, reassured him, but they knew fear within them. Red Marbry, in the ring, looked sharp and loose and confident as ever. Patsy climbed up and the general and all the staff were there and the ex-referee wore khaki, and the canvas padding of the ring was fine. . . . And down at ringside like a clump of flowers were the six girls. Nancy stood and clapped bravely amidst the uproar, and One-Time's G.I. shoes were polished and soft, Patsy noted irrelevantly, from walking over Italian rock. . . .

Then he was going forward, shaking hands with Red, and the referee, even here in this setting, was giving them the time-honored talk: "Break cleanly, make a good fight. Shake hands now and come out fighting!"

Red said, "I'm sorry, Patsy. . . ."

Patsy grinned. "You said that before, pal."

He went back and the ropes were taut and good under his palms. A serenity had settled upon him and the shakes were gone. He looked down and Nancy was weeping a little, and even the Hollywood gals were staring at him with trepidation, having caught the feeling from Nancy. The sailor had supporters, but the gals were for the Army, Patsy thought.

The bell, an ancient gong found in the bazaars, had a note like a tribesman's chant. Patsy turned, his gray eyes narrow against the sun. He went out, crouched a little, his left hand poised, pawing the air a little. He saw Red floating toward him with that marvelous stand-up style which brought him cheers before a blow was struck.

He took the snapping left. Red slid to the right, making him follow. Red had the authority, the real, down-deep skill. It was no use playing Red's little game. That left was a paint brush one moment, tattooing a figure on Patsy's bobbing head. Then it was a spear, thrusting, seeking blood, jarring Patsy to his shoes, snapping him off balance.

That was Red's trick, never to let him set. Red moved, never still, scowling, his green eyes sharp upon the fists which Patsy held so cleverly, walking in. Red retreated, Red boxed. Patsy flattened down his heels

and took it, and blows larruped his head and body. The round wore down and Patsy made a short rush, stopped, caught Red coming back, closed with him.

He let it ride then, luxuriating in the pure rhythm of the punching. His head was on Red's chest, his arms plied like pistons, sending those punches in. He felt the body before him arch away. He pursued, eager, knowing he had to slow down this speed boy.

He forgot, for a tiny instant that coiled right. It came and, like Melton, he never saw it. Its force was like that of a German bomb exploding over a foxhole. It blew him sideways, knocked him into the ropes. He slid down, reaching, grasping for a hand hold. He heard the referee counting, caught a glimpse of the scared face of One-Time, of Boysi motioning him to stay down, to take the count.

The sweet gong wailed and Boysi was coming for him and One-Time was weeping a little in fear. They lifted him and carried him to his corner, worked like slaves to bring him back to consciousness. But he had never been totally out, he knew. He had taken it and he was knocked out, save for the blessed bell, but still he knew what went on. . . .

All the little things of his life passed through his mind in that minute. He lived a dozen years, back in the mines, in the barrooms, through the specious years with Silver Mattson. He wondered whether Silver would know, ever in this world, what it meant to be a fighting man. He decided not. He thought of steaks with Nancy and the beers and the talk. He thought of Mose and his Brooklyn accent and his cynical approach to life. . . .

One-Time was saying, "He's a great one, Patsy. Red's even better than he was. He's terrific. Stay with him, Patsy. This is war, chum— He's got you, but stay with him, for the Army!"

Patsy grinned feebly, putting away the thoughts which crowded him. He sat up and Red was on his stool, and he saw the killer light in those green eyes. Strange that Red should be the killer now! Patsy was supposed to be the Killer.

He got up, and his knees wobbled. Red was on him like a tiger and Nancy was covering her eyes, weeping like a child. The blows were bouncing in a flurry from Pat-

sy's elbows and once one got through and he went to his knee.

But, remembering something else he knew and had stored away, he did not take a count. He came up and ran a moment, getting his bearings, with Red in fleet pursuit. Then he stood and boxed and Red got the left going, trying to prop him off for the finish. He leaned into it and clinched and wrestled ignominiously, but with a skill beyond Red's solving, until his head was clear.

He saw Red coming again with the left and knew that blood was on his face, but he ducked around and threw a long one. It clapped into Red's ribs. It was the first decent punch he had landed in the round and Red curled for an instant.

It merely gave him respite. He walked around, unable to follow it up, trying to get past Red's left. Once he got in, but respect for Red's right made him cover and he caught a hook which swept him to the ropes. He boxed, stabbing his own left, but it carried no authority.

He walked around and took his lumps. He caught every known variety of blow and Red was a master of them all. The knot of sailors lost their voices screaming for their idol. It was one-sided. It was a pathetic spectacle of a brave man getting beaten by a champion of the art of fisticuffs.

The round went by, slow to Army men, swift to the Navy. Red never weakened for an instant. He was sharp, he was on his toes like a figure in a macabre ballet, dealing out punishment, his brows contracted, trying to find a place to put his knockout blow.

In the fourth he had it lined up. Patsy sensed the danger through the bloody mask which was his face and jerked his head aside. Red came in and Patsy put a right and left to Red's midsection and Red retreated, baffled.

In the fifth a swinging punch caught Patsy on the ear and laid him open to the right. It came and Patsy, moving gamely forward was inside it by an inch. He dealt a blow inside and to the ribs and Red was quick to get away and fiddle.

In the sixth a straight one-two deposited Patsy upon the seat of his pants and when he arose he slipped and Red sprang in, all killer, all fighter, giving no quarter. But Patsy's burly arms were crossed around his head and in another second, in his calm,



courageous way, he was belaboring Red about the body once again.

In the seventh it was a right cross inside and Patsy staggered back. Red crouched now, abandoning his boxing stance, and tried the uppercut which had felled Melton. Patsy took it on the chest, going ahead, charging. He hooked his left and Red went spinning. He trudged forward, but Red, a splotch of blood above his eye, came raging to attack. They stood, head to head, and only the bell ended the slugging.

In the eighth it was a devastating left hook to the base of the jaw which almost lifted Patsy off his feet. He thought he was finished then, and went floundering along the ropes, looking for an exit that he might have a brief rest, until his sanity returned and he knew there was no rest for that time. He fought back, knowing his cause was hopeless, but bringing his heart into it for the try. He fought back and the round ended in Red Marbry's corner, with Red against the post, bleeding.

One-Time seemed to be screaming something which did not make sense. Patsy said, "Huh?" There was a blurry haze before his eyes. Amazingly, he could still see from both of them.

One-Time said it again. Patsy shook his head, looking across at Red. He turned and stared down at Nancy. She was looking at him now, and her eyes were like stars, only brighter and the Hollywood gals were a trifle wan, but hypnotized, their little fists clenched, all their attention for Patsy. He grinned at them and spat out a piece of tooth into the bucket where none could see.

One-Time repeated, "You got him!"

Patsy said, "Like Hitler's got Stalin!"

THE bell rang out. He got up and stepped out, his hands still high. Through all the beating, through all the travail, he had held his hands high. He saw Red come, and Red was not so swift. He crossed lefts and heard Red's breath come short.

He backed away, taking his time now, as though he had just awakened from a long sleep and needed to get his bearings. He glanced down and saw Red's ribs, raw and liverish. He had put a few in there, he remembered. He slipped in fast and slugged another to the body.

Red backed away. Red was feinting him,

and Red's green eyes were almost shut with concentration. He saw Red's right fist tremble where it rested on his chest and that remembered something came uppermost in his mind again and stuck there.

He danced a little. It was strange, but all the beating hadn't left him weary. Just a trifle punch-happy, he guessed. He walked in and feinted on his own part and threw the right. He saw Red's right coming, but that was the thing he remembered so well. Instead of retreating, he moved aside and let it come. He caught it on his glove and felt the vicious force of it, and then he slammed a hook to Red's kidneys and Red turned half around in agony.

Patsy stepped back. He grinned. He measured Red's jaw, saw Red's famous right come out to beat him to the punch. He fell away, then snapped back, throwing that left hook. Long ago the ringer Zeno had taught him a thing or two about hooks in a round and a half, he thought happily. He saw Red hesitate, a look of wonder on Red's face.

He walked in, driving both hands ahead of him. He landed both and one clipped back Red's head, so that he stumbled. With the great calmness of a man who has walked with death, Patsy sank the right into Red's belly.

He felt Red fold. It was like an overcoat over your arm, he thought in mild surprise. He had to pull his arm away to give Red room to fall.

He walked to a neutral corner. He saw Red land upon his hands and knees. He leaned upon the ropes, and never did he take his eyes from Red. The count went up and up, and then it was nine, and Patsy was coming fast from those ropes.

It was well he did, for that opossum Red was leaping, trying to cop a sneak. Red's overhand right was a new one, and it was a beaut. Only Patsy's quick reasoning carried him inside it, saved his bacon. His own two hands went back, driving at Red's middle, and then the bell came and Red walked rubber-legged to his corner.

One-Time kept muttering, "He's a great fighter. He's got more guts than I t'ought."

Patsy took a needed breath to say, "Guts? Why, he's loaded with 'em. You should know that!"

He had long since lost track of rounds, nor did he care. At the bell he went out,

that was all he knew or desired. He was fighting a great man and every trick of the game was being used upon him and Patsy was meeting them his own way. He watched that right and took four lefts upon the face. He bled some more, and then he dropped a right into the body and felt Red give.

He had been belaboring that body for a long time now. He felt Red close to him, the restraining steel of Red's arms.

He said in Red's ear, "You don't like it, champ?"

"I'll murder you!" Red grunted.

"You better be quick about it," Patsy grinned. "Now it's me warning you!"

He pushed Red back. For a moment they poised, staring at each other, gray eyes meeting green. Then Red was striking like a scorpion, breaking every rule, lashing out with that right which could kill a mule. It was a fine, gambling, wonderful blow, a tactic most likely to succeed in any contest. It carried everything that Red had in his locker, which was a great deal indeed. It flashed and whistled in that African sun and a horde of soldiers groaned.

Patsy's head ducked. He weaved, first this way until the right went by, then that way as his own hands worked. From the pliant bunched muscles behind his shoulder blades to the hips which swayed in cadence, he was a shimmering machine of devastation. His gloves traveled such tiny distances that scarcely anyone saw the menace in their playful-seeming cuffs.

Red Marbry shook like a tree in a wind-storm. His body flinched, he swayed. From the crouch, Patsy shot his left hand high, the blow stemming from the roots of his being. It crackled like pistol fire, spanging against Red's jaw.

Red threw wide his arms, staggering back. Patsy stood erect, discarding the crouch. Wary of a trick, he walked in. Red threw the right hand. It clipped Patsy's chin. It did not carry the weight of a gentle zephyr. Patsy walked through it, past the left. Red's eyes were glazed, his teeth showed between his parted lips.

Patsy carelessly tossed out his longest left jab. Red's head snapped back. Patsy shifted, taking all the time in the world. His right poled out, crashing mercifully on the very tip of Red's upthrust chin.

Like a sack tossed from a truck, Red's

body left terra firma and flew into the ropes, dangled. While hushed multitude watched, breathless, an arm fell, the glove touched the floor. There was no strength to bear Red's weight.

He came down on the arm, all flaccid, rolling over on his stomach.

The referee, stony-faced, said, "One . . . two. . . ."

Patsy stood erect. He did not lounge upon the ropes, he did not mitt the mob. He stood, watching Red. He saw the return of a flicker of life, saw Red's teeth bite into his lips. He saw the painful effort of Red's limbs to rearrange themselves. He saw the raw courage of the man, naked in the sun, attempting to bring him erect. . . .

"Seven . . . eight . . . nine. . . ."

Red got his knees beneath him, pushed. He came off the canvas in a lurch. Patsy stood, like a statue, waiting. One-Time was yelling, "Finish him, Patsy! He's yours, boy!"

But Patsy stood still. Red reached and grasped the top rope. The referee hesitated. Red managed to get his head high. He faced Patsy, recognition came to him. His hand left the rope, pushed him up. He saluted, Navy style, his face serious, sincere.

Then they were around him, the Navy caring expertly for Red and the Army having its way. The sky resounded to the billowing noise and the M.P.'s were forming a guard to protect Patsy from the adoring mob. He got down and to the tent where he had dressed and they washed him and bandaged him. He was leaden with reaction.

He went out hours later to meet Nancy for a brief stolen moment. Red was there, of course. They shook hands all around and were stiff, strange. Then Red said, "I was wrong about everything. I want to apologize, but I don't know how."

Patsy said, "You're nuts— You were right about everything. You are pretty near the greatest fighter in the world."

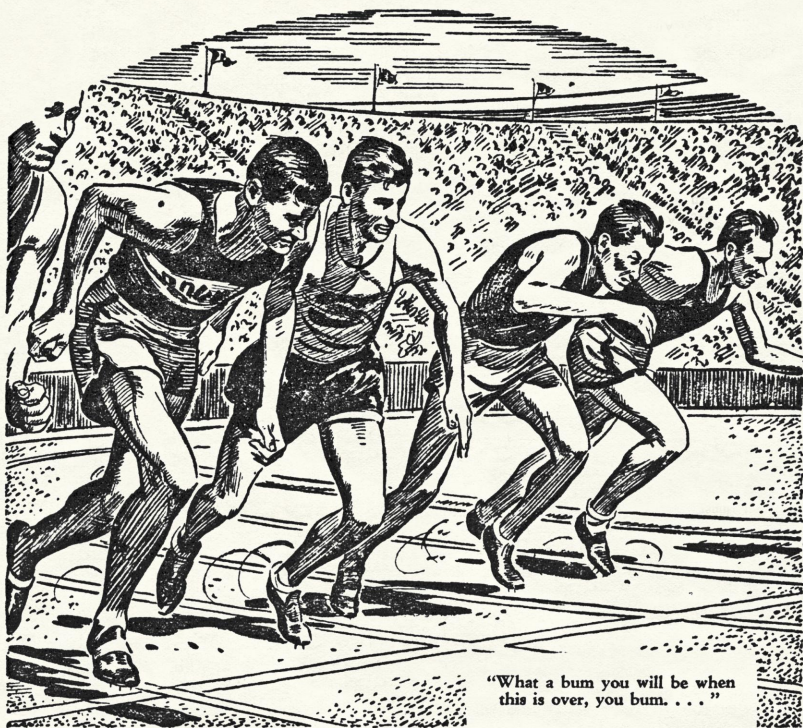
Red choked. He said, "I've learned more than any other fighter—" He went away, towards his ship. He would be gone tomorrow, they knew.

They would all be gone tomorrow, to different places of duty. But meanwhile Nancy was here and he was the Killer again.



# A Run For Your Money

By DAVID CREWE



*There's more than one way of running a race and several ways of winning — but there's just one way of beating a man who's learned not to run—from the Japs!*

**"T**HE hand is not good now," the doctor at the base hospital had said. "Eventually it will be all right. But it will take time. We'll send you home for a couple of months. You can take treatments at one of the centers in the city. You are of no use around here. You will not fix plane engines for some time."

Tommy Lee had asked him about running, if it would be all right. The doctor

had thought about that. He had decided that it could do no harm. "Be good for you," he had said. "Don't run on your hands. Have a good time."

They had liked him at the hospital. He had been a walking case, of course, and not much trouble. They also liked the way he had got the hand banged up. Willy Savage was such a nice kid. Anyone who would go to some trouble to haul Willy out of the

way of danger would be a favorite with the hospital people. Especially when he and Willy were there together.

Willy was through. He was young and healthy and filled with wonderful spirits. The loss of his eye had not depressed him, seemingly. Willy said, "What the hell. I have one, and I'll take good care of that. It's all I need."

Willy had been hit when the Jap planes had first come over the strip, really pouring the stuff down. Tommy Lee had piled out of a slit trench, right in the middle of the fracas, to pull Willy to shelter. A bomb fragment had done a hell of a job on his left hand in the process.

So some kind soul had found seats for them on a plane, and three weeks afterward, they were in the States. Tommy had received permission to go East. Indoor track was just starting to roll, and he wanted to get a little of it before he went back to work. It was a break. He hadn't expected anything like this. The hand hardly bothered him at all.

That was why they were in the dressing room of the Garden, now. Tommy rubbed his legs and grinned at Willy. The kid looked funny in civilian clothes. He was crazy about the town. When Tommy had brought him down to the dressing room, he had almost gone wild. He thought Tommy was wonderful. He had trailed around after Tommy, even before they had been hurt. When he heard what had happened, who had dragged him off the open strip that was catching hell, he became a shadow. Tommy didn't mind. Willy was a wonderful lad.

Willy said, "What time will you make tonight? How fast will it be? Who do you figure will place second?"

Tommy grinned at him. It was impossible for Willy to believe that Tommy could ever lose a race. "The time'll be a little over nine minutes," he said. "Borson might win. He's been running fine, lately. He almost beat me the other night in Philadelphia."

"He was fifteen yards in back of you. That's a hell of a way to beat you. But he's all right. He runs."

Willy lighted a cigarette. "You know, I was thinking. How come you don't run the mile? How come you got into this two-mile business? I've seen four meets, now, and it seems to me that the mile guys get all the

play. They build that thing up. How come you don't get into that? You ain't got so far to run, either." His face assumed an anxious expression. "Don't get me wrong, Tommy. The two-mile is fine. It's a hell of a race. Wonderful. But what I meant was—"

Tommy grinned at him. "Sure, kid. I know what you mean." He thought about it a little bit. "The mile has always been the big American race. It combines speed and distance. It doesn't take long enough to be boring, and if you've got a decent field, you pretty nearly always have a hair-raising finish. There's tradition in it, and appeal, and the knowledge that it demands both speed and endurance. People go for it. I like it myself."

"Then how come—"

Tommy shrugged. "I dunno. In high school I was a quarter-miler. Good, too. But when I got to college I found I wasn't that good. Just not quite good enough. A second off really good time. It makes a hell of a difference. I ran cross country in the fall, and found that I liked distance. There wasn't a decent two-miler at Eastern, when I was there, so I just fell into the spot. I like it. The distance agrees with me. Besides, Ganley was at Eastern the same time as I. He was good then. Just about the best. There was no sense running the mile when he was around."

"He's running tonight again, isn't he?" Willy asked.

**T**OMMY nodded. The Wilson Mile, with Joe Ganley featured. The Morgan Mile, and Joe Ganley running. The Brockman Mile, with Joe Ganley. The Osten Mile—every decent mile during the season. It seemed that a mile was not a mile unless Joe Ganley was in there, winning the thing. Tall, slim Ganley, with the beautiful form, the beautiful times. Ganley, long-striding, crowd-pleasing—and thoroughly objectionable.

Tommy said, "Yeah, he's running tonight. He'll probably beat Jimmy Grant by a couple of yards, and everyone will be happy. Everyone but Jimmy Grant, Evans, Sims, Jario, and whoever else is in the race. And me."

"You don't like the guy," Willy said.

"That's a masterpiece of understatement," Tommy confessed. "I've never liked



him. The first time I saw him he looked lousy to me, and as far as I can see he hasn't changed."

It was true. Ganley had been a great prep-school runner, and he had come to Eastern with a full sense of his own importance. He never lost it for a moment. He was inconsiderate of anyone else. He thought of Joe Ganley, and there his thinking stopped.

Tommy said, "Maybe if a guy is that good, he has an excuse. Maybe when you turn in one fine performance after another, you rate a break. Except that I don't think so. He might be all right. It's just that I don't like him."

He didn't even like the way Ganley ran. Technically, he could find no fault—no one could. The long legs reached out and put the yards behind him. The slim body worked with a style, an elaborate economy that was wonderful to watch. But Tommy knew how many other things went into those winning miles. He knew of the skillful elbows, the adroit hips that would throw another man off stride. He knew Ganley's lack of reluctance to spike another man in the heel, when the going got close. He knew all about the guy.

"He keeps winning," Willy observed.

Tommy nodded. That was something you could not deny. Ganley kept winning. He did it one way or another, but mostly with the speed and the running in his wonderful legs. Tommy said, "Some day he'll get licked. Somebody will do it. Somebody who annoys him, knows every trick that he knows. Somebody who can run. And Ganley won't like it."

Willy asked, "Anybody ever lick him? I mean lately?"

Tommy shook his head. "Not in years. But three years ago Jimmy Grant was really hot. Terrific. Making better time than Ganley. So Ganley simply didn't run against him. Before a meet he'd catch a cold or a sore foot. Or he just wouldn't enter meets that Grant was signed for. He kept out of the way. No one ever knew. He did it nicely. But he stayed out of Grant's way that season. And the next year was different. Ganley had improved and Grant had gone down the ladder a bit. So Ganley went out there and licked him week after week. Just had the edge on him that made the difference."

"What don't you like about him?"

Tommy shrugged. "Sometime you might meet him. You'll be able to figure it out for yourself. It isn't a thing you can explain."

It was time for him to go to work. He had warmed up earlier in the evening. He felt good. On the little island in the Pacific there had been lots of time when there was nothing to do. The beach invited running. It was long and white and the sand was nicely packed by an active tide. The strip had been good in the mornings, too, when there had been no traffic, but Tommy had liked the beach. It had kept him in wonderful shape, and except for a week or so when he had been seriously hospitalized, there had been no chance to get far out of shape.

He'd been in the East for almost a month. He had run three times, and three times he had won. His time was good, his body was happy and in good shape. Except for the hand. He still had a light bandage on it and it wasn't much use to him yet. But the exercises he took daily in the hospital were bringing it along. He wasn't worried about it.

Healy was up there, on the boards, and Kevin, Willis, Borson, Lake, Phillips and Swenson. Borson and Lake were really good. He always had trouble with them. Borson beat him occasionally. The rest of the field was good, but not good enough. It would be a good evening.

He let Borson take the lead for the first half. He was always unsure of the early pace, somehow. His body wanted to run, to get out there and go, but when he permitted this indulgence, he always paid for it later. Borson had a little clock in his head some place. He was a great pace-maker. Tommy let him do it for a while.

And at the half he had caught the subtle rhythm of the thing. His body, his legs, were attuned perfectly. He knew that Borson was running a little slow, and he grinned at this, for he knew why. Borson liked to have quite a bit left to combat that last-half sprint that Tommy liked and used so successfully. So he went out and around Borson and stepped it up a bit, and the crowd roared out in its deep voice. He grinned a little.

He ran and, at the mile Lake came past Borson and up to Tommy's elbow, then passed him. Lake wasn't quite satisfied. He

thought it should be a little fast and he was working it up. Tommy let him go. The little clock inside himself, the tiny, swinging pendulum that was his rhythm, was working now. He was satisfied with the way things were. He might possibly be wrong, and Lake right, but he would find out about that in just a little while.

At the mile and a quarter, Lake was twenty yards ahead of him, and he could feel Borson running right at his heels. He heeded the little warning inside him and lengthened his stride. Borson came along with him, and in a moment the crowd sensed the pick-up of the pace, and their mounting roar warned Lake.

Tommy beat it out. This was what he liked. His legs were still fresh, his lungs working nicely and with not much of the burning heat in them that would be so painful later. The longer stride, the increased pace, all pleased him. In a little while he would have to dig speed out of his heart, coax it out of legs that were fashioned of lead. He'd have to breathe with lungs that were agonizingly on fire. That would be a little later. Now he was enjoying himself.

**T**HEY pulled up with Lake when there was slightly less than half a mile to go. Tommy came to his elbow on the turn, waited until they hit the opening of the stretch, then started to run. He passed Lake, and the thin guy from Chicago fell in behind him, and Borson was just at Lake's heels. Now it would come. Now Tommy would see how accurate was his inside clock. Now he was running into the pain and the exhaustion that every race held for every man who ran it correctly.

The crowd was in full voice, now. This was the Lee sprint, a half-mile affair. This was the thing that took the hearts out of most competitors, won him most of his races. Sometimes Borson could keep up with him all the way and have just a bit more left at the end. Sometimes, Tommy wondered if this would be one of the nights. It was always interesting to find out. He liked to win, but most of all he liked to run. When Borson beat him it did not break his heart. He took this game for what it was, placed no more emphasis on it than it deserved. He always tried to run a winning race, but on the few occasions when he lost, it did not keep him awake nights. Running

was a thing his body loved, and defeat was something his mind could easily cope with.

He was out in front with a quarter mile to go, and there was only one man behind him now, only one set of feet hitting the boards in rhythm with his own. He pressed for a little more speed, feeling himself out delicately and finding a bit more in the reservoir of his strength. The other man came with him.

Tommy wasn't sure whether it was Borson or Lake, and he had no idea of looking to find out. It was not important. What mattered was that someone was running right along with him, that he had to move a little faster, keep the sprint going a little stronger.

And with two hundred yards to go, the man was still at his heels. It was not fun, now. All the elements of pleasure had left the thing. He had to will each stride into being, was punished cruelly for each breath he drew. Now you ran on something other than form or timing. Now you ran on your love for running, on your ability to punish yourself; almost unconsciously trying to make each stride a little longer, trying to push the yards out from under you. It was now that you started to worry about the other guy.

There were a hundred yards remaining; then fifty, and the feet behind him were not quite so close, now. They were fading just a bit. But you didn't trust ears that were pounding with the sound of your effort. You just kept running, with all the stops out, and you ran until you sensed the tape across your chest. You ran it full out all the way. There was no other, no easier method.

Tommy hit the tape. It was not a thing you felt physically, but you knew it nevertheless. You knew it by the change in the tone of the crowd's roar, and by the flash of the photographers' lights, and by the fact that there was no more running in you; that this was the end. He slowed gradually, permitting his legs the luxury of lesser effort, lessening the demand upon his tortured lungs. He made half a circuit of the track before he fell into a walk. He turned and went back. He felt now that it was possible that he might live again, after all. He saw Borson coming up to him, walking, working his arms over his head in that funny manner he had. Lake was not far behind.



Borson shook his head as they approached. He reached out his hand and Tommy took it in his. Borson said, "Tonight, Tommy, you were very good. Tonight the time was very fast. It was a fine race." His breathing was labored, the words came slowly. But they were good words.

Tommy said, "Tonight I was lucky. Tonight you must have had too much to eat."

Lake came along, and Tommy took his offered hand. Lake shook his head. "Too much, Tommy. Just a little too much. Why the hell don't you go back into the Army? I could win one once in a while with you away. Sometimes I could even beat this squarehead." He indicated Borson with a grin.

THEY walked back to the line together. Tommy felt fine. He wondered about the time. He got it in a moment. 8:59.6.

Borson managed to whistle. "And I was less than a second off that. I've never made such fine time." He, too, grinned at Tommy. "Maybe this Lake, he is right. Maybe you better go back to the Army. We will have none of the fine medals while you are here."

Tommy stood around and grinned while they took his picture. Willy came to him with his sweat clothes and Tommy put them on. Willy was enraptured. He said, "What a race! What time! Terrific! That last half mile!"

Tommy grinned at him. The kid was a caution. He could do no wrong in Willy's eyes, and everything he did was magnified to heroic proportions. It was sometimes embarrassing. He said, "Tonight everything came out right. I was just in the groove. Next week Borson or Lake will trim my ears off."

Willy said, "Nuts! Those guys never seen the day! There isn't anyone running that could take you. One mile, two miles, three miles—sprints! Hell, I know a runner when I see one."

"You know from nothing," Tommy told him. "You are full of wind and enthusiasm. Hang around and watch Ganley run. That's really something, in spite of the fact that I can't stand him. They're running the Wilson now. I want to go and get a shower and rub before I catch cold. See you later."

He was just coming out of the shower when Ganley came into the dressing room.

Tommy had missed him, somehow, in the earlier part of the evening. He looked at him now, and Ganley said, "Hello, Lee. I haven't seen you in a long while." He did not offer a hand. Tommy was glad of that, though not surprised. He said, unnecessarily, "You make out all right?"

Ganley looked at him, and there was a distasteful expression of surprise upon his face. "With that field? Are you kidding?"

"Of course," Tommy said. "I'm kidding. I forgot that any of the other gents weren't allowed to ride horses. Stupid of me to ask about the thing."

"A little slow," Ganley said. "Four-nine. No one to push me. Had to run the thing by myself."

Tommy said, "A terrible shame. I'll bet you hated that." He had a sudden thought. "Where was Jimmy Grant? He usually supplies you with a little company. Where was Jimmy tonight?"

"The Army took him away. He got orders yesterday. He couldn't make it tonight."

"I'll bet you were heartbroken," Tommy told him. "I'll bet it almost killed you."

Ganley said, "I could take Grant the best day he ever lived."

Tommy was tired of it. He did not like this man. He said, "There was a year when you wouldn't run against Grant. His best year. Don't kid me, Ganley. I get around."

Ganley did not lose the arrogant pose that was a part of him. He said, "That was an unfortunate year. Nothing went well with me that year. Had a lot of trouble with my legs."

"You had a little trouble with your stomach," Tommy told him. "Your guts. That was the only trouble you had that year."

Ganley walked over to him. He was inches taller than Tommy. He was quite a few pounds heavier. He said, "Lee, I don't particularly care for your attitude. I think a punch in the mouth would do you a lot of good."

Tommy laced his shoes and grinned happily. "Maybe you're right. Maybe there's something in what you say." He finished with his shoes and stood up. He punched his finger into Ganley's chest. "But whenever you get the idea, stupid, that *you* can do it—"

Willy interrupted the little tableau. He stood in the doorway. He said, "Punch him

in the puss, Tommy. I will see that no one interrupts. Who is the bum?"

Ganley looked at the figure in the door. He walked away. "It's fortunate," he said, "that you have friends handy. It's thoughtful of you to have them standing around conveniently."

This was the Ganley Tommy had known for a long time. This was the man with a worm in his soul who was somehow a great runner. This was the false alarm that could run like a three-alarm fire. It was a great world.

Ganley, from the other side of the room, said, "The Army must do great things for you, Lee. You've never shot off your mouth before, like this." He glanced at Willy, still standing in the door. "Or perhaps you've never had just these circumstances to prompt you. Never had a friend so convenient."

It was true. Tommy had never lipped off like this. He had never had anything to do with Ganley. He had stayed away from him. But he had seen things in the last year or so that made an observance of manners and the acceptance of stupidity seem less important than they formerly had been. It was a nice, free state of mind, too. He had always disliked Ganley. It was just about time he had told him so.

But he was tired of the thing, now. He was weary of the evening. He said to Willy, "This is that great miler you just saw, Willy. This is Ganley."

Willy gazed at Ganley with his one eye and said, "I don't like him."

Tommy buttoned his shirt clumsily with his one good hand. "You show good sense. There are many people who share your opinion. Even the Army is on our side. They won't have him."

Ganley was an imperturbable soul. He said, "Next week they will. Next week I answer the call to the colors."

"You mean, next week they come and get you," Tommy said. He knew, from several things he had heard, how frantically Ganley had tried to stay out of uniform. He had exhibited much more than the usual and expected reluctance. He finished dressing. "Well, Willy, maybe the Army will be fortunate. Maybe they will find he has bad eyes, or something."

"They couldn't use the bum," Willy said. "Not even for picking up cigarette butts."

They left. Tommy said, "Let's go up and see what's left. I want to get the bad taste out of my mouth. That guy bothers me."

"He stinks," Willy agreed nicely. "Why don't you get in one of them miles, just for the hell of it, and beat his pants off? It would do him good. Him and me. Why don't you do that, Tommy."

Tommy said, "For a lot of reasons, Willy. Principally, because he'd trim my ears. He'd run me into the ground."

Willy said, "Go on!" He was incredulous. "Don't give me that. You'd kill him. You'd make him look like a bum. You can run two miles fast as hell. You could run a mile a lot faster."

Tommy shrugged. Willy thought in one direction only, when he dealt with a particular subject. There was nothing you could do about it. And it was nice. It was wrong, but Tommy found it pleasant.

THEY went up on the big floor, and the evening was almost dead. The vaulters were still at work, and they watched them for a while. And suddenly Tommy heard his name called. He turned. It was Barney Mears. Barney had coached him in high school. Barney was an integral part of the track world. He was getting a little old. He was a wonderful man. Tommy remembered many wonderful things Barney had done for him in the past.

He introduced Willy. He said, "What's on your mind, Barney?"

Barney looked at him for a moment through the glasses that perched on the end of his nose. He said, "I wonder if you'll do me a favor, Tommy. A big favor."

Tommy said, "Certainly." Any favor you did for Barney was a break for yourself. He owed much to Barney.

"It's about next week," Barney said. Next week would be the Maxwell Games. They topped the season. They were the cream off the top of the bottle. When they were over, the season was officially dead. Barney was chairman of the games committee. Tommy knew that.

Barney said, "We have a problem. We had a wonderful race lined up. We've billed it 'The Service Mile.'" Tommy felt something funny happen in his chest. He thought he knew what was coming. He didn't like it. Barney continued. "We have Ganley, of course. He's not in the Service



yet, but he will be. We have Burton, the Englishman. He's an officer in the British Navy, and his ship's been here for repairs for awhile. He's in good shape, and he'll run. We have Evans, who's in the Coast Guard; Harry Sims of the Marines; Jario, of the Air Force. And we thought we had Grant. Grant made the race a big thing, of course. He and Ganley. Without Grant, the whole thing is a washout. Burton might be good, but no one in this country really knows about him. The Army transferred Grant and spoiled our mile." He looked at Tommy. "It means a lot to me, lad, and I wonder if you—"

He didn't have to say the rest. Tommy knew what was coming. Barney said it anyway. "If you run, Tommy, you'd make it a big evening. You could do a good job. And you'd be doing me a wonderful favor."

Tommy said, "I'd get my ears beaten off, Barney. I haven't run a mile in years. I'd be a slob."

"You might not win," Barney agreed, "but the crowd would love to see you in there. And you'd be giving Borson and Lake and the rest of them a break. The way you've been going, they don't have a chance."

That much might be true. But to go in there with Ganley, and not have a chance himself—

Willy interrupted his thought. The big kid was joyous. He said, "You mean, Mr. Mears, that Tommy'll be running against that Ganley guy? In a mile?"

Barney smiled at him and nodded. Willy was jubilant. "That'd be wonderful, Tommy. You could take that guy out there and run him crazy. You could make him look like a bum. You could probably break the record for the mile."

Tommy said, "Stop, Willy. You're killin' me." He thought about it. There could be only one result. He'd go out there and make a bum of himself, and Ganley would be the happiest man in the world, particularly after tonight's little chat. The fans would love it, of course. He knew he was a big name in track, that the crowd liked him. They were not aware of the difficulties involved, and if it were announced that he would run in the Service Mile, it would help to fill the house, would round out what was really a lean program.

He looked at Barney, and Willy said,

"Hell, Mr. Mears! Of course he'll run in the mile. We been dying for a chance to get on the same track with that Ganley slob."

Barney looked at him over his glasses. He said to Tommy, "Evidently your friend has met Ganley." He stared at Tommy. "What do you say, son? It may work out a bit differently than you think. In a week you can make a big adjustment. I'll help you as much as I can. It'll be an experience for you, anyway."

There was nothing much that Tommy could say, taking everything into consideration. What if Ganley did beat him? It would be no disgrace. And he would be satisfying a desire he'd had for a long time. He would be answering a question he had often asked himself. It was stupid, but he told Barney, "Okay. I'll be glad to do it, Barney. At your service for the Service Mile."

Barney thanked him. He named an armory. He said, "Monday afternoon. Maybe we can work something out."

Tommy left the Garden in a slight fog. Willy was joyous in the extreme. "Boy, this'll be something to see! The first time you run a serious mile, and you take Ganley!" He howled in a low octave and people turned and stared. "You'll run him into the ground. You will set a new record. It'll be wonderful."

"It'll be insane," Tommy said, and let it go at that.

It was a heavy burden, the whole-souled admiration of a kid like Willy. He knew that come next Friday night, Willy would be heart-broken, more grievously affected than himself. Some fine bright strain in the kid would be broken. He would be a very disappointed lad.

But it couldn't be helped now. He had opened his big mouth, and in a week he would be trailing Ganley around the track. He was sorry that Willy would feel the thing so keenly, but not much could be done about that now. In himself there was a fierce little flame, a questioning and a gladness, and he looked at it once, then closed his eyes to the thing. It was enough that Willy was crazy.

**B**ARNEY told him Monday, "Warm up and run a few halves. Do two miles easy, then we'll see what you remember

these days about the half and the quarter."

Tommy did the two miles. He jogged until he was hot, then he stretched it out a trifle. He finished fresh. Barney gave him a little rest, then made him do a half. He said, "Not too fast. Get the feel of it. Get to know just how long a half is."

And when he had finished there was another, faster half; then a couple of quarters. He killed the day with a couple of controlled sprints.

It went that way during the week. Barney worked him faster each day, and his legs felt a little different. Not sore. Just a bit more filled with bounce. It was a nice feeling.

The papers were filled with the Service Mile. You would have thought that there had never been another foot-race in the history of the world. They spoke of Sergeant Tommy Lee with more reverence than of MacArthur. They dug into the past and searched his service record, and the story of Willy came to light.

The games would be a sellout, stand-up affair. That was certain. Willy could not contain himself. All week long, he talked of nothing but Ganley's impending defeat. "Imagine how he'll feel," he said, "getting licked by a guy who never ran a mile before."

Thursday afternoon, at the armory, Tommy met Ganley. The miler smiled at him. He said, "Well, if it isn't our little hero!" His face changed. "Will you look silly, my little man, running in back of all us big boys! It's something I want to see."

"Go away," Tommy told him, "before I set Willy on you." For Willy was large and anxious, waiting not many feet away. Ganley went.

Tommy went out to warm up, half an hour before the Service Mile, and the Garden was a packed and roaring madhouse. Someone recognized him and shouted his name, and soon the great voice of the crowd yelled it out. He ran with Burton, the slim Englishman, and the Navy man said, "Rather fancy you, don't they?"

"They're nice," Tommy said, "but sadly mistaken. I will follow you gents home at a respectable distance."

Burton said, "I wish I were so sure of that as you are, you know. Saw you run last week. Liked it then—don't like the memory now."

Five minutes before the race, Willy was very excited. He said, "You can bet on these things. I found some guys up in the stands. I'll make a fortune."

Tommy looked at him and shook his head. "Tomorrow I will lend you some money. You are a nice kid. You have only one fault. You are very stupid."

He went out at the call, and Barney Mears was there. He took Tommy aside and said, "I wouldn't fool you, Tommy. I asked this favor of you to help the games. That was all. It was nice of you to oblige. But now I have other ideas. You can win this thing. You can beat this field, Tommy."

Tommy grinned at him. "Okay, Barney. Just give me the medal now and I won't bother running. It will save a bit of trouble."

Barney said, "I am not fooling, Tommy Lee. You can win this race."

And looking at him, Tommy became again aware of the flame that persisted in burning within him. He felt something in his throat. He said, "Thanks, Barney."

He went down to the line. They made a big thing of the introductions. The house was darkened for a moment, and then a big spotlight hit Burton. "Leftenant Burton, of His Majesty's Navy!" It was big stuff. They went down the line. Evans, Sims and Jario got the same thing. Then his name was called, and his eyes were blinded by the light, his ears deafened by the thunder of the mob. It lasted a long time. They gave it to Ganley, then, and the thunder was repeated, but in a slightly minor tone, Tommy liked to think.

The lights went on again, and they took their places on the line. Tommy was between Evans and Burton. Ganley had drawn the pole. He walked over and held out his hand to Tommy, and the crowd roared its approval of the gesture. Ganley said, "What a bum you will be when this is over, you bum!"

He walked back to the pole through the thunderous applause, and Burton said, "Nasty chap, what? I say, let's give him a trouncing."

"It would be a very wonderful thing," Tommy said. "We will get together, when this is over, and share a pipe of whatever that stuff is you've been smoking."

In a minute the gun sent them away, and Tommy got his legs under him. There was



a slight scramble for the pole, and Tommy let the field run. He wanted a minute to adjust himself. He fell in behind Burton. Ganley was in the lead.

And if he ran his usual race, he would keep the lead. He always set a blistering pace. He burned off the dross early in the race, and then relied on his fine sprint to deal with anyone who had stayed with him. He was a fine judge of pace and timing, he had a wonderful kick to take him through the last quarter. He was a smart runner and a great runner. Tommy couldn't see, from here, just how he could be beaten tonight.

He stayed in fourth place through the first lap and through the second. It was faster than he was accustomed to, but nothing like the halves and quarters Barney had been working him on for the past week. It was fast, but he suddenly wondered if it were fast enough. Ganley was running his own fine, perfect race. The time would undoubtedly be good, the performance smart and, if Ganley were allowed to have his way through the entire affair, it would undoubtedly be Ganley's race.

**A**ND suddenly Tommy knew that he was not in this race merely as a favor to Barney Mears. He was in this race because this race had been in his heart for a long time. For years, subconsciously, he had been anxious to get on a track with Ganley and match strides and strength and something else. Circumstances simply had not permitted it. It had taken the accident of Jimmy Grant's transfer, and Willy Savage's idolatry, and Barney Mears' need.

Here he was, and he was letting Ganley set the pace—letting him arrange his own pattern.

*The hell with that!* There were ways and ways to run a race. You might lose and you might win. But you used what you had, the talents you possessed, and you used them before it was too late. He might not be able to beat Ganley—but he would never

beat him this way. But there was another method. It was not standard, Tommy guessed. It might not even be good. But he would see. It was all he had to offer.

He stepped up his stride and passed Burton. He passed Evans and was at Ganley's heels. He waited until they came off a turn and passed him on the straight. He passed him swiftly, running fast. He felt the man's head turn to him, felt Ganley surge ahead and along with him for a moment, then drop back.

And Tommy pushed things. He let his legs stretch out, reaching for the yards. He let his body swing into the quicker rhythm, felt an answering glow within him as the great crowd shouted out. Maybe he was doing the wrong thing. Perhaps he would find that out when it was too late. But he was doing what he wanted to do, running this particular mile the way he thought it should be run.

And when he hit the half he stole a look. The field was strung out over fifty yards. Ganley was behind him; Burton at his heels. Tommy thought he could see a slightly anxious look on Ganley's face.

He felt within himself and measured the intangibles. He examined his lungs and his legs with practiced care, and he thought of the yards ahead and the probable conduct of those men behind him. And he stretched a little farther, quickened the pace another notch.

And the crowd sensed it and roared out once more. There was something besides excitement in their voice, a second later, and he recognized it instantly. It was alarm. It was warning. Ganley was bringing on the pack.

And Tommy settled down to running. His legs were strong, his wind fine. He didn't know how long things would remain like this, and he knew of the agony ahead. But he pulled another peg and the pace went up, and he wondered how Ganley was taking this bit of business. He had no doubt that he would be caught in the stretch. It

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would work like that. He had rationed his supply of strength more loosely than his fellows, and he would ultimately pay the price. It would be down at the tape where full story would be told. Would he have enough in his basket to fight off men who had used their strength with more care? He'd know the answer to that in a very short time.

With four hundred yards to go, Tommy entered the gates of hell. The strides were no longer effortless and easy. They were calculated things, now, and the breath that was his fuel was thinning out. He wondered how the others were. The voice of the crowd told him they were coming up, but how fast he did not know. He knew only that this desperate struggle must soon end, for there are limits to what a man might endure.

They caught him with one lap to go. They had made up the many yards that had separated them, and suddenly Ganley was at his shoulder. He felt the effort the man was putting out, could read it in the strained outline of his face. And as they hit the turn, he felt something else—Ganley's arm digging into his side. His balance was delicate, and he knew that once it was upset, once he was pushed off stride, the thing was over. So he slowed just a trifle. He let his right arm swing back farther than was its normal arc, and he felt his elbow jounce Ganley satisfactorily. He had no more trouble like that. Ganley, he felt, knew he'd have to run to win this one.

And Ganley ran. They went around the far turn together, and Tommy was running on sticks, now, which he somehow disciplined.

Ganley came on once more, and the roar of the crowd was a monstrous thing that beat against the figures on the track. Tommy dug deep down inside and found an ounce of strength he had not used. He employed it now, and it shoved him through the solid yards, and Ganley fought but did not gain. Tommy reached again, this time into his heart, for there was no further strength of body to be found. And in his heart there was something just as good, perhaps a little better, and Ganley was gone from beside him, suddenly, although there was a form close by, fighting with him for the yards.

And when there was absolutely nothing

left, when legs would move no more and lungs refused to breathe, there was the tape. He caught the signal from some deep-rooted instinct and knew that no further effort was required. He was through for the night.

He slowed down. It was no effort. His legs jerked him gradually to a halt, and there was Willy with a supporting arm and a sweat-shirt thrown about his neck. There was Willy with a blessed half of orange, which he pressed to his mouth as soon as he could breathe. In a while he could hear Willy.

"I told ya! Terrific! What a mile! You trimmed that slob from here to Christmas. So did the Limey. Caught him in the last few yards and passed him. I thought he was gonna catch you. The thing ended just in time. I had heart failure! I won four hundred bucks."

Burton came along. They spoke with effort. "Remarkable!" the Englishman said. "Most remarkable." His handclasp was warm and strong.

Tommy said, "Very remarkable. I thought I was going to die." But it was splendid now to be alive. The night was a roaring of festive and jubilant thousands. He said, "I'm sorry you lost. But I'm glad you beat Ganley."

He looked for Ganley. The guy was collapsed in a heap on the side of the track. Burton said, "Oh, I say! Couldn't let a chap like that beat one. Wasn't at all worried about him. Worried about you. Remarkable runner."

He went away, and Barney Mears had tears in his eyes but no words as he patted Tommy on the back. At last he was in a cool and quiet corridor, and there was only Willy and the wonderful sense of satisfaction and of wonder.

Willy said, quite calmly, a thing Tommy had just learned. "The time was good. Four-seven, two. We will do it again. Next week you will beat them guys a hundred yards."

Tommy looked at him. "Next week," he said, "there will be no meet. There will be a circus here. And I will come down and race an elephant. You can feed me peanuts."

Willy looked at him. "You feelin' all right?"

Tommy nodded. "Wonderful. I feel wonderful."

He did. He had never felt so fine.

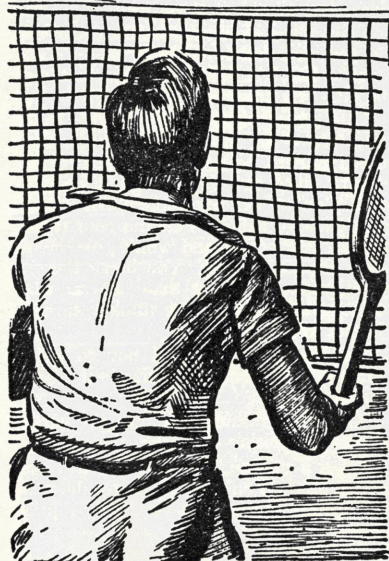


# LONE WOLF RACKETEER

By  
W. H. TEMPLE



He knew Vail was  
feeling the pace,  
too. . . .



*"I joined up here and you were glad to get my money. But now you're scared to take your crown off the ice! Give me one chance, bum, and I'll blast you off that court—for keeps!"*

THE Parkside Tennis Club was very fashionable. The clubhouse, newly painted, glistened in the summer sun, and there were bright umbrellas here and there on the terrace. Lounging in chairs were equally smart men and women, laughing and talking among themselves, their conversation punctuated by the musical clink of ice in tall glasses. Slightly apart from them sat a husky young man who resembled a thunderstorm.

Walt Snyder decided that he had just about enough. He'd been getting fed up for weeks and the explosion was about



ready to pop under the bright thatch of his hair. He scowled out at the number one court where Lewis Vail was playing singles. The number two court held four of Vail's satellites in a double game.

The one and two courts were the best of the club's six. Walt Snyder had never been on either one of them.

Sitting there, Walt watched Vail's serve strike the net. It was a terrific cannonball that boomed from Vail's racket, struck the tape and bounded high in the air to land half a dozen feet away from Walt on the grass. Walt scrambled to his feet, retrieved the ball and tossed it back. Lewis Vail took it on the bounce without a word.

Walt boiled over slightly. "Back at the clubs where I come from," he said, "a guy says thanks for that."

The conversation died. Walt's face reddened as he realized the words were louder than he had intended. But the slim saturnine Vail was not perturbed. He made a mock bow in Walt's direction.

"Thank you," he said. "Now you've done your good deed for the day. You can report back to the Scout master."

There was a ripple of laughter from some of the spectators. Walt became conscious that a lorgnette was trained on him. A dulcet voice inquired, "Is that the new member?"

Walt sat there grimly on the grass. *New member*, he thought ironically. He had joined the club six weeks ago. An engineer, Walt's company had transferred him to a branch plant in a strange town. He hadn't expected to like it, but on his first day he had glimpsed the Parkside Tennis Club. The courts were as good as any he had ever seen. It had been simple to join, the president of the branch company had pulled the strings and Walt became a member. And ever since he had watched other people play.

Occasionally he had picked up a game on one of the back courts. But he had never played with any of the best players. He had wanted to play Vail the first day he had seen him. The guy, Walt told himself, was good. And Walt was no slouch himself. Just out of college he had been the number one player on his team. He even had hopes of playing in the big tournaments some day. Not that he would ever be the best, but he might be good enough to com-

pete against them. Only a tennis player didn't get anywhere sitting on the grass. He had been snubbed and had taken it, hoping that it was just a matter of getting acquainted. But in six weeks the situation hadn't changed.

The ball bounded off the court again, rolled across the grass and came to rest three feet away from Walt. He stared somberly at it, and then became conscious of Vail watching him, and winking at his friends. Walt felt they all were amused. From the corner of one eye he could see a pretty brunette watching him. Then and there Walt made up his mind.

He sat there. He didn't move a muscle. The smile faded from Vail's face.

"Ball, please," he said. "You, there, what's your name?"

"My name's Snyder," Walt said. "Maybe after I've been a member for ten years you'll remember it."

"I doubt it," Vail said. "Throw it back, will you?"

"Get it yourself," said Walt, suspecting that he was acting like a fool but not caring.

They stared at each other. Activity on the number two court was halted. Walt could feel all the eyes on him.

Vail walked slowly across the court, then stooped and retrieved the ball. "Times must be bad," he said. "It seems as though the club lets anyone in these days."

"All right," said Walt, getting to his feet. "Now let me speak my piece. I joined up here. Nobody has made a friendly gesture since the day I signed up. You were glad to get my money but I can't get a game of tennis. You and your friends hog the best courts and won't give anyone else a chance at them. You break the club rules by playing more than one set when someone is waiting. You think you're the kingpin around here."

The brunette Walt had noticed before said softly, "Well, he is the best player, you know."

"Oh, is he?" said Walt. "A guy gets to be best by beating everyone, doesn't he?"

"Wait a minute," Vail said, a thin grin on his lips. "You've seen fit to shoot off your mouth. Apparently you have a grudge against me. Did it ever occur to you to try working your way up the club ladder. I believe you're at the bottom."



"The two fellows just above me," Walt said, "are cronies of yours. Every time I've challenged them they have something else to do. Maybe that's why you stay at the top of the ladder, Vail."

Vail turned toward his partner. "Do you mind, Johnny?" He nodded curtly to Walt. "You talk big, Snyder. Get out here and play. On the number one court. A one-set match."

Walt grinned and picked up his racket. He strode out on the court and began warming up, driving the ball across the net. A few minutes later he nodded that he was ready.

Walt saw the crowd watching them and didn't care. He was a good tennis player, and he was getting his chance. It had come in an unpleasant way but at least he was going to play tennis for a change.

He lost the spin for service and went back to await the serve from Vail. He had watched Vail, and he was far back, prepared for the cannonball. Vail's racket swooped high and the ball came just over the net with a terrific sidespin. Walt got his racket barely on the ball and sent it out of court.

They exchanged sides and Vail served again, a flat shot straight down the middle that exploded up from the clay. Walt, pulling out of the way, sent a weak return down the middle, and Vail moving toward the net, smashed it away for the point. The third service was an ace, Walt lost a volley on the fourth and it was love game for Vail.

They changed courts, and Walt felt his face getting fiery. Either Vail was better than he thought or his own timing was off. He hadn't played a hard match in months, but it was too late for alibis.

He studied Vail's feet, set himself grimly, and smashed the ball down the backhand close to the line. Standing there he had a clear view as the ball bit into the outer edge of the lime.

He relaxed and then Vail didn't move. "Sorry," he called, "outside."

WALT opened his mouth, then snapped it shut again. A snob and a cheat as well, he thought. He served again, the American twist and the ball was in. A drive landed at his feet and he picked it up and drove it across court. Vail chopped

it over the net and he just got to it and lifted it over. Vail had come up and he easily put it away.

Love-fifteen. Walt's flat service was in the net. His second was good and they dueled from the baseline. Walt worked his opponent toward the forehand corner, then lashed a drive to the backhand that was out by inches.

Love-thirty. He felt a little sliver of cold up his spine. Across the net Vail grinned at him, a cold, unpleasant smirk. Walt double-faulted and he could feel the scorn from the others now, from the spectators.

He lost the game at love. And with it he knew the match was gone. His only chance was to break through Vail's serve. He was conscious of the spectators watching him, and tried to keep himself from blowing up completely. But the touch was gone. Now and again he felt that Vail was calling the close ones wrong but he said nothing.

It went to three to nothing, and then it was five-love and he was serving again. It was a long game, going again and again to deuce and suddenly Walt knew that he had found himself, suddenly he was back in the groove. His drives were crisp and flat, he could angle for the sidelines and trust his aim to a matter of inches.

Across the net Vail sensed the change in his opponent. He wanted it to be a love set and his smile was replaced by a snarl as he fought back. He was a good tennis player, about the best that Walt had ever faced. It went to Walt's add and he had a chance to salvage a game with one more point. He decoyed Vail to one side and then blasted a crosscourt shot to the forehand. That was it, he was sure.

Vail tried. He went diving after it, sprawling on the clay and the ball bounced crazily off the racket. It came up toward the net and hit on the top. It rolled along and then fell off on Walt's side. It didn't bounce six inches. There was nothing Walt could do.

It was deuce again. Confident once more, Vail stormed the net to take the next point and make it set point coming up. Walt gave him the cannonball and it came back at his feet. He backhanded to the corner and Vail risked all on a drive to the far corner. Walt raced over for the ball, not quite able to get to it. The line had been

chewed up by the play and the ball hit there at the corner where the lime was missing.

Walt stared at the spot unable to tell whether it was in or out. He thought that Vail had called the close ones for himself. He could call this one out. He wasn't sure about it anyway, he didn't know.

Then Vail said, "How was it?"

Walt shrugged his shoulders. "Good," he said.

"Game and set," said Vail. "Six-love, I believe. You still feel like talking big."

"Thanks for playing me," Walt said.

He picked his way through the staring spectators. He went on up the clubhouse steps and inside to the lockers. They could have their tennis club and do with it what they pleased. The membership fee was high, his dues were paid up for a year, it didn't matter. He was through. He thought so until he was halfway through his shower and then he knew he wouldn't quit. They might get rid of him but they would have to throw him out. And some day, maybe, before that happened, he would get a chance at Vail again.

There was a dance at the club that night. Walt hadn't intended to go, but a perverse sort of pride made him attend. He stood on the sidelines, grim-jawed, and watched the dancers. The men were cutting in, he noticed, and he saw Vail dancing with the good looking brunette. Her name, he had heard, was Joan Taylor. He walked across the dance floor and tapped Vail on the shoulder. "Still butting in," the number one star said, grinned at the girl and walked away.

They danced silently for a few moments. Then the girl looked up at him. "Not talking so much now," she said, giving him a slightly malicious grin.

"I have trouble enough controlling my feet," he said. He thought that she was nice and at least she wasn't treating him like a leper.

"What's wrong with this club?" he asked her.

She shrugged her shoulders. "It's cliquy. Most tennis clubs are the same. It's hard for a stranger to worm his way in. They take his money but he has to do the rest himself. It takes time. Maybe you're just impatient."

"I just want to play tennis."

"You did yourself no good this afternoon."

He wasn't going to apologize for his game. He said nothing and someone cut in on him a little later. He drifted toward the bar and there he was alone. It was crowded but he found a place at one corner and nobody said anything to him. An hour later with the party in full swing he went back home.

He kept coming out to the club. The next week-end he was sitting there by himself as usual when the number six court became vacant. Joan and another girl and a man were starting toward it when one of the men said, "Joan, your partner's late. We can't hold the court for him. You'd better find another partner."

She glanced around her and then beckoned to Walt. "You like to play some doubles?"

He went out on the court with them and was introduced to the other couple. They rallied for a few minutes and then began to play with Joan serving and Walt up at the net. She hit the ball hard for a girl and her first swerve went straight and true to the blond man who was their opponent. He was back deep and he fired a full forehand down the doubles line on Walt's left.

Moving like a cat, Walt stretched sideways. His racket angled out and the ball pinged off it diagonally, struck the court and bounded erratically away for a placement.

"Nice shot, partner," Joan called.

The game went on. It was good tennis and it was fun. Walt discovered that their male opponent didn't like the ball on his backhand. He kept driving it there and he began to fizzle the returns. It was over quickly, six to one, and according to the club rules, they had to turn the court over to the next group.

"Nice tennis," the blond man said, coming up. "I'm Rick Barton."

They shook hands, walked toward the terrace, and Walt looked out on the number one court where Lew Vail was playing. "He was there when I came in this morning," Walt said. "How does he get away with it?"

Rick Barton shrugged his shoulders. "He's got money. He's put a lot of it into the club. He didn't have to. It costs money



to keep up a club like this, and Vail's poured some of his own into it. It didn't hurt him, he has more than he can spend. That's one thing. He's got a lot of friends. He's the best tennis player in the club and one of the best in the state. Most of us are just club players. He's better than that. So he and his particular pals go out there and hog the one and two court and nobody has the guts to say anything. Only you stick your neck out."

"And got it chopped off," said Walt grimly.

"Right. People are funny," Rick Barton went on. "If you'd cleaned up the court with Vail that day, you'd have had a lot of friends. But you didn't back up your talk. You strengthened Vail's position. But you looked better today. And someday maybe you'll get your chance. There's an open city tournament held here every year in September."

"It's a long way off," Walt said.

"It's the same thing every year," Rick said. "The finals are between Vail and a gent named Borden. He doesn't belong to the club. He plays on public courts. He used to be very good but he's getting older. Vail takes him without too much trouble. Maybe this September you'll get Vail. Only thing is—" Barton hesitated a moment—"I don't think you can take him."

IT WAS better after that. Walt began to get in an occasional match. He had to hold himself in. He played with the young married set, and it was too easy. He played on the back courts and watched Lew Vail and his friends strut on one and two. Walt began to make friends and he found out that Vail was not generally popular. He went out a few times with Joan Taylor and she seemed to like him better. There was just one thing wrong. He had tried to call Vail's bluff and he had been flattened. He wasn't going to get another chance. Maybe it was just as well. The guy was very good.

Walt got an idea and one Sunday instead of going to the club he went downtown to the public courts. He hung around until he saw a man with gray in his hair who knew how to hold a racket. Without breathing hard the man beat his opponent and when he walked off the court Walt went up to him

"Borden?" he said. "I'm Walt Snyder. I'd like to play you some time."

Borden's sharp eyes studied him. "Heard about you," he said. "Got your nose rubbed in the dirt by Vail."

Walt reddened, and Borden said, "Never mind. He's done the same to me. I'll take you on."

They went out on the court and started in. And right away, Walt knew that Borden was a cleverer player than he had ever met. He knew every inch of the court, he had perfect control and a variety of shots. He boomed drives deep to the baseline and then when he got Walt out of position, he chopped the ball back over the net.

He took the first three games and then Walt found out how to beat him. Borden was forty-two. Walt made him run. He chased him back and forth and he could see Borden tiring across the net. It was the one sure way to beat him, it was youth becoming stronger than age and experience. Only Walt didn't like it.

He abandoned the tactics finally. He tried to beat him without chasing him around the court. He tried to match strokes with him and he didn't have enough. It was six three—six four and then Borden had enough.

They walked off the court together. "You could have beaten me," Borden said.

"Yeah. But I wanted to learn. I got an education out there."

Borden said, a little sadly, "I was good once. I wasn't the best but I played the best. I was good enough to go to Forest Hills every fall. I never won but I stopped some of the first ten once in a while. I made them earn the cup. I don't go anymore. I'm too old. I go in the city tournament and Vail beats me every time. It's a little easier for him every year. He gets better and I slip back."

Walt made a date to play him again. Twice a week he met Borden on the city courts and regularly he took his beating out there. He didn't make Borden run, he didn't want to win that way and finally three weeks later he did the trick. He got control of the match. He was coming up to the net and attacking all the time, rifling the ball at Borden's feet, beating him on the sheer pace of his shots.

When it was over, Borden said, "Maybe

you can beat the tramp. I dunno. He's good, he's awful good and getting better. But you've learned a lot."

Walt went back to the club. Once again he challenged the two men above him in the club leader. He didn't get a match with either one. He wasn't getting anywhere.

The club was playing a match the next Sunday with a group from another town. One of the singles men was unable to play and Rick Barton as the next man in line was scheduled to take his place.

Walt sat glumly on the sidelines. Rick started down the grass toward the court to play his match and then suddenly his feet went out from under him. He landed heavily and then groaned and clutched at his wrist.

"Sprained," he said. "No, don't get a doctor. It'll be all right, but I won't be able to play. Snyder here can take my place."

Vail said, "Wait a minute. He's not next on the list."

"The man's waiting," Rick said. He winked suddenly at Walt. "Snyder can play."

Walt got the idea. Rick winked again and Walt knew that his friend had arranged it. His wrist was not hurt. Rick walked out to the court with him.

"It's a chance," Barton said hastily. "You play this guy. If you beat him, that makes you good. We can apply pressure here and there. Maybe we can bust up things. But not if you fall on your face."

He went out there and felt the tension in him. They rallied and began play and promptly he blew the first three games, knocking the ball far and wide. And then he settled down and began to play tennis. He forgot the crowd and what depended on the match.

It was his serve and his overconfident opponent had moved up. The ball blasted at the line and whistled by him for an ace. He moved back then and the twist service cutting sharply on his backhand, eluded him for thirty-love. Walt polished off the next two points.

He awaited service by his opponent and remembered some of the tricks that Borden had used. He didn't need to apply the pressure, he went in for finesse, angling for the sidelines, chopping the ball across the net, making his opponent run. He

fought up to three-all and then went ahead. He took the set at six-four. It was a two out of three set match and in the second set he went all out, playing deep, driving for the baseline and it was over in a few minutes, six-one.

He came off the court and Rick Barton had a grin from ear to ear.

"My boy," he said, "you're in. I'll get you a match with Vail. Leave it to me."

Walt didn't know just what went on. He wasn't an official of the club and Rick Barton was. There was a meeting and Rick came prepared. Walt Snyder had demonstrated his tennis ability. He was entitled to a chance to play on the Park-side Tennis Club team. The best way to find out where he belonged was to have him play another match with Vail.

Vail tried to laugh it off but it wasn't so easy now. A week or so later there was another Saturday night dance at the club. Walt had friends now, and they were nice people now that he had gotten to know them. He could sense the drama, a lot of them were sick and tired of Vail's arrogance, of his attitude that he owned the club. They had never found a member who might beat him and now they were banking their hopes on Walt Snyder.

Walt was having a good time that night when shortly after ten o'clock he was called to the telephone. He went to the booth and it was a hurry call from the plant. Some machinery had broken down and his foreman couldn't straighten out the trouble.

Walt left immediately and drove to the factory. He took off his coat and went to work and long hours later the trouble was located and corrected. Production began again and Walt went home, washed the grease off himself and went to bed. The clock on the dresser pointed to four in the morning.

It seemed to him that he had just gotten to sleep when the telephone awakened him. He rolled over, reached for the receiver and answered sleepily.

"This is Lew Vail," a sharp voice said. "You've been wanting to play me again. You've had your friends working behind the scenes. I'll play you a three out of five set match. I'll stop your big mouth for once and for all. How soon can you get out here?"

"I—" Walt hesitated.



"Backing out," Vail laughed. "I thought there was a little yellow in you when it came to a showdown."

Walt said, "I'll be there in thirty minutes."

It was 9:00 A.M. He showered, dressed, and had his breakfast in the corner drug store. He drove out to the tennis club, put on his tennis clothes in the locker room and hurried out toward the courts.

They were jammed as was usual on a Sunday morning. But there were even more people on the verandah and the grass terrace. The news must have been spread around.

He went down to the court and Vail was ready for him. They went out on the number one court and Walt knew that this was it, this was going to be his last chance to break this thing wide open, to establish himself. He had to win now.

They started to rally, and Vail said, "Ready?"

Walt shook his head. "You've been out here warming up. I haven't."

"Stalling," Vail laughed, his face mocking.

Walt hammered the ball back at him, then a few minutes later nodded his head. They spun for service and Walt won the spin. He picked up three balls in one large hand and went back to the service line. It was a real match today, he knew. They had a man up in the chair, and judges seated at the baselines.

Walt looked at Vail crouched across the court. He tossed the ball high, went up, and then uncoiled. His racket came viciously across the ball and it zoomed across the net. Vail, back deep, met it on the rise, turning his whip-like body into the blow. A white blur struck at the baseline and Walt, racing over, took it on his backhand, sending up a lob. Vail danced in toward the net, left the ground and his racket flashed in the sun. Walt made a dive for a ball that bounded over his head.

"Love-fifteen," the referee said.

WALT went back and served again and this time Vail had moved up on the serve. He picked it off the ground, rifling it to the backhand. At the corner Walt caught up with it and sent it back. But it was a weak return. Standing at the net, Vail negligently put it away.

There wasn't any applause from the spectators but a silence that was grim and forbidding. Walt fired again, and smashed at the return, trying to outdrive Vail and again he lost. He knew that he was playing hard tennis. But Vail was at the peak of his game.

He hit a low raking drive, he held the offensive and took the game.

He took the set. He didn't lose a game.

Walt mopped his face with a towel and looked out at the people. He saw Rick Barton sitting there, a worried frown on his face. He saw disappointment in other faces, a few smiles from the sidelines where sat the satellites of Lew Vail.

Walt strode across the court and prepared to serve again. He tried to attack this time, to take the offensive away from Lew Vail. He stormed the net and this time he did better. It wasn't six-love the second set. It was six-one. Walt won one game.

They had a rest period after that second set. Walt went over and flopped down on the grass and presently Joan came by and smiled at him. She said, "Keep on fighting, Walt," and went on by, and it helped him a little but not much.

Rick Barton dropped down beside him. Walt stared unhappily at him. "You arranged it," he said. "And now I blow the thing. I let you down."

"It isn't over," Rick said. "The lug is good. Even better than I thought. He never played so well. But there's just one thing. Did it ever occur to you that Vail was afraid to play you? He didn't want this match. Why not? Why should he avoid the issue unless he thinks maybe you could beat him? You ever think of that?"

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Win the War!**  
**Remember this — and save yours!**

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"He beat me badly enough the first time."

"I know, but you were off that day. He knows it. He saw you play that other match. We had to force him into this one. I got another angle. How late did you work last night?"

"I got in at four."

"And he calls you up bright and early this morning. He capitulates all of a sudden. How come? He saw you leave last night. Maybe this morning he checks up. He finds out you've had practically no sleep. He talks you into the match. He takes no chances, that lad. But it adds up to something, maybe."

Rick clapped him on the shoulder and went away. It was time to go out again, and Walt was busy thinking. Maybe Lew Vail was afraid but the way things looked now, he hadn't needed to be afraid.

Walt went out there with a different idea in his mind. He felt calmer, easier in his mind. And Vail had to take one more set to win the match. He would play him a little different this time.

They went at it again and Vail was on top of the ball once more, out to win three straight sets, to blow him off the court once and for all. This set Walt didn't fight back with the same guns. He went in for a get game, he got the ball back and that was all. He forgot how tired he was. He concentrated on getting to the ball, on pushing it back over the net. He was being led around the court by the nose but he was returning those booming drives. And Lew Vail began to make an occasional error, to slam a shot in the net, or over the backline. They went to three games all, to four-all, and finally it was Walt's set at eight-six.

They changed courts and Walt saw Borden parked in an aged car in the driveway, hanging out the window, grinning at him. Walt began the service, and he took some strikes from Borden's bag of tricks. He began to vary his game, he threw the book at Lew Vail. This was stuff Vail hadn't seen, hadn't quite expected. He was down three to one before he recovered from the shock and Walt held the advantage and took the fourth set, six games to three.

They met at the net. Vail mopped perspiration from his face. "This time you get it," he said.

Walt didn't answer. He felt a trifle shaky

but Vail's tone was a little unsteady and he knew Vail was also feeling the pace.

They began again and Vail had come back with his power game. Walt knew he couldn't rely on gets now, he had to try and match his opponent. They stood at the baseline, firing the ball back and forth at each other. Vail took the first two games and Walt knew it wasn't going to work. He had a buckling in his knees and then he threw common sense to the winds and began to storm the net. It took everything he had to get up there but he caught Vail by surprise. He slashed the ball back across the court and for the first time he saw a glimpse of panic in the lean face of his opponent.

He fought up even, and they went on, holding their own serves. Something had to crack and then Walt knew suddenly it would be all right. Vail's drives were softening up just a trifle, they were a little easier to handle. Some strength flowed back into Walt's body then, and he began applying pressure. At five-all he held his own service and then went back to await Vail's.

He moved up on the serve, chopped it down the sideline and took the net. The return was a vicious drive just above the net. Walt lunged, threw out his racket arm and the ball spat back across for the point.

The game went to deuce. Walt chopped a serve just over the net and Vail went to his knees, trying to get it. He got up slowly, one point away from the defeat and went back to the service line.

The racket went high. Walt was deep and he saw the blur coming at him, nipping the lime when it hit. He locked his wrist and turned into the ball, smashing with all the force in his body. A rocket shot back across the net. It exploded at Vail's feet. The racket flew out of his hand, the ball bounced on past him and it was all over.

Walt went slowly toward the net and Vail was there, barely able to stand up. A guy with guts, Walt thought, and maybe the beating would make him into a human being.

They shook hands. Vail said, "I'll play you again."

"Sure," Walt said cheerfully. "We'll play and have a pack of fun. That's what a tennis club is for."



*(Continued from page 6)*

nor ever slowing down enough so Sam could hit in time with him.

Joe Gans was like a dancing master teaching a somewhat slow pupil, always just a shade ahead of the music so the student would be right on the beat. But Joe was dancing with his arms, his shoulders, his head, every muscle beneath his sleek brown skin. And he was making a go of it.

While the bout moved on to its draw decision, the sports writers began to recall other Gans bouts. And in every one of them Joe Gans was the winner.

But in spite of all these wins, any manager was willing to let his man get into the ring with Joe Gans. The reason for this was, Joe always made the other man look his best. Joe did not blow an opponent down by pure strength and fury, nor did he outspeed or outbox him in a way to make him look foolish. He caught the rhythm of the man he faced, then paced himself to it. He caught on to the other man's style, then made the man beat himself. As a result, no one could figure out just why Joe Gans was winning. Everybody seemed to think that the next man Joe faced would surely beat him.

**J**OE kept right on winning. But bouts got harder to find. And he had to find them. Joe was not one to hold on to a dollar, and he seemed to have hundreds of friends all of whom needed money.

He took on Jack Twin Sullivan, a championship caliber middleweight, twice in 1906. Sullivan was knocked out in ten rounds the first time. The second time, Jack Twin tried all sorts of odd moves to throw Joe off from his perfect timing. He managed to stay fifteen that way. And from this the promoters got an idea.

Somewhere there must be a fighter so unorthodox, so queer in his methods, that the perfect Gans' sense of rhythm would not work. Gans had actually gotten a black eye in the second Sullivan bout. He had laughed it off, saying "dat just kain't happen to a real good boxer, and de ole marster is goin' to learn how to box all over again, practice every move, and den he won't get no more black eyes." But the thought of an off-style boxer caught on.

A man made to order for this was com-

ing along. His name was Battling Nelson.

Battling Nelson never made an orthodox move in the ring. He absorbed punishment like a sponge does water. He never took a back step and never stopped swinging.

He met Gans in Goldfield, Nevada in 1906, in the first big bout Tex Rickard promoted.

Round one began. Joe Gans got in the first ten punches, then got in the second ten. All of them were straight driving lefts, and none of them did more than rock Nelson back on his heels.

Round two came up. Again it was all Gans. Joe might as well have been at work on a punching bag. He was always just a few inches too far away from the floundering Nelson, or too close, or to one side. And always those brown arms were punching and punching.

Every round looked like the last one for Nelson. But he recuperated so fast between rounds—Bat Nelson had one of the most perfect hearts ever owned by a human body—that the beginning of every new round looked like the start of the fight. But, at the end of forty-two sessions, Bat Nelson swung low and fouled his way out.

Another enemy was fighting Joe Gans now—illness. Joe knew he was through. But he hoped to stay champion for one more fight and win enough cash to help fight off his illness. He took on Nelson for another long one.

It was July 30, 1907. Once more Joe Gans made Nelson look like a clown. The colored man's timing was never more perfect. Nelson committed foul after foul; the bout should have gone to Gans a dozen times, but the referee could see nothing. And in the seventeenth old Joe Gans went down, a victim not so much to Nelson's punches as to the white plague.

Even in that last round, Joe Gans was a master. On legs turned to rubber, he swayed out of the path of Nelson's rushes, boxed in perfect rhythm. But the Gans punch was gone. Without it, his timing made him wonderful to watch, but not dangerous to fight. He ended his career fighting against such odds as no man could face. The ring has never seen another like him, perhaps never will. For experts count Joe Gans the most skillful at timing an opponent and perhaps the best boxer who ever threw leather in a ring.

# A PRESENT FOR POP

## CHAPTER ONE

Temple—of Mayhem

THERE was less than a quarter to play, the Blues were out in front by six points, and Toby Marsh was a happy guy. Beating the Wolves was always an exercise which Toby enjoyed, but today was special. Today the win would give them the championship. It would mean that next week they could play the Bulls, beat them as they had beaten them once before, this season, and everybody would make a fancy dollar and there would be rejoicing in the land.

It was their ball on their own twenty-eight, and Toby took it into the tackle for four. He lowered his head at the correct moment and took Fasio's swinging fist upon the top of his helmet. It was a good place to take it. It would have been a mistake to take that thing on the nose.

Toby got to his feet and grinned crookedly. He told the Wolves' big tackle, "Some-day I'm going to take you apart, Fasio, just for the hell of it. It would be fun."

Fasio snarled at him, "That will be the day, you louse! When you do that—"

Cincy Green interposed himself between them. He pushed Toby away. He said, "Not now, chum. We still got another ten minutes of this thing. Hold onto your hat. You can have him later. This is business."

Toby shook his head. "For about five years that slob has been bothering me. Once I beat his ears off, but he's never discouraged. He keeps trying all the time. Never a dull moment."

There were few dull moments when you were in there playing the Wolves. Fasio, and Big Joe Bergen, and a few more of them, were continually trying to shove their arms down your throat, trying to kick your eyes and your teeth out. They were a pleasant crowd. It was always an interesting afternoon when the Wolves came to town.

But they had them licked today. Toby stole a glance at the Wolves' bench, and he could see Jud Temple, down at the end. Temple's hat was far down over his eyes, and Toby could picture the scowl the brim

*The present for Pop couldn't be just anything—it had to be special. It had to do with eleven guys deciding to lose a game—a game they were breaking their hearts to win!*

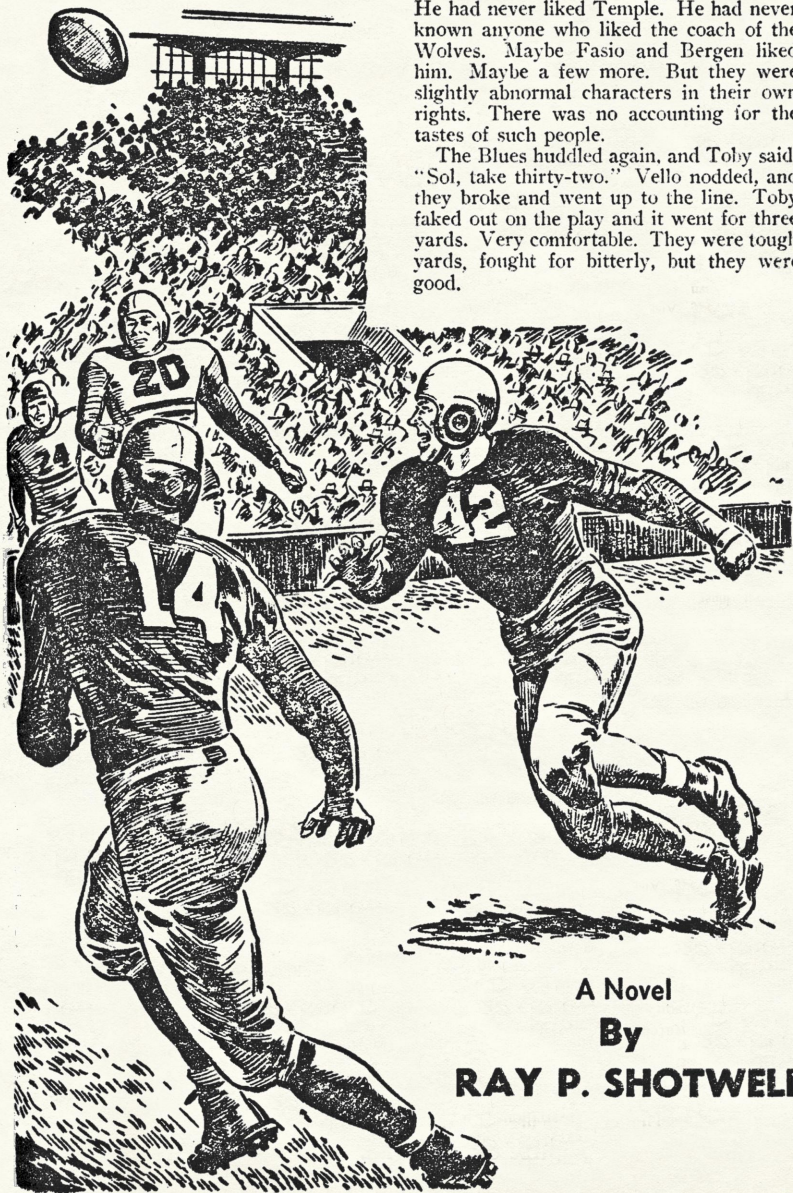


He thought of Pop on the bench  
—and something clicked in him.



concealed. He grinned happily to himself. He had never liked Temple. He had never known anyone who liked the coach of the Wolves. Maybe Fasio and Bergen liked him. Maybe a few more. But they were slightly abnormal characters in their own rights. There was no accounting for the tastes of such people.

The Blues huddled again, and Toby said, "Sol, take thirty-two." Vello nodded, and they broke and went up to the line. Toby faked out on the play and it went for three yards. Very comfortable. They were tough yards, fought for bitterly, but they were good.



A Novel  
By  
**RAY P. SHOTWELL**

Vello was a good kid, big and hard-running. A find. It was his first year up. He had come in in the third quarter, when Martin had gone out with a busted leg. Martin, the savage bucking back. "Monotonous" Martin, some sportswriter had called him. He riveted in there and always came up with a couple of yards. Just as certain and as sure as tomorrow.

Fussil had been banged up in that same quarter. Timmy Fussil was a great running back. He and Toby alternated at the post, relieved each other at the wicked job.

That was one thing about playing the Wolves. You could always be sure of losing a couple of valuable men. They were tough and dirty. Crippleers. They reflected the coaching and the personality of Jud Temple.

The clock was ticking off the minutes and the Blues were marching. Marching slowly, but marching. Keeping that ball away from the Wolves.

So, in a little while it would be over, and he could thumb his nose at Fasio, or knock his block off if he wanted to. Pop Delmer would be coach of the Blues for another season, anyway, and there would be little to worry about. Any worrying that was to be done after that, the Army would have to do. Toby would be part and parcel of the Army in two more weeks. If he was lucky. If he could arrange things.

**H**E TOOK an end play himself, and Cincy Green rolled along in front of him. Schwartz and Plossi came out of the guard spots, riding high, and cut down the end and the man backing up on that side. Toby wheeled into the clear, with Cincy leading him, and Cincy cut the legs from under Big Joe Bergen and Toby ran free. He ran for thirty yards before they knocked him outside. He got up with the blood running slowly in his mouth, but with a pleased grin on his face. It was always nice to be on the other club's thirty-five rather than on your own. It was a nice margin of safety.

The Wolves called for a time out, and Toby sat upon the grass and Cincy Green came over and sat beside him. Cincy fingered his mouth. "They should keep a dentist on the field instead of a referee. He'd be of more use."

Cincy Green was the best blocking back

in the business. He was big and fast and he loved to knock 'em numb. He backed up a line like few people Toby had ever seen. For the last five years, ever since they had both come to the Blues together, they had shared an apartment in town. Cincy was a wonderful guy.

Cincy removed his hand from his mouth long enough to say, "This will cinch it for Pop. Haslin won't dare throw him out. I mean, you just don't take the coach of a winning club and fire him out on his pants. It would be silly."

"Haslin has done a lot of silly things," Toby reminded him. Morton Haslin was the owner of the Blues. He was a young man with a great deal of money. He had bought the Blues a year ago and was a first-class source of trouble.

"Pop could have any other job in the country, if Haslin gives him the gate," Cincy said.

Toby nodded. "Sure. And he'd be so happy. Like a cow in a kitchen. He's run the Blues for fifteen years. He'd just sit down and die if he went to work any place else. You know that."

Cincy nodded. "Yeah. I was just talkin' I know."

Pop Delmar had coached the Blues ever since the league had started. You thought of the Blues and Pop Delmar the way you thought of bread and butter; the way you pictured a glass of beer—with a head on it. He was a wonderful football coach, and he considered himself part of the Blues. So did everyone else—everyone but Haslin.

He and Pop had trouble. Haslin had obeyed a whim, had bought the Blues for a heavy sum, and had come in and tried to run the team. He didn't know any more football than a dog did, and Pop had explained this to him in the forthright Delmar manner. Haslin hadn't liked it. He had made threatening noises. If they didn't win in their half of the league, then beat the Bulls for the championship, Pop would get the boot. That was fairly certain. And that would be calamity. They could not permit that to happen to Pop. He had done too much for them. Too much for every guy who had ever played for him.

The whistle brought them to their feet. Toby sent Curtin on a reverse, on the first down, and it was good for only a yard. He banged into the weak-side tackle himself for three, then sent Vello into the middle



IT ALL happened so suddenly that Toby found it difficult to believe. Vello smashed through and into the clear. Then Fasio and Rettler scissored him viciously, and Kane worked on the ball. The well-held apple could not stand the strain and went popping slowly and stupidly up into the air. Big Joe Bergen came racing out of nowhere and it settled in his arms. There was no one within ten yards of him at the moment and that was all the start Bergen ever needed. He went up the sideline, a huge, long-striding ghost. He scored without being touched.

It was stunning, stupefying. Toby felt as if someone had hit him on the head with a paving block. Vello knelt on the ground and cried like a child. Cincy Green walked slowly up the field muttering unintelligibly to himself.

The Wolves got the extra point they needed. Kane stood back there and booted the ball nicely between the uprights, and the big ball park was thunderous with the noise and the shouting.

Toby told them, "We'll get it back. We got three minutes."

It was idle talk. Toby ran like a madman, and Vello drilled into the line like someone possessed. Curtin rifled four lovely, clothesline passes that were incomplete by inches. They took it to the Wolves' thirty, but that was all. The Wolves were a tough outfit—the toughest in the league, and a tired team could not run against them. The gun went off just as Toby had been smashed outside on the Wolves' twenty-two.

He walked with lowered head to the dressing room. He did not hear the profane jibes of Bergen and Fasio and Pogan. He thought of only one thing; that they had dropped this big one, and Pop Delmar would be told to take a walk. A walk away from his beloved Blues, the club he had raised from an infant and which he regarded as his own.

It was true that they would have a shot at the Wolves next week. Each club had lost a game during the season, beating each other once. But Toby knew what would happen. Martin was lost to them. His vicious driving would get them no desperately needed yards next week. The guy was always a terrible threat even when he wasn't running. And now he was gone.

And with Fussil hurt, it looked as if Toby would have a sixty-minute ball game on his hands. He knew how much the club had lost in Martin and Fussil.

You couldn't kid yourself about a thing like that.

He discovered that Cincy was beside him. Their big, rangy forms cast twin shadows on the beaten turf. Cincy said, "And we had it right in our pocket. A couple of minutes to go, and something like that has to happen. We had it right here." He spread out a huge hand, palm cupped.

Toby didn't want to talk. There was nothing you could say. It was too tough.

They went into the dressing room, and there was only the noise of cleats shuffling on the cement and the weird and bitter sound of Vello sobbing inconsolably in a corner. Pop Delmar left the kid, came over to Toby. The thin, spare man offered the package of cigarettes in his hand. He said, "We'll get it back next week. It doesn't make a bit of difference. Don't look so damned miserable. It was a break. No one can help something like that. Next week we'll murder them."

Toby said, "How's Fussil?"

Pop told him, "Well, now, that leg might be perfectly all right. You never know about those things. Give it a day or two and he'll be as good as ever." But his tone belied his words.

There wasn't much sense asking about Martin. Toby had seen that twisted leg. But he said, "And Martin?"

Pop shook his head. "He's over in the hospital. Busted in two places. Those swine really do a job. Sometimes I think it would be worthwhile to play that kind of football. Against them."

Toby said, "There's next week. There's something in your remark, Pop."

"No sense in it," Pop said. "And forget it. You know I don't go for anything like that. But Martin and Fussil, both within five minutes—" he shook his head—"That's a tough way to win any sort of ball game."

Toby showered and dressed. The hot water took some of the tiredness from his big frame, and the cold, stinging spray dispelled some of his gloom. He came out feeling better.

Cincy said, "You got a date tonight? You gonna meet Annie?"

TOBY grinned at him. Things seemed brighter. He had not forgotten the date, but his mind had been busy. The world was worth living in after all. He said, "Yeah. Gonna meet her at Jake's." The steaks at Jake's, when you could get them, were masterpieces you were almost reluctant to destroy with your teeth. Most of the time it wasn't necessary. Most of the time they just melted in your mouth. Toby felt generous. He said, "Come on down and have a drink with us. Maybe we'll even let you eat with us. We're going to a movie later. You can't come. But you can eat."

Cincy nodded. "I can eat a horse. I can eat a house. Even sittin' at the same table with that business, I will be able to eat—I'm that hungry."

Annie Sherris lived in the same apartment house with them. Toby and Cincy had seen her for almost a month before Toby had managed to talk to her. She was tall and dark and very lovely. Toby had left the apartment with her one night. It was raining like two days before the Johnstown flood. He had walked through the down-pour for five blocks, had found a cab and had brought it back to her. She had been very grateful. Toby had had to go upstairs and change his clothes. But it was all right. After that he could speak to her. That had been two months ago. Toby was very much in love and happy about it. Cincy was unhappy but resigned.

A cab dropped them at Jake's and the place was crowded. They sat at the bar and ordered drinks, their backs to the room. There were tables just behind them. Jake, his great body swollen and comfortable from his habit of eating and drinking up his profits, had assured them of three fine chunks of meat. Toby was happy.

He was much happier, in a moment, when Annie came in, sat silently on the stool by his side and said, "I'm hungry."

He looked at her. That was always a pleasure. Her lovely, intelligent face was topped by a ridiculous hat. Her eyes were smiling at him. She exuded a warmth and a fragrance that made Toby feel that he was sitting on a small cloud.

She leaned over and grinned at Cincy. She indicated his slightly swollen mouth. She said, "You should have kicked him back." The smile faded quietly from her

face. "I saw the game—you were both mighty fine. It was a tough one to lose. A shame."

Cincy took a drink and spoke. It usually took Toby about five minutes to recover sufficiently from the shock of her presence so that words would come to him. Cincy said, "Next week we murder 'em. Wait'll next Sunday."

The girl nodded. "With Martin's leg broken and Fussil all banged up. You'll murder them, all right."

She was smart. She was interested. Toby asked, "What are you drinking?"

"About a pint of liquid fire with a little flavoring, if they can arrange it. That grandstand was freezing."

Toby ordered another round, and the three of them sat there happily. The disappointments of the day faded in the kindly atmosphere, and it was slightly shocking to hear the voices in back of him. A man said, "It isn't that Delmar wasn't once a good coach. He's just getting old, is all. Behind the times."

Toby knew the voice. He waited for the answer. It came. Another man said to the first, "I've been thinking that myself. I know a bit about the game, and I've made suggestions. Delmar ignores them. A man doesn't like to have his judgment treated like that."

"Certainly not," the first man told him. "Of course not."

By craning his neck just a little, Toby could look into the mirror on the backbar and confirm what his ears had told him. At a table directly in back of them, Jud Temple was sitting with Morton Haslin. The Wolves' coach was heavy-set, his meaty shoulders hunched forward, his face wreathed in an ingratiating smile. The owner of the Blues, munching noisily at his steak, was tall, well-dressed, trim in a fat-padded fashion.

Toby didn't have to strain himself to get Temple's angle. The Blues would pay more money than the Wolves. It was a bigger town, a more football-conscious town than housed the Wolves. And Toby knew that Joe Redwood, who owned the Wolves, was ready to get rid of Temple. In spite of the fact that Temple turned out good clubs, Redwood couldn't stand him. Redwood was a guy in love with the game. He had no use for Temple's brand of mayhem.



Pop, on the other hand, had one more year to run on his contract with Haslin. It didn't mean much, though, for if Haslin didn't want him, he'd just pay him for the extra year and let him go. Temple knew it and Temple was a man to hurry things along.

"As a matter of fact," Temple said now, "Pop Delmar is a has-been. He's had a lot of luck with this season, of course." Toby could see the big shoulders shrug. "But it all comes out in the wash. I beat him today, and I'll beat him next week. Now, you and I, working together with a club, could really put something on the field."

"**I** WOULD look funny and smell bad," Toby said loudly, turning on his stool. Both men at the table whirled and looked at him. "You could get a bunch of gorillas out of the zoo," Toby told them, "and then you would have a fair sort of team. I would like to see the outfit you two manufactured."

Haslin said, "Why, Marsh. I didn't see you sitting there. And I think you're talking too much."

Temple snorted. "He's one of Delmar's favorite children. He is a Boy Scout and likes to help old men across the street."

Toby said, "Pop knows more about football than Einstein knows about two plus two. Thirty years ago, he forgot more about the game than you could learn if you lived forever."

Haslin held up an imperious hand, nicely manicured. "Now, Marsh, I won't have any of this—"

Temple grimaced, "He knows he is in a place where talk will not lead to anything. He has a large mouth." Temple, only a few years before, had played the sort of football he now taught. He had been a tough gent.

Toby stood up. He said, "Of all the lousy people I know, you win the Oscar. Trying to take Pop's job away from him like this. Practicing to be a 'yes-man' to this clown." He indicated Haslin. The day had been too much for him. He was getting rid of a little of his anger now.

Temple stood up, his attitude aggressive. Toby smiled crookedly and cannoned a terrific right hand against his chin. Temple went over backward, slid across the next

table, taking its contents to the floor with him. Everything stayed where it fell.

Haslin was on his feet, his face several shades whiter.

Jake came walking over with a couple of waiters. He directed them in clearing away the debris, told them to lug Temple from the premises. He turned to Annie and Toby and Cincy at the bar. He said, "It was a lovely shot, Toby. I can't stand that guy. The steaks'll be on the table in four minutes." He said to the bartender, "Willy, drinks for the people. Mr. Marsh adds to the gaiety of the joint."

Toby's anger had cooled with the punch. He felt a little afraid of what Annie would say. She shook her head and grinned. "What a wonderful way to get a drink on the house. I'm starving."

The steaks were wonderful. They ate in happy silence, and when the coffee came they were content. Annie said, "You didn't like that gent, Toby."

Cincy explained the situation and, when he had finished, Toby said, "It's not only that Pop is a wonderful coach. He's such a guy. He breaks his back to do you a favor. Why, when Joey Brennan's father was sick . . ." Joey Brennan was the locker boy. Pop had laid huge sums on the line, directed towards the recovery of the kid's father. He had not mentioned this to a soul, but the grateful boy had not been able to keep from talking. Toby mentioned other instances. There was no member of the team who had not received, in some way or other, the blessings of Pop's kindness.

Annie observed, "He keeps a small squad."

Toby nodded. "Smallest in the league. Twenty-five guys. One big family. Claims you can work better with twenty-five men than with fifty-five. Says he gets the best and doesn't need any more. Pop says you can play only eleven guys at once. Why clutter up a bench?"

"It sounds sensible," Annie said. "Except that sometimes it's embarrassing. As when Martin and Fussil get hurt the same day."

Cincy grinned. "Pop'll probably play himself."

"I think he could," she told them. "The way you talk about him."

They had just called for the check when the two men walked up to their table. An-

nie looked at them, approaching, and said, "Either they're plain-clothesmen or I have never seen a movie."

They were. They both took out wallets and displayed badges. One of them said, "Which one of you is Toby Marsh?"

Annie said, "I will confess all. But I didn't mean to strangle her."

Toby said, "I'm Marsh."

"You are also locked up," the man informed him. "On account of you punched some guy in the puss a short time ago. Assault and battery."

Annie said, "AC or DC?" She looked at Toby, "Is this a joke?"

He was puzzled. Temple was not a guy to do something like this. Or was he? Ordinarily, Temple would work out his anger in some more physical fashion. He would instruct his gorillas before the game next week—something like that.

Toby looked at the policemen. "So what happens?"

"You finished eating?" the man asked him.

Toby nodded.

"So you come over to the station with us. Peaceful."

It was an annoyance. It smacked of something more than annoyance. Toby told Cincy, "You take Annie to the movies. I will see you later."

The policeman nodded. "In about a month."

## CHAPTER TWO

### For the Dough

THEY went to the station house together.

They got the story. Temple had preferred charges against him. The desk sergeant said there had been another man with him. Toby would appear at night court in three or four hours. He was liable to a nasty little spell in the jug if the charge stood. He was taken away to a detention pen.

Cincy had said, "No bail?"

"A thousand bucks," they were told. Sunday evening and no banks open. Cincy said, "I'll get it from Jake. I'll be right back." He left with Annie.

Toby spent several hours with a penful of drunks and minor stick-up men and dope peddlers. He wondered what the hell had

happened to Cincy and the money. He also had a bit of time to think about the situation. It began to make sense. If he spent more than a week in jail, the game with the Wolves would be little more than a joke. With Fussil in bad shape, the Blues would be far up the creek. It was smart of Temple. It was also characteristic of him to take advantage of some break like this.

The court went into session and Toby was summoned into its presence. His case would come up in fifteen or twenty minutes. He went into the ugly, crowded courtroom and was amazed. He looked around, and in prominent seats, he saw fully twenty of the Blues. Cincy approached him with a man he did not know. Cincy said, "This is Denny Harren. He is your lawyer. I figured to let you stew in that pen for a few hours while I rounded up some witnesses."

Toby looked at the Blues and began to get the idea. He also looked around and saw Jud Temple. The man's mouth was swollen. Toby grinned. Beside Temple was Morton Haslin. The owner of the Blues looked very annoyed.

Toby stood before the bench, and Temple recited his woes. He said that Toby had struck him without provocation. Viciously, he said. Haslin corroborated his testimony. The judge was a cold and methodical looking person. Toby began to sweat.

And then began the parade of the Blues. All of them, it seemed, had been eating in Jake's that evening. All of them had witnessed the alleged attack. All of them had seen and heard Temple provoke Toby. Manny Schwartz, the huge guard whose two hundred and thirty pounds made his six feet appear to be six inches less than that, was asked for his version of the affair.

In answer to the judge's question, Manny said, "Temple was very nasty. He said something to Marsh, then made as if to bust him one."

"Could you hear what he said?" the judge asked.

Manny hung his head, put his hands behind his back. Toby was astonished. He could have sworn that Manny was blushing. Manny said, in lowered voice, "He called Marsh an unprintable name."

The row of Blues were convulsed. There were various sounds of strangling and choking, and Toby almost fell over backward. That Manny should be on the stage.



The judge was disgusted. He dismissed the charges and the case with a wave of his hand. He said, "Get these people out of here. The court is embarrassed."

They left. On the street, Haslin came up to Toby. Temple was nowhere to be seen. Haslin said, "Marsh, your attitude is unfortunate. You'll hear more about this."

Cincy came close. He told the owner of the Blues, "You better get yourself out of here, Waldo. You start anything and I got witnesses." The Blues' witness staff was still in attendance. Haslin retreated into the comparative safety of a cab. He lowered the window and said, "You men will regret this when the contracts are mailed out next season—"

There was a concerted movement toward the cab, and the driver got underway hurriedly.

Toby looked at the crowd around him. He shook his head. "All in Jake's at the same time. The place couldn't hold so much beef. There's a joint just down the street. We will all have a drink."

They went in a body, Annie holding Toby's arm, ringed by the crowd of giants. She said, "Now I know how a peanut feels in the elephant tent." She was happy.

Cincy said, "It was Annie's idea. I knew most of the crowd were staying down at the Weston House tonight." It was a hotel in town, favored by the football crowd. "Sunday night is no night to travel on the trains. I just called them up, got them together, told them the story. The lawyer was dressing. He knew from nothing."

Toby looked at Annie. "Such a smart girl."

She nodded. "But smart. You didn't hear me opening my mouth in that courtroom." She waved her hand at the assembled Blues. "All these lovely mountains could spend the rest of their lives in jail for perjury, if the judge hadn't had a sense of humor."

The evening was a happy thing, but the week following lacked many joyous notes. They started work on Tuesday for the game with the Wolves, and all went about their tasks with a certain lack of fervor. Pop was patient. He said, "I know that those guys took a lot out of you Sunday. They're a tough club. Rough. You'll be all right in a few days. It's always that

way when you play them. It takes a day or two to get over the beating."

They started to move like racehorses. Manny Schwartz said, "Why those lousy. . . ." Toby thought that the judge would have wondered to hear him. Manny could really turn it out.

ON WEDNESDAY Toby went down to the hospital to see Martin. The big guy looked as if someone were starting to build a house, with his left leg as a foundation. He told Toby, "The same doc that works on me was taking care of Fussil. He says the leg is so-so. It's all right unless it gets hit a certain way. I figure he will be good for about five minutes, for those Wolves will hit that leg from eighteen different directions the first time he carries. They are experts about legs. It looks like you will have a rugged afternoon."

Toby grinned. "I'll manage to keep busy."

Martin asked, "How does it make with the Army?" He was a confidant. He and Toby had been together a long while. He knew that Toby had been trying to get into the Army—his draft board had turned him down. He had been kicked in the head four years ago, and he had a punctured eardrum.

He said, "You know how it is. I can go out there and gallop around like a horse for half the year, but they won't take me in the Army, Navy or Marines. They will not even have me in the Waves. Sometimes I cannot hear so good. What difference does it make?"

Martin shrugged. "I wouldn't know. I got four kids. It is just like war."

"So I look around and I find Harry Forest." Harry Forest had once been a fine tackle for the Blues. "He is a doctor. He is now an Army doctor. I tell him my troubles and he says it is all right. I can get myself examined by him at an induction center and he will look into my ear and say he has never seen a prettier ear. If it gets real annoying and it seems that I will get someone besides myself into trouble, I can always call a halt. It all depends, Forest says, on what sort of job I get."

Martin nodded. "I hope it works." He lighted a cigarette. "How's about Pop? What's going to happen there?"

Toby shook his head. "It looks lousy. This guy Haslin is a phony, and Temple is

after the job. You know Pop. He won't have Haslin fooling around with the club. Tells him to keep out of the way. Haslin doesn't like it."

"Haslin," Martin said, "is a thus-and-so."

"Sure. But that doesn't do Pop any good. And you know what'll happen to him if he loses the Blues. He'll just go curl up some place and melt."

Martin was more realistic. "He'll probably get himself a good job at some school or other. There are a lot of them would like to have Pop."

Toby agreed. "People get along when an only child dies, too. But it isn't pleasant. That's the way it is with Pop. And he is not so young that many schools would be anxious to get him. The accent is on youth."

Martin said, "Maybe Haslin could be talked out of it. Maybe he could be persuaded to change his mind."

"Not after what happened the other day," Toby said. "Not in a million years."

"There should be a law," Martin swore. "Just because some slob has a lot of dough, it seems as if he can do just as he pleases with another man's life. Hell, Pop has been the Blues for so long that—"

On Thursday Fussil worked out. Toby took one look at him and knew he wouldn't be much use. Fussil would try. He was that sort of a gent. But once those guys got to working on him. . . .

Cincy mirrored Toby's thoughts. "If we could take this one, somehow—if we could win this damned league title, Haslin might not let Pop go. Maybe if we could just—"

"If we had wings," Toby said, "we could have a lot of fun. What you been smoking lately?"

They went through their paces Friday morning, and Haslin was on hand for the workout. He stood on the sidelines for a little while, then came over to the group Pop was working on. Toby eyed him with mistrust. He did not even like the way the guy walked.

Haslin said, "Delmar. I have a few ideas about this game Sunday. I think it might be a good idea to have Vello working in Fussil's place." Vello was strictly a straight-ahead power runner, generating a terrific start, but with no real speed. It was a brilliant thought.

Pop looked at him patiently. "Anything else?"

Haslin nodded. "Yes. I wouldn't depend on passes very much. It's been my experience in the past that passing is overrated as a ground-gaining device."

"You mean," Pop said, "that Sammy Baugh is a flash in the pan?"

Haslin nodded quickly, then looked at Pop and colored. He said, "Not precisely that, but—"

"Why don't you wander downtown and buy yourself an oil well, or something?" Pop asked. "Why don't you find a nice quiet spot up in the stands and lie down for a little while? Why the hell don't you leave me alone when you see I'm busy?"

He turned to the club. "Let's get working. Enough of this comedy."

The laughter swelled and died, and they started to work again. Toby saw Haslin trail off, anger in his every step. He looked at Pop. Pop wore an expression that was a mixture of vexation and deeply hidden worry. He knew the axe was falling. He was simply more interested in what he was doing at the moment than in what would happen to him, almost inevitably, in a few days.

THE news broke Saturday afternoon. They'd had a light workout in the morning and things had gone as smoothly as could be expected. Pop had grinned at them when it was over. "We can lick these guys," he said. "And if we don't, we'll all live for a while anyway. They're a bunch of lice, but they caught us with our pants down, and sometimes, with lice, it's a little embarrassing. But we'll get along. I'll see you all tomorrow."

Toby left the park, went down to the apartment and had a nap. He went out a bit later and bought an evening newspaper. It was all there in black and white. Haslin had decided that he and Pop Delmar did not see eye to eye on certain policies, and that it would be best if they parted. Haslin, being a student and a devotee of football would, of course, retain ownership of the club and cast about for another coach.

Toby held his stomach in check with difficulty. A student of football. It was sickening.

But it was final. Pop was out. There was nothing that could be done about it.



He told Annie about it that night at dinner. They were at Jake's again. Annie looked around and said, "I am a dainty gal. I like lace doilies and cultured looking lamb chops, all served in antique teashops adorned with spinning wheels. What is it about this place that interests me?"

Toby said, "The steaks."

Annie nodded. "You hit the steer on the head. All my life I've been mistaken. I thought I was a canary. I'm an eagle." She told the waiter, "Make mine rare. I'm not even particular whether or not you kill it. Just knock the horns off and wheel it in. Bring the blood in a bucket."

Toby grinned. She was as cute as a button, and much lovelier. He said, "You see the papers tonight?"

Annie nodded. "Lovely news. You should have hit Haslin the other night, not Temple. And the game, the paper also says, is an absolute sell-out."

"A sell-out and a wash-out for Pop," Toby told her. "The joint will be jammed."

Annie looked at him. "You got a ticket for a girl?"

He fished into his pocket and came out with a pasteboard. He scowled at her benignly. "Fifty-yard line, upstairs. Had to buy the thing. The situation is getting tough."

She gave him the best Sherris smile. "One of the reasons why I love you. Fine tickets."

He grinned, then sobered. "That business about Pop. That is very bad. The Blues mean more to Pop than I can tell you. Years ago he was one of the founders of the league. He got a bunch of ball players together, tried to work them into a good unit. Sometimes the crowds didn't show up. Pop paid the guys out of his own pocket. There wasn't much money in the game. You had to love it to stick with it the way Pop has. And now he's seen it grow to the point where his club can draw ninety thousand people into a park of a Sunday afternoon, and some slob kicks him right out of his house. Just because this guy's father was smart about oil wells. It's lousy."

Annie nodded. "I could add to that if I were not a lady." She lighted a cigarette, sipped her drink, and her lovely brow was wrinkled prettily in thought. She said, "Ninety thousand people."

Toby nodded. "They crowd them in. Everybody wants to see this one. They figure it will be terrific. They don't seem to think about Martin and Fussil."

Annie said again, "Ninety thousand people. That's a great deal of money."

"Just a part of our regular salaries," Toby informed her, "but a fine huge lump for Mr. Haslin. Another oil mine."

The steaks came then, and they attacked them. Halfway through the meal, Toby looked at her and said, "Good?"

Annie nodded. She seemed happier than even the steak should make her. She said, tapping the steak with her fork, "Wonderful. But I thought I just heard this one below."

The coffee came, and Annie looked at him. She said, "Miss Sherris has an idea. From here it looks good."

Toby nodded. "I suppose it is." She was a smart gal. Most of her ideas were fine. "What is it?"

"It concerns ninety thousand people and Mr. Haslin," she told him. She leaned forward and spoke earnestly for five minutes, and when she had finished, she leaned back and looked at him. Toby stared at her and whistled slowly. He said, "This is very different. This has not been done before."

She nodded. "That is just what the gentleman who ate the first oyster said. But it worked out all right. Why don't you try it?"

He considered the thing fully. He grinned at her. "What have I got to lose?"

AND when he went out to the park the next afternoon, he did something that was not his custom. There was a window in the dressing room, and from it a person could get a fine view of the park. Toby stood there anxiously for several minutes, looking out upon the crowd. It was a huge and terrifying assembly. He knew that on only a few occasions had this many people been packed into the place.

Then he dressed. Pop was not yet in evidence. Toby called the crowd around him and had the door locked. He raised his voice slightly. He said, "I have an idea. It is slightly revolutionary. You want to listen to it?"

Eddy Elson, the big end, said, "If you speak English, most of us will be able to understand you."

Toby gave it to them, then. He gave it fast and straight, and when he had finished, he stood there and watched them waiting for their reactions. They came quickly. They approved. Their approval was unanimous, uttered in a low and eagerly angry voice. Then Henders, the tackle, said, "And suppose he says nothing doing?"

Toby had to make them believe this, or what he would have to say in a few moments would not carry sufficient authority. He nodded. "We'll go the whole way. Why not? None of us gets hurt."

They gave it to him, then. The low tones of their speech blended into a powerful roar. They were with him all the way.

There was a knock upon the dressing room door, then, and someone opened it. Pop Delmar came in, his eyes questioning. Toby threw a warning glance at the club. He knew what would happen if Pop got wind of this. They shut up like clams. Pop turned to Toby. "What the hell's going on here?"

Toby grinned at him and shook his head. "Nothing, Pop. You know how it goes. The end of the season, and the boys were chipping in for a little present for you. Secret session."

Pop blushed. Pop was the most wonderful guy. He said, "You gents are crazy. I don't want any present. You guys have been givin' me a good time all season. Forget about it. Don't be foolish."

Toby asked him, "Pop, let me use your office for about fifteen minutes, will you? A guy I want to speak to privately. I won't be long."

Pop nodded. "Sure. Go ahead. But don't be too long. We got a ball game to play."

"After we warm up," Toby told him. "Just for a few minutes."

Out on the field Cincy said, "Toby, you gonna make this thing stick, if Haslin doesn't come across?"

Toby looked at him. "What do you think? Pop would kill me. But Haslin has to think it's the business. He can't know I'm kidding."

Cincy nodded. "It's a big jackpot. Awful big. I think you'll have him over the barrel."

Toby said, "Look, Cincy. How hard can you hit a guy? I mean, not counting your feet. Strictly on the level. Pop's way."

Cincy looked at him. "I don't really know. I guess I've never gone all the way out. What are you thinkin' of?"

"Big Joe Bergen," Toby told him. "Or Fasio. I can't play sixty minutes of this ball game and, when Fussil comes in, those two will murder him—if they're both still in there. If we can whack one of them. . . ."

Cincy licked his lips in anticipation. "You know, Toby, we have never really combined our talents like that. It should be interesting. I personally guarantee that in three or four plays. . . ."

They warmed up. Toby booted a few. The day was cold and clear. He took another look at the house. A very small and greasy pig could not have squeezed in. If Annie's idea would ever work, today was the day.

The Wolves came on as they went off. Big Joe Bergen passed close to Toby and said, "Take out those false teeth and lay them in the locker, mac. Today you really get a going over."

Toby stopped. "You wouldn't like to lay a little dough, would you, blabbermouth?"

Bergen said, "I will lay three to one that you are not in the ball game for the second half. We got plans."

There were a few guys around. Toby told him, "Of that I will take a hundred buck's worth. How about the game?"

Bergen said, "The same bet." His thin-mouthed grin was not reassuring. Toby nodded. "You got bets."

**H**E WENT back to the dressing room. He had given an usher a five dollar bill before he had gone on the field. Now, as he stepped into Pop's office, he saw that the guy had found Haslin in the owner's upper box and had given him the message. Haslin was there. He turned as Toby came in.

"What is all this, Marsh? An usher told me that Delmar wanted to see me about something very important. Said he wanted to get my ideas on certain aspects of the game."

Toby didn't waste any time. "It was a stall. I wanted to see you. Pop's down on the field. He won't disturb us." He took Haslin by the arm, led him to a window looking out upon the huge ball park. He said, "Quite a crowd, eh, Haslin?"

The man smiled and seemed to swell a bit. "Largest crowd ever to see a profes-



sional football game. Slightly over ninety thousand."

"Quite a piece of change is involved?" Toby prompted.

Haslin shrugged. "We'll do all right on the day." Toby had figured it out. He knew just how well Haslin would do. He turned away and sat on the edge of the desk. He gave Haslin the business.

"About Pop's contract—you're letting him go?"

Haslin said, "Under the circumstances, there isn't anything else I can do. We differ on our theories concerning the game. I believe that Temple, who coaches the Wolves, would be a much more suitable—"

Toby cut him short. "I just wanted to make sure." He looked at Haslin, and his dislike for the man increased. He said, "Pop has been with this club ever since the town bought a franchise. It's really his team. Pop is the Blues; the Blues are Pop. And just because you happen to be stupid—and rich—he loses the outfit he loves and has created out of nothing, and that louse Temple takes over."

Haslin frowned. "See here, Marsh! I—"

Toby jabbed him in the chest with a huge finger. "You will listen. Hard." He indicated the window and the great crowd beyond it. "How would you like to have that mob tear down the joint? How would you like to pay back to each and every one of them the money they dropped for their tickets? Over two hundred thousand bucks. How would you like to be laughed out of your pants—lose the entire future of the Blues, kill them as an investment?"

Haslin's color faded a bit. "What do you mean?"

Toby's words were short and clipped. "Just this, Haslin. Either you call Pop Delmar in here—and right now—and sign him to a new ten-year contract, with a slight raise in salary or there will be no ball game today."

Haslin stared at him silently, and Toby said, "I mean no ball game. We will not walk out on the field unless Pop is taken care of—his future as coach of the Blues absolutely insured. We are not fooling. You will have to tell ninety thousand people that they will see no game. You will have to refund their dough. You like the idea?"

Haslin said, "You're crazy, Marsh!"

"You ever heard of a strike?" Toby asked him. "Well, this is one. A dandy. We've got you right by the seat of the pants. Either you pay back the dough and get this crowd out of here without a riot, or Pop stays with the Blues as long as he likes."

Haslin stared at him. "You can't do it. You don't dare."

Toby shrugged. "What have we got to lose? Half of us will be in the Army or Navy before next season. The other half are so damned good that they can get a job anywhere, under any circumstances. Some of us just play for the hell of it, anyway. There are five or six guys who have their own businesses. It doesn't mean a thing to us whether we play today or not. But we think a great deal of Pop, a great deal of the Blues."

He sat there and watched the other man, and his heart was a rigid piece of ice in his breast. Either he had bluffed the guy or else.

He would find out in a moment.

Haslin stared at him, the color returning slowly to his face. He was furiously examining every angle of the situation, Toby knew. He was looking for an out, matching his pride against his greed, looking for the weak points in Toby's armor.

He laughed; it was an ugly sound. His mouth assumed brutal, if weak, lines. He said, "Marsh, you're just talking. You haven't got the nerve. Your bluff won't stand up. It's fantastic."

Toby didn't say anything at the moment. He looked at Haslin. The man was walking uncertainly toward the door, not quite believing his own words. Toby followed him with his eyes, kept his own cold and noncommittal, let the beginnings of a grin wrinkle the corners of his mouth. He raised one foot, started to unlace the shoe. He bent down and shook his head slowly. "I want to be here. Right at this window. It's really going to be something to see and hear, when that mob gets the news." He paused a moment. "And where are you going to get the dough? Most of those tickets were advance sales. It's Sunday, Haslin." He forced himself to whistle a popular tune.

Haslin said, "Does the rest of the team know about this? Do they really endorse your plan? Are they really fools enough

to think they can get away with this?"

Toby didn't answer him. He walked to the door and opened it and called down the corridor, "Hey, you gents! You gonna play ball today? Mr. Haslin would like to know."

The roar came back from the dressing room. The club trooped up to the office. They were huge and numerous and forceful. They smelled a little of muscle. Haslin took one look at them and turned to Toby. He said, "Where's the contract?"

Toby drew it from an envelope. He had had it drawn up that morning. He put it on the desk, handed Haslin a pen. The man bent over and signed it, and Toby could hear him muttering, "Ninety thousand people, averaging almost two dol-

lars—"

He straightened up. His face was brick red. "There is one condition I must impose. The game next week will draw almost this many. I will agree to this contract, if you win today's game. Otherwise. . ." his voice trailed off.

Toby looked at him, then at the rest of the club. Joe Szrobo voiced the sentiments of the pack. Joe said, "Okay, Toby. Let it go that way. What the hell. We'll take these slob."

Toby turned back to Haslin. "You heard what they said. Okay. Sign the contract. If we lose you won't hear any more about it."

Haslin said, "How do I know—" He saw something in Toby's eyes, felt it in the restless, sudden movement of the men in the corridor. He bent down and signed. He straightened up and there was a nasty smile on his face. "I know you gentlemen are trustworthy. I don't think I'll see that contract again." He went to the door, and they made a passage for him in the corridor. He said, "I hope you have a pleasant afternoon."

Young Cisti, who relieved Newnan at center, said, "I hope you have a—"

Toby checked him. "Let him go, kid." He looked at the rest of them. "We did the best we could. He's got us up a tree."

"Hell," Manny Schwartz said, "we can just climb down again. Let's go and take these guys. But good."

They went out on the field like that. Cincy said, "It didn't work so good."

"It worked all right as far as it went,"

Toby told him. "I didn't dare hold out any longer. If he had only known it, there couldn't have been any strike. Pop wouldn't have allowed it." He looked up at the jammed stands. "You know, it would be nice if we won this thing. It would be an awful surprise to most people."

Cincy said, "Including me."

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Present for Pop

MANNY SCHWARTZ went out to the middle of the field to meet Fasio and the officials. A coin was flipped into the air, then Fasio said something. Manny moved toward him and the officials intervened. The crowd had seen the by-play and voiced the excitement they felt. Manny came back. "We kick," he said. "An' I wish that slob's head was what I was kicking in'. That is a bum I have never liked."

Pop told them, "Take it easy out there. You can lick this crowd. The ball game is sixty minutes long. Many things happen. Take good care of yourselves. Don't get hurt."

Elson kidded him. "Pop! Did you forget? We're playin' the Wolves."

They went out and lined up on the forty. Manny waved his hairy hand and the whistle tootled out. Toby took his steps and rammed his toe into the pill. The carnage had started.

Illis took it on the goal line and started back. He got to the eighteen before Schwartz and Edson knocked him down. Fasio and Pogan, the Wolves' guards, both concentrated on Toby. He eluded their blocks, their flying, searching feet, and said to Cincy, "Those guys are starting early and earnestly."

Cincy said, "Fasio?" and Toby nodded. Cincy said, "He will be number one on our hit parade. Call them like that when we get that apple." Toby nodded.

The Wolves started slowly, and on fourth they kicked from their twenty-five. The big Blues line had stopped them cold. Toby was back there to take the boot on his twenty-two. He rolled back to the thirty-eight before they dumped him. It was a wonderful day for running. He felt as if he had a motor in him. He hoped that the damned thing held out.



Fasio backed up the Wolves' line on the weak side. The Blues went into a single wing to the right and Toby called May on the long reverse. He and Cincy went after Fasio.

They hit him like a bomb. They hit him with vicious intent. He went up three feet and back six feet and landed on his neck. He got up very slowly. It had been a terrible block administered at the same moment by two large gentlemen. Cincy grinned and said, "Hello Fasio." They walked back before he made his muttered, profane reply.

Toby called the same play again. May had gained four. He called it short, this time, and he and Cincy went at their task with a will. Fasio was a large and wonderful target. They did not miss. They scissored him with a high-low and the impact was horrible. Fasio stayed on one knee while they walked away. Cincy repeated his greeting.

Vello went to the weak side of a delayed buck, and Toby and Cincy resumed their task. Fasio was slowed down. They butchered him. They hit him like a couple of runaway locomotives would hit a car stalled on a crossing. They got up and walked away, and Cincy turned and said, "Good-bye, Fasio." Some Wolves came off the bench and helped Fasio to a place of safety and Cincy said, "That is that."

"He'll be back," Toby observed.

"But he'll never be the same. I think we damaged his spirit. Also his nose."

It was fourth and two, but something had been accomplished. Toby booted one outside on the Wolves' eight.

They caught the Blues napping with a dangerous pass into the flat. Toby knocked Bergen outside on the thirty, and the Wolves' back said, "And now we go, bum. Just keep out of the way."

They did move. They had power and speed. They made three first downs in a row, and when the Blues finally checked them, they were on the twenty-five. They tried a placement from a bad angle, and it was no good. The Blues took over.

Toby sought for openings. He drilled Vello inside. The big kid was hot today. He had recovered from his wretched misery of the week before. He was taking it out on the Wolves, today.

Vello made yards.

Toby ripped at tackles, ran May at the ends. He flipped a short pass to Cincy, and the big guy toted it to the Wolves' thirty-eight. They stalled there, and Toby tried to boot one. He missed.

The first quarter was tough, but Toby knew it was only the beginning. It would become a bitter battle as it progressed. He and Cincy went out at the quarter. Toby said to Fussil, coming in, "You take care of that gam. I don't want to put in any overtime."

Fussil grinned at him, "I will be cautious."

He was cautious for exactly three plays, then it happened. It was very plain for everyone to see. Fussil took a kick and came prancing down the sideline. He took the thing back twenty yards before they slaughtered him. It seemed as if the entire Wolves team hit him at once. The tangle went out of bounds, and when it unraveled, Fussil did not get up. Toby had started to put his helmet on when he'd seen how the play was developing. He walked down the field. Fussil swore from the ground. He said, "They didn't take long. The thing is all shot."

Pop looked at Toby. "It looks as if you have a long afternoon ahead. I'll put someone else in there when you poop. Be careful."

Toby grinned at him. "Don't you worry about me, Pop. Just keep score."

NEAR the end of the second quarter, the Wolves scored. They fought their way to the Blues' forty, and every inch of their progress was contested bitterly. But Martin wasn't backing up that line, and it made all the difference in the world. Vello was good and he tried hard, but he didn't have the savvy. The Wolves fooled him for plenty of yards.

And on the forty they sucked Vello in and chucked a cute little pass into the spot he had vacated, and suddenly there was Pratt, the great end, running into the clear. Curtin and Miller missed him, and when he came down to Toby, he had a flock of interferers. Toby did what he could. He threw a long block on the interferers and felt the world collapse about his ears. He hoped someone would catch Pratt, but it was unlikely. He looked up in time to see him score. It was bitter medicine.

They converted, Bergen kicking the point.

Toby looked at the clock. There were three long minutes to the half. He told his gang, "Let's get rolling. We can get it back in three minutes."

He took the kick on the five-yard line, ran to the twenty-six. He ran again for five, then passed to Dix for seven. He passed again, once more to Dix, and they gained a measly four. He ran for three, passed for ten to Qualen. Curtin took a reverse for thirteen and they were near the money. Toby banged at the weak side and was stopped, and Miller got five through the middle. He faked Miller inside again, went back and passed to Sammis. The lanky end took the pass on the twelve, ran to the four and was knocked outside. And the gun went off on the play.

The crowd was frantic, roaring down with a mighty voice that thundered through the stands. Sammis was disgusted. He said to Toby, "Fo' mo' yahds. Jus' fo' little ol' yahds. Ah shoulda flew."

It was tough, but there was nothing that could be done about it now. Toby went to the dressing room with the rest. He was weary, and he wondered just how he would feel after another half-hour of this. It would be wicked.

Pop did not say much between the halves. He seldom did. He pointed out mistakes, let his men rest. He spoke to Toby. "It was close. You almost had the score. It was nice."

Toby shrugged. "It was all right, Pop, but the clock was a little bit ahead of us. We'll get it, next half."

Pop told him, "Sure, Toby. But be careful out there."

Cincy stretched his long legs on the floor. He was grinning to himself. Toby said, "And what the hell are you so happy about?"

Cincy looked at him a bit startled; then he said, "I'll bet they put Fasio back in again this period."

They did. The Blues kicked again, and Fasio was there. Bergen had taken Toby's kick, and Fasio was up front with the blockers. Cincy got a shot at him from the side. It was a brutal, smashing block. Bergen went only as far as the twenty; Fasio went all the way back to the bench. Cincy lined up, shaking his head joyously. "That bum

is wonderful. I hope they stick him in again."

Toby grinned at him. "They won't. Not if he can help it."

But there were others of the Wolves with Fasio's intentions. They were not so skillful, but they tried hard. Bergen was a man you always had to watch, and Pogan knew all the fine and nasty points of the game and there were more who were willing.

The Blues evened it near the end of the third period. Young Vello was running like a tank, busting the middle of the Wolves' line wide open. Manny Schwartz and Flanagan were prying the spots apart, and Vello was exploding through in fine style. He took them from the thirty to the Wolves' twenty-two in eight smashing, furious bursts. Toby let him run. He was full of running. Toby sent him into the middle again without the ball, faded and dropped a pass into Cincy's arms on the six. They knocked him down where he stood. Toby faded again, while Vello dynamited through the middle for the score. He bulled over the line with six guys hanging to him. He arose with a slightly bloody smile. He said, "All day, Toby. All day we can do this."

He did not do it all day. Toby carefully made the conversion, they went back and kicked to the Wolves, and on the third play Vello was laid out like a rug. His nose was all over his face and he was dead to the world. Cincy looked at him and said, "He is young. He does not know how to keep his face out of the way of feet. He will learn, though, breathing through his mouth during the period of instruction."

**B**UT it was a jolt. The kid had been wonderful, and the threat of his vicious assaults on the Wolves' line had given Toby and Curtin a bit of leeway outside. He had been making plenty yards. He would be missed.

And Toby knew that from now on it would be his apple, a bitter, wormy piece of fruit. He started to eat it.

Smith came in for Vello. He was a willing gent, but he didn't have the drive the kid had possessed. He wasn't nearly the ball player. So Toby worked. He banged at the tackles, passed sharply, cautiously lest one of the Wolves grab his heaves. He kicked with precision and for fine distance.



He ran Curtin on reverses and into the tackles when they went to the left.

And it was a losing game. Without Vello, the Blues did not have a good inside game. The Wolves loosened up a trifle; they did not crowd the middle and set up a nice, shifting defense that played hell with Toby's running and passing.

When the fourth quarter started he was tired. Cincy was in there with him, and Curtin and Smith. They would stay until the end.

A tie was no good to them. They had handed this game away a week ago, they could not afford to lose it today. Pop's future and their common self-respect were on the boards, with the odds all stacked against them.

The Wolves moved. They were comparatively fresh. The toll taken of the Blues' personnel had been costly and apparently decisive. There was no Martin to back up the line, to smash inside defenses with his withering blasts. There was no Vello to rip a line to pieces in his own fine style. There were eleven tough and tired guys, and they would do what they could.

Toby kicked from his own five early in the period, and Bergen took it on the Blues' thirty, a magnificent, lofting spiral. He came back ten yards before Edson took the legs out from under him. Bergen passed into the flat. It was good for four. Joslin and Kane combined their tries into the middle and they got a first. Toby came within an ace of intercepting a long heave to Pratt, but the ball slid off his fingers to the grass.

Bergen passed to Logan, a short and lovely shovel-heave, and the back was suddenly in the clear with three men in front of him. Smith trapped him near the sideline and he lateraled to Pratt. The play came on, Pratt running high and handsome, and Cincy almost knocked him up into the stands with a roaring tackle that put the ball outside on the Blues' thirty-two.

Bergen slashed into the tackle and young Cisti stopped him cold. Bergen ran the same play, then jump-passed to Pratt coming across. The fast end was away by himself. Toby smothered him on the fifteen and called a time-out for the Blues.

They formed a circle on the grass, and Toby could feel the weariness cover him like another skin. Manny Schwartz said,

"This rodeo has gotta stop. Let's dig a trench, or something."

Edson said, with bitter pride, "They get another yard on me, they gotta use a mortar. I'm gettin' sick of this."

Their attitude, Toby thought, looking at them, was fine. Their performance was fine, but, lacking some of their larger guns, necessarily limited. They were a wonderful bunch of guys—which would not prevent them from dropping this game, if things went much further.

Toby told them, "Just tighten up a bit and dig in. These guys must be a little weary, too."

He doubted it. The Wolves had plenty and to spare. A whole fresh club, with the exception of Bergen, Pogan and two others, was coming on the field. He said, "We'll take 'em. We got plenty of time." They had thirteen minutes to go. Toby wondered who or what would carry him through the last five.

The whistle blew and the Wolves came up on the ball. They hit at Edson's end and he killed the play for a yard's loss. Burton whipped into a tackle for five, then Joslin hammered through the middle for three more. Bergen got the three they needed on a play that came inside tackle. They were on the five, and moving.

The Blues kept them there. Toby watched it and was proud. For three plays the Wolves hammered against a line that would not give an inch. Bergen tried and was murdered. Joslin bulleted in there twice, and twice he was stopped dead. The heavy-duty back bored in again, and the Blues converged upon him. Toby shouted his warning, but it was too late. Bergen had the ball, fading slightly. He tossed a cold and efficient pass to Olsen. The end took it standing on the line and stepped across.

The stands were roaring wild, and the Blues were silent and numb with their grief. They charged Bergen with a hoarse fury when he tried to kick for the point, and they smothered the attempt with a blanket of muscle.

**T**OBY didn't say anything to them. There was no need. They were all talking to themselves—and saying the right things. They would receive the kick-off. Toby glanced at the clock. There was a little over ten minutes. And, looking at the clock, he

glanced at the figures on the scoreboard again: 13-7.

He waited for the kick, and he looked at the bench. Pop was there, down near the end, and he was pert and chipper as a sparrow. He waved to Toby as their glances seemed to meet, and something clicked in Toby's chest. This was the last chance he would have to do anything for Pop, and the relationship had always been too one-sided. He had ten minutes to return a lot of wonderful favors.

Toby took the kick in the end zone. He came up the middle and cut to the right. He went to the twenty-three before they smothered him. He felt knees working on him as he fell. He got up and Bergen said, "So long, stupid. It won't be long now."

He ran the first play to the right, outside tackle, and he made five. He was falling as Bergen came up. The man's swinging foot just missed his head. Bergen said, "Next time will do."

Toby gave Curtin the long reverse. He led the pack. He passed up the end, left him to Cincy and the guards. He cut into Bergen with a savage insistence, left the ground at the last moment and took him high, jamming his head into the man's face. Bergen went down and time was called. Temple came upon the field. He complained to the officials. He said, indicating Toby, "This slob has been getting away with murder."

"From," Toby corrected him. "And if your gorillas don't stop this nonsense, some of them are going to get hurt. Where's Fasio?"

They drove to the Wolves' forty-eight, and there the attack bogged. Toby kicked outside on the nine, and the Wolves put power into their drive for the open. Bergen was on his feet again, running hard, and Cincy hit him twice with wonderful effect. Pogan, the huge tackle, took a sneak punch at Manny Schwartz, and Manny looked at him with a grieved and shocked expression. "Why, Mr. Pogan! How dare you?" He added, in an undertone, "You are through for the day, punk. Enough is enough."

And on the next play a ham-like hand descended, and a knee rose swiftly, and Pogan was carted from the scene of battle. Manny said, "Me honor is reborn."

The Wolves came on to their own forty, then kicked quickly on a first down. It was

a smart and lovely play, a long boot. It caught Toby with his pants around his ankles. He ran on tired legs and retrieved the pill on his own six. They downed him on the spot.

He looked at the clock and wondered where the time had gone. There were four minutes left of the ball game, and then he knew it had been an even thing for this past little while, both clubs kicking three times. The sands were running down.

Cincy said, "Let's get rolling, Toby. The fans will start to worry."

They got started. Toby passed on first down, and Curtin took the short heave out to the fifteen. Smith went inside for two, then Toby took the dice. He knew the thing was on his back. He couldn't afford to pass, any more than a winning team would pass. An interception would be fatal. This was ground that would have to be traveled on foot, not through the air. He labored.

He got four at a tackle, three to the weak side, then ran the end for six. He faked a pass and Smith got three on a delayed buck, then Toby romped around the weak end for eight. Curtin ran the short reverse for four, and working on the same pattern, Toby got loose for fifteen wonderful yards. They were on the Wolves side of the fence.

And the going got tougher. Smith was stopped cold, and Toby hit the end for three yards, and took Bergen's heavy hand just beside his eye. He took a chance on the next play and chucked a bullet pass to Edson. It was good for eight, but Edson was through. They slaughtered him on the play.

Freton came in and the play resumed. Toby was walking through a heavy curtain of pain and weariness, now. Each yard was a tremendous effort, each step was paid for in pain. The Wolves were fighting bitterly, and the clock was on their side.

Toby ran wide, faking a pass, then cut sharply, with all the power in his big and battered legs. He hammered to the eighteen before he was dropped. Pop stopped the clock by sending Miller in for Curtin, and when the play resumed, Toby used him on a reverse. It went for six. They were moving beautifully, the line getting the jump, making the holes.

Toby got seven on a weak-side play. His lungs were fashioned of hot metal.



The crowd noise was constant, huge, and now it was swelling. Toby knew why. He was aware that, at some spot in back of him, the gun was being lifted in readiness.

He ran the heavy tackle play. The Wolves knew it was coming. They shifted and waited for him. He took the lovely pass from Cesti, the ball leading him beautifully, and he ran. He went out and cut, and when he turned, Manny and Cincy were packed in front of him, their big bodies plowing out a furrow for him. He cannoned into the slot, running low, generating power from some hidden source. He was hit hard, but his speed was great, his force terrific. He caught a distorted glimpse of Bergen's face, and he ran right into it. He felt the terrible impact almost impersonally. He kept his feet and battled for the yards, maintaining speed somehow. He landed on his face and wondered what the hell.

CINCY told him. Cincy told him with a wink that was the only possible means of communication in the bedlam that existed. He got up on his knees and saw that he was well into the end zone. Cincy managed to shout, in a moment, "I thought you were going to run into the upper tier. Come on and kick that point. I'm getting hungry."

The gun had gone off on the play.

They went back and lined up, and it was

not possible to hear a sound against the cataract of noise that filled the park. Cincy knelt upon the grass, and when he saw that things were right, he just opened his hands. Cesti put the ball right in them.

Toby swung his foot with care and force. It was like a practice kick. The Blues let no Wolf through. They were a solid concrete wall and Toby was alone. The ball sailed up and over, splitting the bar with a geometric nicety. And the place went mad.

The dressing room was a strangely solemn place. There was just a little sound as Pop came in. The tears were unabashedly evident in his eyes, his voice was unsteady. He told them, "I've seen a million ball games, and a lot of teams. Today was different. After today they will have to rewrite the book. You were fine."

Manny said, "Now. Give it to him now."

Toby took the new contract from his locker. He handed it to Pop. He said, "A little something from the boys, Pop. We thought you might like it."

Pop took it in his hand. He said, "What the hell, Toby? What is it?"

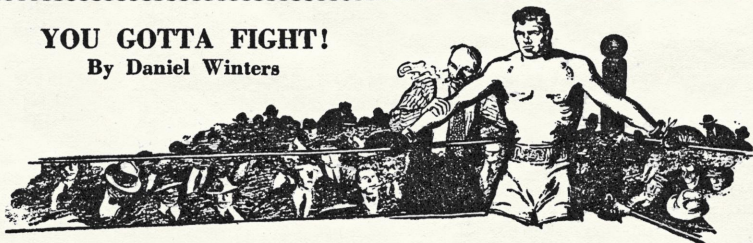
"A little present," Toby told him. "A little present from the gang."

Manny grinned at Pop. He said, "Yeah, just a little monumento from the fellas."

"From the guys," Toby said, almost to himself, "and from a gal named Annie, who should be hungry just about now." He headed for the showers. He was in a hurry.

## YOU GOTTA FIGHT!

By Daniel Winters



"Every guy that's got a uniform figures you're a hero—and so does the rest of that mob. What you gonna do—lay down for that bum or go out fighting like your brothers?"

### In the same issue

"Boy Wonder," by William Heuman; "Bric-a-brac Kid," by David Crew; "Mile Men to Mark," by Ray P. Shotwell, and stories by William R. Cox, W. H. Temple and many others!

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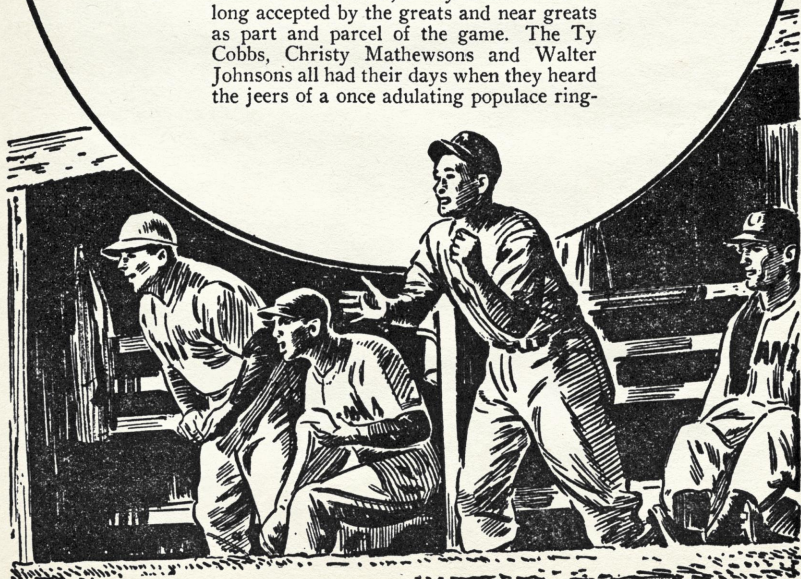
A Fact Story

By

**JOHN  
DREBINGER**

# THE MAN FROM COOGAN'S BLUFF

**T**HE fickleness of sport fans in general and baseball addicts in particular is well known, firmly established and long accepted by the greats and near greats as part and parcel of the game. The Ty Cobbs, Christy Mathewsons and Walter Johnsons all had their days when they heard the jeers of a once adulating populace ring-





***The unwrapping of the boy wonder of Coogan's Bluff—the little package somebody shipped McGraw from New Orleans—and who proved he was big enough to stay!***

ing in their ears. They even hissed the fabulous Babe Ruth one afternoon and right in New York, too.

It therefore must be regarded as most extraordinary that in this late day and age, when baseball, buffeted about by the war but nevertheless pushing resolutely into the second century of its existence, there should remain a performer who, admittedly having gone over the hill as an active player, has yet to lose any of the warm affection in which fandom has held him for almost a score of years.

One day last summer, it is true, a few thoughtless souls did boo him. For on his own frank admission he had played very wretchedly that afternoon. But before the jeers could make the slightest headway they were immediately drowned out as the gathering, rising in a wave of indignation that seemed to demand instant vindication, cheered the little fellow to the echo.

For to boo Mel Ott in New York is well nigh a sacrilege. In fact, it simply isn't done, at home or abroad, and not even in Brooklyn where the mere sight of a Giant uniform brings about a reaction similar to that produced by a red flag upon a bull.

He is perhaps the only ball player to whom hostile crowds, be it Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis or Chicago, are almost totally unknown, and if baseball scribes have occasionally been at a loss to account for this singularly universal feeling of friendliness it has often puzzled Mel himself no little.

The day a few gave rise to boos it shocked even the case-hardened scribes and, as they gathered with Mel for their customary aftergame chat in the club house, one expressed himself very strongly on the subject.

"Can you imagine those mugs razzing you for the way things are going out there?" he asked.

"And why shouldn't they," replied Mel, his eyes opening wide in surprise. "The thing I can't understand is why they haven't given it to me long ago and I've been wondering how much longer they would hold off. The way I've been going the wonder is they haven't ridden me out of the park weeks ago. Maybe from now on I'll be getting what I deserve."

But in the days that followed he got nothing but more encouraging cheers and when the campaign had run its course he was to receive one of the most astounding tributes ever accorded an athlete under similar circumstances. For though he may have had the poorest year of his career, batting a meager .242, and the ball club he managed may have finished a hopeless last in the National League, the folks still weren't of a mind to let Master Melvin down. Instead, they elected him winner of a spectacular War Bond Popularity Contest in which he topped not only such baseball luminaries as Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth but outranked the all-time toplineers in all other sports as well.

Such, then, is the strange popularity of Melvin Thomas Ott, perennial "boy wonder" of the Polo Grounds who, lacking utterly in so-called color and flashy showmanship, rose from the obscurity of Louisiana's bayou country to become the greatest home run hitter in the history of the National League, to don the managerial robes once worn by his illustrious mentor, John J. McGraw and establish himself in time as one of the most universally well-liked athletes any sport has ever known.

That all this should have happened to a youngster, shy and modest to a fault and to whom all honors, promotions and monetary rewards came without the slightest solicitation on his part is a story also quite without parallel.

Perhaps the best answer lies in the fact that to Ott all things pertaining to baseball came with an astounding naturalness. He crashed the majors at the age of sixteen and inside of a year was playing in the manner born. And when, overnight, he was catapulted into the limelight as a manager, those who had misgivings because of his shy and retiring nature found themselves knocked speechless when the little boy of McGraw's day suddenly revealed himself a young man gifted with forceful character, calm resourcefulness and unusually keen talents for leadership.

It was once said of Capablanca, the chess wizard, that the reason the Cuban expert could size up intricate positions in the twinkling of an eye was because, having played

the game since infancy, chess to him was like a mother tongue. Where others pondered and studied for hours, Capa played with effortless ease and invariably shot straight for his mark.

In similar fashion one can say that Mel Ott, born March 2, 1909 in Gretna, suburb of New Orleans, can scarcely remember when he wasn't catching or throwing a baseball or toting a bat around. In fact, lugging a bat, was perhaps the first official job he ever held on a ball club. As a little shaver still in grammar school, he served as batboy on a semi-pro team managed by his uncle and week-ends saw little Melvin hauling bludgeons around that were almost as big as himself.

Presently, on growing a little huskier, he was presented with a catcher's mitt and allowed to warm up the relief pitchers. It was with this chore that he conceived his early notion that his future in baseball lay in catching. Between shifts as batboy and relief backstop for pitchers twice his size he started playing on school teams, sandlot teams, or any team at all on which he could win a place. He would play at any position that offered itself, although he continued to qualify himself as a catcher because, among kid teams, that usually is the job open.

Came the summer of 1925, with Mel just turned sixteen, when he came under the observation of Harry Williams, wealthy New Orleans lumberman, husband of Marguerite Clark, noted movie star of that period, and an ardent baseball fan. Williams also was a great friend of McGraw and, along in September of that year, he wrote a letter to the Giant manager informing him that he was sending to New York "one of the finest hitting prospects and one of the most natural ball players I have ever seen."

It is, of course, quite possible that McGraw awaited the arrival of Ott with some skepticism but he, by no means, meant to disregard the tip. The Little Napoleon, by reason of his wide contacts, had come across more than one great find through just such stray channels and never overlooked even the remotest possibilities of coming up with another Freddie Lindstrom, Ross Young, Travis Jackson or Bill Terry.

**A**T FIRST glance McGraw still was far from impressed. For while Master Melvin had filled out to some extent he was

still only a chunky kid with curly hair, brown eyes that opened wide as saucers and thick-set legs that looked more promising for a career as a wrestler. Those legs, incidentally, were to give Mel a lot of trouble in later years.

The austere, white-haired and florid-complexioned McGraw cast a sharp, appraising eye in the direction of the youngster.

"So you're Melvin Ott, eh?" he said.

"Yes, sir," gulped the youngster as he strove desperately to make himself look older than his years.

"And what position do you play?" the great man asked.

"I'm a catcher."

"Humph, you're pretty small for that job," grunted McGraw as he pictured this pint-sized boy trying to stop some of the blazing slants of the pitching huskies the Giants currently had on their staff. "Have you ever tried any other position?"

And then came a reply that brought many a laugh as McGraw so often recalled it in later years. Fearing his prospects already pretty well shattered by reason of his extreme youth and size, Mel answered boldly, "Well, Mr. McGraw, I did for a time play in the outfield when I was a kid."

Without batting an eye, McGraw said, "All right, we'll see. Put on your uniform, warm up with some of the other players and tell Jackson I said you are to take your turn in the batting practice. And don't get hit in the head with any stray balls. I don't want the Children's Society down on me."

A few minutes later McGraw strolled out of the clubhouse and up the field. Halfway up in front of the grandstand, the Old Man suddenly stopped in his tracks. Little Melvin, standing on the left side of the plate, was taking his turn in the batting drill. Other players, some of them veterans of four straight World Series campaigns in which the Giants had engaged from 1921 to 1924, also stood and watched. Through baseball's grapevine route they already had heard of the little package somebody had shipped McGraw from New Orleans.

As for the little man at the plate, he had now suddenly become the personification of coolness. His knees may have been quaking and his head might have been in a whirl a few minutes before as he stood talking to the great Mr. McGraw, but now there re-



mained not a trace of nervousness as he took a free and easy cut at the ball and drove it on a line to the outfield.

"By God," declared McGraw, more to himself than anybody in particular, "look at that swing. It's perfect."

Later that day, after the ball game which Melvin watched from the clubhouse window, McGraw said to the late Bozeman Bulger, dean of the New York scribes of that time, "Boze, that kid from New Orleans has the most perfect natural swing I have ever seen in a youngster just coming up. The timing, rhythm and follow through are absolutely flawless and there isn't a flourish or wasted movement anywhere. Watch him when he comes out tomorrow for batting practice. You will see that swing travel straight as a string, absolutely parallel, and when he meets the ball he's got his bat well in front of the plate with all his strength behind it.

"All I hope is that nobody tells him about that swing. It may make him self-conscious, give him the idea perhaps that he might improve it, change it and wind up ruining himself."

Oddly enough, Ott, some years later did make a serious change in that swing and while this was to make it considerably less flawless there is no denying it brought most gratifying results. The change consisted in lifting the right or front foot at the moment of coming forward with his bat. Already a home run hitter of considerable renown, Mel had found that the momentary lifting of that foot helped to give him added momentum as he surged forward to meet the ball and increased the power of the drive.

It made it an absolutely unorthodox swing, one which Mel, today as manager and mentor in his own right, would never recommend to any rookie, but down through the years it did produce more home runs than ever sailed off the bat of any other National League player.

Mel's early years with the Giants were rough and tough but the schooling he received was one he never was to regret. The players for the most part were a hard-bitten crew who, in the words of the immortal Ross Young, were quick to let the other fellows know they weren't playing for marbles. And they were ruled with an iron hand by a stern disciplinarian whose word on or off the field was absolute law and who

would brook not even the slightest infraction of the rules he laid down for his men.

It was, therefore, a strange setting indeed in which this shy and diffident youngster found himself and while McGraw never was as harsh with him as with others he was no less stern. Mel learned this on two occasions.

The first was in 1926, his first full season with the club, when, drawing a salary of a paltry few hundred dollars a month, he asked McGraw in late August whether he couldn't receive a slight increase. He had heard, as others had, of McGraw's fabulous generosity and he had a good tale. Living in New York came unusually high and on top of that half of what he made he had to send to his parents in New Orleans.

"Young man," said McGraw, "I know you are not getting much or anything like you deserve. But you signed that contract and you will have to go through with it. Let that be a lesson to you."

The second instance came some years later. McGraw had just laid down a rule forbidding card playing in the forenoon before ball games. He considered it bad for batting eyes, not to mention distracting the attention of his players from their more serious tasks in the afternoon.

Now Mel was perhaps the most tractable and obedient ball player McGraw ever had, but on this particular morning it rained. There didn't appear to be the slightest chance of a game being played and so, when some of his teammates asked him to sit in for a quiet little game in one of their hotel rooms, he acquiesced.

The rain continued and so did the card game since no ball game was played that afternoon, but the next morning Mel was informed by the club trainer that the Old Man wanted to see him.

"Melvin," said McGraw, "you played cards yesterday morning, didn't you?"

"Yes, Mr. McGraw, but—"

"I don't want to hear any buts," interrupted the Old Man. "You played and you know my rule forbidding it. That will cost you just fifty."

Later that season, with home runs now soaring quite regularly from Ott's bludgeon, Mel mustered enough courage to tackle McGraw. Catching the Old Man in a jovial mood, he asked if he couldn't have the fine rescinded.



"Young man," said McGraw sharply, "I fined you that day for your own good and I'm going to continue doing you some good. That fine stays."

**M**CGRAW'S tutelage of his prodigy was perhaps a classic in the development of a young player. From the very beginning McGraw had insisted he would never send Ott to the minors for the seasoning customarily given to rookies especially of such tender years.

"I'm not going to let some minor league manager try any of his ideas on this boy," asserted the Old Man, "or start tinkering with his style and wind up ruining him completely. He'll stay right here with me."

And with McGraw he stayed. In 1925, of course, Mel saw no action at all and most of the next year he spent sitting on the bench. But there were arduous hours of training before each game. The idea that he was a catcher was quickly dispelled and, overnight, he was converted into an outfielder with Ross Young, Eddie Roush and others helping in the tutoring.

They taught him how to get the jump on line drives, how to gauge towering, long flies so he could take his eye off the ball while running toward where the ball would land and then picking up its flight just before the catch. They showed him how to play the various sun fields around the circuit and also how to play the walls and fences, especially the difficult angle made by the right-field wall at the Polo Grounds.

They soon learned they had a very apt pupil who in short order was surpassing his teachers. In hitting, of course, they could teach him nothing, as he already had been born with the natural swing.

Still McGraw held a tight rein on his prodigy. He let him play in only thirty-five games in 1926 and increased the number to eighty-two in 1927. In neither year did he let Mel, a left-handed batsman, face a left-handed pitcher.

"Not that he can't hit southpaw pitching right now," explained McGraw, "but I don't want some smart left-hander try to show him up for one afternoon and fix him with a complex that he can't hit southpaws."

It was not until 1928 that the Old Man finally turned his finished product loose against whatever pitching the opposition

cared to use and Master Mel hammered right-handers and portsiders with equal ease and vehemence. By 1929, Master Mel, now only twenty years of age, had stepped up his home run output to forty-two circuit blows, tying Chuck Klein of the Phillies for the league leadership. In fact, Mel might well have won the title outright that year but in the final game, played in Philadelphia, the Philly pitchers refused to give Ott a chance to hit the ball and gave him five intentional passes. Mel, however, never complained.

What is more, the Gretna prodigy, unquestionably McGraw's greatest handiwork in the development of a young player, had definitely arrived and from then on records galore began to pile up.

But despite his successes, the ways and mannerisms of the erstwhile little boy never changed. McGraw's retirement in 1932 and his death two years later were two sad blows to Mel, who to this day still refers to his former mentor as Mr. McGraw.

However, with the appointment of Bill Terry as McGraw's successor Ott continued to play the role of the quiet, unobtrusive ball player who did what he was told, said little and never by the slightest sign gave evidence that he considered his exploits anything unusual. And when Horace Stoneham succeeded his father, Charles A., as owner of the club, Mel's business dealings with the club continued on the same quiet, orderly plane as they always had been.

Quite a few experts have felt that the Giants, especially in his early years, never exploited their boy wonder to the full and that Ott himself never reaped the monetary rewards he should have received. But Ott himself has never agreed with this and insists that, taken by and large, he has no complaints. Today as manager and player, he hauls down twenty-five thousand dollars per annum.

As a player under Terry, as well as McGraw, Mel in his dealings with the baseball writers was always warm and friendly but at all times extremely careful not to say anything that might be construed as criticism of his manager's leadership. In other words, he considered himself at all times strictly a performer in the ranks and if he happened to hit a couple of home runs that won the World Series in 1933 for the



Giants, or turned in other prodigious feats afield or at bat, that still gave him no license to pop off or indulge in other liberties.

As the scribes became more and more aware of the sterling qualities that lay hidden behind his quiet mien and began imparting their knowledge among the fans, Mel's popularity began to grow in leaps and bounds. He was no glamorous Babe Ruth, no flamboyant, swashbuckling Dizzy Dean, but gradually the fans began to take more and more to the unassuming chap who made great plays look easy, who belted home runs and then couldn't vanish into the dugout quickly enough after the rounding of bases, and who in 1937 helped win a pennant by allowing himself to be shifted in mid-season from his familiar haunts in right field to third base, a position he had never played before.

**T**HEN came the managerial job in December of 1941. That one literally fell out of a blue sky when Stoneham and other Giant officials, having come to a parting of ways with Terry, had decided to let the latter operate the club's farm system in the minors and name Ott the manager. The last to suspect any such move was Mel himself who, with a winter vacation on his hands, had motored over from New Orleans to Jacksonville where the Giant owner was attending a minor league convention. Ott, in fact, was hobnobbing with acquaintances

in the hotel lobby at the very moment Stoneham was trying to reach him by phone in New Orleans.

With the appointment came new revelations for the scribes.

One day, in his first season as leader, he fined two young players and suspended them for three days. Then he called in the scribes. "I have just suspended two of my players for having stayed out all night. As you are certain to note their absence I thought I might as well tell you at once. But I would appreciate it as a favor to me if you withheld their names and, if possible, skip the whole thing. They are just young and thoughtless kids. I'm sure I won't have trouble with them again."

Nor did he and small wonder it is the players idolize him, and the scribes to a man rate him tops. His lifting the Giants out of the second division into a strong third-place position in 1942 was regarded a standout managerial job and while the club collapsed in the cellar last year, neither fans nor critics ever showed the slightest inclination to place the blame on him. Heavy army inductions, and the failure of the club's front office to obtain suitable replacements in time, were chiefly responsible. However, this never prevented Mel from wanting to share plenty of the fault himself.

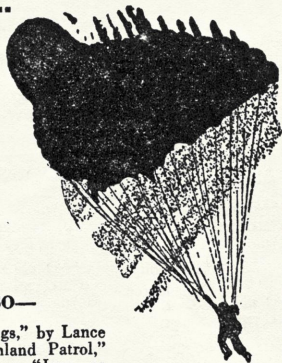
He had learned from McGraw years ago that only results, never excuses, count in baseball.

They Were

## NOT EXPENDABLE

By George Armin Shaftel

And it was his job to see that they weren't expended—those buddies of his who were shot down on the rim of a frozen hell—until the day they gave him the thing he wanted most—a load of TNT and a one-way flight to vengeance!



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JULY



## RING CRUSADER

Grosso came out fast, with plenty of power.

By  
**WILLIAM  
HEUMAN**

**T**HERE were over a dozen men in the room above Benny Klein's gymnasium, and nine of them were pugilists. Tommy Grail, welterweight, sat in the corner and listened to the talk. This New York fight crowd was different from the boys who hung around the "Palace" in Highland Falls.

Tommy Grail moistened his lips and pushed a hand through a mop of dark hair. Unlike the other fighters in the room, he

*"I'm watching you, kid. . . . You going into the tank for Carriere?  
If you don't there'll be a new champ in your corner—or a dead  
man!"*



was unmarked, nose as straight as it had been the day he was born.

"Tonight," manager Ruby Taubman grinned, "we meet the big boss, kid. Make a good impression."

"I thought I signed with you," Tommy said quietly. "How many bosses do I have?" He'd come out of Highland Falls in the sticks and had won three straight fighting for Taubman—all prelims.

"You got a boss," Taubman chuckled, "an' I got one, kid. Get it?" He was a short man with a bald head, bulbous nose and yellow-flecked eyes.

"No," Tommy Grail said flatly, "I don't get it."

Taubman lowered his voice, gesticulating with a black cigar. "Look," he explained. "You come out of the sticks, kid, an' you don't know from Adam. If I don't pick you up, you can't get a fight for yourself."

Tommy nodded. He hadn't forgotten the weeks he'd hung around the gyms trying to get a match for himself. Taubman had connections.

"I'm like you," Taubman grinned, "on a larger scale. See? I don't get anywhere unless the guy up above me gives the okay."

"Who's he?" Tommy asked.

"Doc Carriere," Taubman said. "You'll like him, kid, but you gotta get on his good side."

Tommy Grail's dark eyes flitted about the smoke-laden room. "You got fights for me," he said slowly, "and Carriere wasn't even in town."

Taubman laughed. "Small stuff, kid. Prelims. Any dope can arrange a six-round-er. If you want to get in the big dough, you work along with Doc Carriere. He builds up fighters; he made Red Grosso."

Tommy didn't say anything. Grosso was the welterweight champion and a tough customer.

"Remember," Taubman ordered. "You do what Carriere says, kid. He's my boss an' I'm your boss. It's like that."

"Is it?" Tommy murmured. The setup didn't appeal to him, and he didn't like the looks of the men in the room. Most of the fighters were prelim men, ranging from lightweights to heavyweights. All of them bore the marks of their trade; they were dull-eyed, listless, with big hands and tight-fitting suits.

The door opened and a dark-skinned,

slender man came in. He had a brush of black mustache and glistening white teeth. His eyes were dark under a natty Panamá hat; he wore a camel's hair topcoat which must have cost a lot.

A stocky red-headed man sauntered in behind him, wide face wreathed in a contemptuous smile. He had green-colored eyes and peculiar whitish eyebrows.

"Grosso," Taubman whispered.

Carriere nodded to the three fight managers present and then sat down at a table near the wall. Slipping a black leather notebook from his pocket, he opened it carelessly and then looked around the room.

"I need a middleweight," he said coldly. "In two weeks."

"Where?" Taubman asked.

"Philly," Carriere said. "Semi-final."

Taubman nodded to a blond-haired man with vacant blue eyes. "There's Georgie," he said.

Tommy Grail glanced at the middleweight curiously. Georgie Crandall was in Taubman's stable; he was a veteran, already walking on his heels. He grinned foolishly when Carriere looked at him.

"Leave tomorrow," Carriere murmured. "Look up Jack Harrigan at the Glen House." He paused. "You stay five rounds."

Crandall blinked and then nodded. Doc Carriere wanted a lightweight to appear in Hartford on the twenty-first. One of the other managers nudged his boy and Carriere gave him the instructions and the round he was to fold up.

Tommy Grail tightened his fists and took a deep breath. Grosso was sitting at the other side of the table, feet on the desk. Once or twice, the redhead glanced in Tommy's direction, recognizing him as a newcomer.

"I need a welterweight," Carriere was saying. "Next week in Scranton."

Taubman hesitated, waiting for someone else to speak. Tommy Grail smiled coldly.

"Any welters here?" Carriere asked. Several pairs of eyes swiveled to Tommy.

"I got a kid here," Taubman said finally. "He's just comin' along, Doc. I'd like to work him—"

"What does he weigh?" Carriere broke in flatly.

"One-forty-six," Taubman muttered. He was standing up at Tommy's shoulder.

"This kid has class, Doc. He's won three six rounders—"

"Send him over to Scranton," Carriere murmured, dark eyes passing over Tommy with little apparent interest. "Look up Manny Seeman, kid," he said. "You stay five."

"Like hell!" Tommy Grail snapped.

**D**OC CARRIERE was passing on to the next page. He stopped and looked up. Red Grosso's feet came off the table.

"Take it easy," Taubman whispered.

"Who's this guy?" Carriere grinned at the manager.

"Young Grail," Taubman explained hurriedly. "He's new, Doc, and he don't understand our game."

"You should have taught him," Doc Carriere snapped. "Send him to Scranton."

"Not me," Tommy grated. "I don't throw a fight for anybody."

"His mother taught him to do right," Grosso sneered from across the room. "Send the baby home."

Tommy Grail stared at the champion coldly. "How many bums lay down for you, Grosso, that you became champ?"

The red-headed man's face turned the color of his hair. He took one step and then Doc Carriere's voice cracked.

"Sit down, Red." The dark-skinned man studied the welterweight contemptuously. "You don't play ball with me, kid, and you play ball with nobody. Get smart."

"Listen," Taubman whispered hurriedly. "Suppose you drop one or two fights. Doc builds you up if you show anything. Get it?"

"I don't want it that way," Tommy said stubbornly. He picked up his hat and started for the door.

"You know where you stand with us," Carriere called after him. "You're black-balled, kid. Better start home."

"Somebody chase me," Tommy bit out.

"I could cut him up a little," Red Grosso observed.

"Don't try it," Tommy Grail said slowly. He went out the door and passed down the corridor to the stairway. At the foot of the stairs a tall brown-haired man stood smoking a cigarette. He looked at Tommy's flushed face with interest.

Vaguely, Tommy remembered seeing him in the press row at some of his fights,

pounding a typewriter, or hanging around the gym getting notes on some of the fighters. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles and had quiet brown eyes.

Tommy walked past, through the half empty gymnasium, and out into the street. It was still early in the evening and he was sure he could find John Simon, matchmaker of the Parthenon, in his office. He'd been introduced to Simon by Taubman and the man had given him two six-round prelims at his club.

Simon sat behind his desk, a big heavyweight of a man, with bright blue eyes.

"I'd like a fight," Tommy told him. "Have anything open for Saturday?"

Simon's eyes twinkled. "You break with Taubman, kid?"

Tommy nodded. "I'm getting my own fights," he said grimly.

Simon nodded and looked at a paper before him. "You're in luck, Grail," he said. "One of my boys is down sick and I need a substitute. You go on with Joe Apollo, first six-rounder. Get down to the club by seven o'clock."

"For how much?" Tommy wanted to know.

"You get twenty-five," Simon grinned. "You win and it's fifty."

Tommy Grail signed his name to the contract and went out. It had been ridiculously easy, but then Taubman had explained that anybody could get a prelim. Still it was hard to believe that a man like John Simon was working with Doc Carriere and his ring.

For three days before the fight Tommy worked out at Klein's gym, resting on Friday. Once he saw Taubman, but the manager stayed away from him.

At seven o'clock Tommy walked into the dressing room in the basement of the Parthenon. He was opening his bag when two men walked in. One of them carried a pail and a small first-aid kit. He was a thin, rat-faced man with a low forehead and a pointed, bony nose. The other, taller, heavier, in a faded blue sweater, sat down on the rubbing table and lit a cigarette.

"We're workin' with you, kid," the man in the blue sweater grinned.

Tommy nodded. It was the custom for the Parthenon to provide its own seconds in the prelims, unless a fighter chose to bring his friends. John Simon had undoubt-



edly assigned these two men to work in his corner.

"This Apollo's a pretty tough baby," the rat-faced man grinned. "Don't fool with him, kid."

Tommy slipped into his trunks and then started to move around the room, working up a little sweat. In Highland Falls, he'd been taught all the tricks by old Sam McCord, a former heavyweight contender, who ran his own little gym in the town. McCord had worked with Tommy for months perfecting his footwork, teaching him how to jab and hook.

At eight-thirty, Tommy went down the aisle with his two seconds sauntering behind him. It was the first six-rounder of the evening and the Parthenon was only three-quarters filled. Tommy spotted the tall brown-haired man climbing into his seat with a portable typewriter. He looked up as Tommy stood in the corner directly above him, shuffling his feet in the resin box. Then he nodded and smiled.

Apollo came into the ring wearing a checkered black and red robe, dark hair slicked back against his skull, a broad grin on his wide face as his friends in the balcony started to yell.

Tommy listened to the instructions as he pushed his gloves tighter on his hands the way McCord had showed him. Apollo oozed confidence. He had dark black eyes, high cheekbones, and peculiar, whitish skin.

Tommy moved out of the corner with the bell, boxing high on his toes, stabbing with the left. Apollo came in low, left arm hooked and ready to drive in to the body with it. Obviously, Joe Apollo was a left hook specialist.

The Italian boy fainted twice and then charged, sweeping the left up from the floor. Tommy easily pulled himself away, jabbed with the left lightly to the eye and then shot the right. It went home, smashing Apollo on the jaw and shaking him to his heels.

Tommy heard the startled yell from Apollo's adherents in the balcony. Apollo fell in close and held on as Tommy shook him with another left to the body.

The referee broke them and Apollo kept his chin behind his left shoulder, shuffling in awkwardly, uncertainty in his eyes now. Tommy jabbed with the left, stepped around, feinted, and then shot the right again to Apollo's jaw.

The Italian slumped into the ropes and then slid to the floor. He got up at a seven count and threw punches wildly in an attempt to turn the tide. Tommy avoided his blind rushes, picking off punches with his gloves or ducking under them without any trouble.

He clipped Apollo with another hard right to the chin as the round ended, and the Italian's knees buckled again. They gave Tommy a big hand as he returned to his corner.

"You look good, kid," the second in the blue sweater grinned. "Keep after him."

Tommy nodded. He rested against the ropes as the two of them fussed over him. Down below, the reporter with the horn-rimmed spectacles was looking up at him quizzically. Then he winked gravely.

The rat-faced second bent down over Tommy's eye a moment before the warning horn sounded.

"Looks like a cut," he muttered. "Just a minute, kid." Picking up a cloth, he daubed at the eyebrow, squeezing the cloth at the same time. The horn blared and the rat-faced man climbed through the ropes. He still held Tommy's head back, fingers tightening around the fighters' chin as he pressed the cloth to his face.

A liquid ran down over Tommy's right eye. He blinked and shook his head, tearing the second's hand away. The stuff burned like fire. He couldn't see out of the eye.

The bell clanged as he was rubbing it with his glove, still unable to see out of the eye. Apollo leaped from his corner and tore across the ring. Tommy never saw the left hook the Italian brought up from the floor. It thudded against him stomach, knocking the wind from his body, and driving him to the canvas.

Limp as a rag, he rolled over and tried to get to his feet. He heard the sounds outside the ring and he saw Apollo standing in a neutral corner, grinning. The right eye still pained him and the vision was blurred. He could hear the referee count and it was up to seven. At nine he got to his feet, almost bent over double.

Apollo caught him on the chin with the left again and he hit the floor, rolling over on his shoulder. The eye was beginning to clear up but the damage had been done.

Tommy got up at nine and tried to hold

on. His legs were wobbly and he had no strength in his body. Apollo shot the left hook to the mouth, opening a big cut. The blood flowed down his chin and dripped to his chest. Apollo rushed him to the ropes, driving lefts and rights to the head and body. Tommy tried desperately to hold on till his head cleared.

Another left to the mouth knocked him into the ropes. He staggered out and the referee caught him.

"No!" Tommy mumbled.

"You got enough, kid," the referee growled. "Try it again some other night." He led him to the corner. It was a technical knockout in the second round.

**T**OMMY picked up his robe which had been hung across the top strand. He caught a glimpse of the two seconds hurrying up the aisle. They were announcing the time—"Two minutes and five seconds of the second round. Winner—Apollo!"

Tommy Grail slipped through the ropes and plodded up the aisle. The brown-haired reporter climbed from his seat and fell in step with him.

"What happened up there, kid?" he asked.

Tommy looked at him. "They put something in my eye," he growled. "I'm paying them back."

They walked up the aisle together and then Tommy saw Doc Carriere standing in the doorway which led to the dressing rooms.

"Stay away, Pendleton," he spoke to the reporter. "You don't belong in this."

"Get away," the reporter snapped, "before I knock you down." He shoved past the swarthy-skinned man and walked down the corridor with Tommy Grail.

"You know Carriere?" Tommy asked curiously.

"I know plenty about him," Pendleton murmured, "and I want a talk with you, Grail."

"First I get those two seconds," Tommy muttered.

"You won't find them," Pendleton advised, "so forget about it."

"They work for Simon," Tommy snorted. "I can get them fired."

"Whatever you tell Simon," Pendleton said, "he'll think it's an alibi. His men will swear nothing happened. I didn't know

what was the matter myself and I was at ringside."

Tommy pushed through the door to the dressing room and threw the bathrobe over a chair.

"It's the first time I was ever stopped," he said bitterly.

Pendleton nodded. "You had that Apollo on the skids," he admitted. "You have class, kid." He paused. "What happened in the room over Klein's gym the other night?"

Tommy stared at the man curiously. "You know about Carriere?" he asked.

"Not enough," Pendleton admitted, "but I want to break this thing and I need evidence. It's rotten."

"You don't know," Tommy growled. He let the reporter work on the cut with a sponge. "What happens if I talk?" he asked.

"One man isn't enough," Pendleton explained, "but you're the first one and we can work together. When I get sufficient evidence, I break the story in my paper and then get called before the Boxing Commission. If you speak, and one other witness, we'll have something."

Tommy sat up suddenly. "What about tonight?" he asked. "You think Carriere was behind that?"

Pendleton laughed. "Why would those two boys want you to lose?" he pointed out. "Carriere probably slipped them ten bucks apiece to work on you. You bucked the Doc and he doesn't like it, so you're to be broken."

"Like hell," Tommy muttered.

"You'll never get a main event," Pendleton told him. "And you'll have to fight against things like tonight all the way through. You'll have crooked referees and crooked judges. This Carriere is big."

Tommy Grail tightened his fists. "He said I'd be blackballed."

"Because you wouldn't go into the tank for him?" Pendleton asked eagerly. "You remember all the others who were in the room?"

"I could spot them," Tommy grated.

The door opened and Carriere came in with Red Grosso.

"Two little love birds," Carriere grinned, "telling each other secrets."

"Take off those bottle-bottoms," Grosso chuckled. "I'm workin' on you, Pendleton."



"I asked you to stay out of this business," Carriere murmured. He looked at Tommy Grail. "Get out," he snapped.

"Somebody put me out," Tommy smiled coldly. He moved to Pendleton's side.

"You got off on the wrong foot," Carriere said. "And you're still out of step, Grail."

"Call off your dog," Pendleton grinned, "or my sheet sues you for assault and battery, Carriere. I have a witness in this."

Doc Carriere laughed. "You're smart, Pendleton," he admitted, "but you're not smart enough. Write your gossip and lay off me or you'll find yourself on the bottom of the pile."

"Guys like you make this game stink," Pendleton told him cheerfully. "I intend to break you, Doc."

"Let me hit him," Grosso pleaded.

"Glasses and all—just once, Doc."

"It'll be just once," Pendleton said.

Tommy Grail stepped forward, "I owe you one, brother," he said to Carriere, "for fixing up my seconds tonight."

Carriere grinned and shrugged. "You wouldn't play ball, kid," he chuckled. "See what happens?"

Tommy brought up his right fist, smashing Carriere in the mouth and knocking him into a corner. Red Grosso yelled and leaped forward, hooking Tommy on the side of the face with his left.

Pendleton let out a yell and then pounced on Grosso's back bearing the lighter man to the floor. Grosso tried to turn over and roll his man off but Pendleton held him firmly.

"I used to wrestle in college," the reporter murmured. "I'll break an arm, Red, if you get fresh."

The door opened and a big flat-footed cop came in. Tommy had seen him in the corridor earlier in the evening.

Pendleton stood up and brushed his clothes. "Take them out, Mike," he grinned. "These boys were getting fresh."

Carriere had gotten to his feet and was holding a handkerchief to his cut lips. Grosso, pale with anger, stood up, fists clenched.

"You're looking for trouble," Carriere said flatly, "and you're going to get it—both of you."

"It might work the other way," Pendleton grinned. "Be careful, Doc."

Red Grosso paused at the door. He looked at Tommy Grail steadily. "Maybe some day we can get together, kid," he grated, "when there's nobody around to stop it."

"Any time," Tommy told him. "In the ring or out."

Pendleton sat down when the two were gone. He adjusted his tie and then cleaned his glasses.

"I intend to break Doc Carriere," the reporter said simply. "You want to work with me, Grail?"

Tommy nodded. "I'll go all the way," he stated. "Any time you want me to talk, let me know."

"It won't do any good now," Pendleton explained. "When I get another man to open up, we'll break the story."

"Got anybody in mind?" Tommy asked.

Pendleton laughed coldly. "I've been after Carriere for over a year," he said, "and he knows it. You're the first one to leave him. The others are scared stiff. They either work for him or they're out in the cold."

"We'll find somebody," Tommy Grail said.

"In the meantime," Pendleton advised, "you'll keep in shape and I'll get you the fights you need. I have connections, too—with honest guys like John Simon."

Pendleton got him another six-rounder at the Parthenon and he flattened the colored boy, Art White, in two rounds. He won three straight prelims in the smaller clubs around New York, and then Pendleton took him to Jersey City for a semi-final at the Pioneer Club. He had a tough welterweight by the name of Johnny Seeman for eight rounds.

"We need this," Pendleton explained.

Tommy outboxed Seeman for five rounds and finished it off in the sixth with a right hand shot to Seeman's jaw.

Pendleton got him a main event in Albany a month later, after two more prelim wins. He had the lank upstate Italian, Marty Felice, in ten rounds. Felice boxed fast and he had a good left hand, but Tommy got under the left with a smash to the body in the fourth round and Felice stayed down. The papers tagged Tommy Grail as a comer.

"I'd like that Grosso," Tommy murmured on the train back to New York.

Pendleton shook his head. "Grosso's had seventy-five fights, kid," he stated. "He knows all the tricks. You're not ready for him."

DAILY, Tommy worked out in Klein's gym while Pendleton got him the bouts—eight rounders, semi-finals, and eventually a main event at the Parthenon. In the semi-final, Tommy watched a kid named Dick Prescott go into the tank for Doc Carriere against one of the Doc's light heavyweights. Prescott, a big farm boy, was in poor shape and he took three rounds of beating before going down for the count.

"You see what it's like," Pendleton snapped. "Carriere's getting a strangle-hold on the game. He bought out Abe Glickman's stable last week. He has fifty fighters working for him all over the country."

"You haven't found anything?" Tommy asked.

"Not yet," Pendleton muttered. "It looks almost hopeless."

Tommy flattened Angelo Scarpati in six rounds at the Parthenon with Red Grosso and Doc Carriere looking on. Carriere waited for them in the corridor when they came up the aisle.

"You want a title bout?" the Doc grinned. "Red needs some fresh meat."

"We'll wait," Pendleton told him.

"It's a lot safer," Carriere chuckled.

"Why not get him now?" Tommy asked later. "He might change his mind."

"No," Pendleton said. "Carriere wants this fight before you're ready for Grosso. If he cuts you up and scores an easy knockout, you're through as a big time contender."

Twice during the next month Tommy Grail watched Dick Prescott, the light heavy, go into the tank. In the gym he saw the man going through the motions of boxing, walking on his heels.

"He's punch-drunk," Pendleton grated. "And you'll find plenty more like him in every big city where Doc Carriere is operating. These boys go into the tank once too often."

"We have to get somebody to talk," Tommy muttered. "I have nearly a thousand in the bank. You can have it if you want to buy one of Carriere's fighters."

Pendleton shook his head. "I've tried to bribe some of them, but it won't work."

"Maybe you haven't met their price," Tommy told him.

Pendleton smiled grimly. "I don't make a million," he admitted, "at my job. I suppose every man has his price if you can meet it." He paused. "Carriere has Grosso signed up with Joe Moran for a title bout next month and I think Moran is taking a fall."

Tommy blinked. "A title bout?" he asked.

"He's getting big," Pendleton said. "Pretty soon it'll be the heavyweights and the big money. He'll have shyster lawyers making everything legal and you won't be able to touch him with a ten foot pole."

"Then we have to get him quick," Tommy Grail mumbled, "before he puts a lot of other good boys on the nutty road." He looked at the reporter closely. "Why should Carriere pay Moran to take a fall? Joe's about washed up anyway and Grosso shouldn't have any trouble."

"Carriere's boys pick the round now," Pendleton grinned, "and they know Moran is a hard nut. If he wants to stick around the full distance, he'll probably do it. Carriere will get good odds that Grosso don't put Moran away. If Joe goes into the tank in three or four rounds, Carriere cleans up again."

Tommy shook his head. He was at the ringside when Joe Moran climbed through the ropes wearing an old Indian blanket. Moran was about thirty-six and he'd fought every man in the field, his chopped and battered face showing the marks of a hundred encounters.

"Joe's a family man," Pendleton said quietly, "and he probably needs the dough. I never knew him to take a fall before."

"Maybe he won't," Tommy muttered. He watched Grosso outclass the veteran for two rounds. Grosso was tremendously fast on his feet and he could hit with either hand. Besides, he knew every dirty trick in the bag and he pulled a number of them on Moran.

"I think the third," Pendleton whispered when Moran came back to his corner. "Joe's a little disgusted with Grosso's tactics." The reporter's brown eyes lighted up. "Maybe I can do business with Joe after tonight," he added.

Joe Moran took a left hook on the jaw and went down in one minute and six sec-



onds of the third round. The crowd jumped up in surprise. Moran got to his feet, lunged in, and then dropped from another shot to the jaw. He was counted out, lying on his face.

Pendleton sniffed. "I've seen Moran take a dozen of those in one round," he said, "and come in smiling." He touched Tommy's arm and they walked to the back of the building. "We'll hang around till Moran comes out," he said quietly. "This might amount to something."

Moran came out the side entrance three-quarters of an hour later and hailed a passing cab. Pendleton ran over as the fighter went through the door. He climbed in and Tommy followed.

"How's it, Joe?" the reported grinned. He reached forward and closed the window to the front of the cab.

"What's the joke?" Moran growled. "I ordered this cab, Pendleton."

"How's it feel to get knocked out the first time in your career?" Pendleton asked easily. "My readers would like to know."

"Skip it," Moran muttered.

"It's not nice to be taken by a guy like Grosso," Pendleton went on. "He's a rat, Joe."

Moran didn't say anything. He looked at Tommy Grail and nodded in recognition.

"You didn't fool me," Pendleton said flatly. "You went into the tank tonight, Moran."

"What?" Moran growled.

"You're working for Doc Carriere now," Pendleton informed him. "Doc bought out Matty Coleman's stable and you went with it. Carriere was getting three to one that Red wouldn't stop you. Those are good odds, Joe."

Moran laughed sourly. "You can't prove anything, brother," he said. "Forget about it."

"You've seen guys like Dick Prescott and George Olson," Pendleton said. "They're walking on their heels, Joe. Those boys worked for Carriere a long time. You got a family to think about."

Moran looked out the window.

"This kid and I," Pendleton nodded to Tommy Grail, "aim to smash Carriere. We need another guy to talk."

"You said I got a family," Moran mumbled. "Who takes care of them?"

"If we get Carriere thrown out of boxing

you don't have anything to worry about," Pendleton explained.

"What if we don't?" Moran persisted.

"How much do you need?" Tommy Grail asked quietly.

Joe Moran hesitated. "With five grand," he stated, "I could buy a farm upstate and quit the racket. I only got about a year left anyway."

"Five thousand dollars!" Pendleton snapped.

"You'll give us a statement," Tommy asked, "that you went into the tank for Doc Carriere?"

"I'll spill the works all the way," Joe Moran said tersely, "if you boys will give me time to get my family out of town."

"It's a deal," Tommy told him.

"Wait—" Pendleton broke in. "Five grand—"

"We'll get it," Tommy murmured.

Pendleton listened to Tommy's argument on the street corner till nearly one o'clock in the morning.

"It's crazy, kid," the reported insisted. "I don't want you to throw up your chances."

"Carriere wants me to fight Grosso now," Tommy Grail grinned. "We need the dough now. A year from now it might be too late."

"You won't figure to take in more than two thousand anyhow," Pendleton objected. "You're the contender. Grosso gets the big cut."

"We're putting the purse on me," Tommy said quietly. "I'm taking this fight."

Pendleton stared at the younger man. "Grosso will be at least two to one to take you. If you lose, you don't get a cent."

"Look at the experience," Tommy Grail grinned. "Forget about it."

He signed the papers three days later in promoter Lew Gibson's office. Doc Carriere was all smiles as the photographers snapped the picture.

"This one you can't frame," Pendleton said slowly.

"We don't have to," Carriere told him. "Red's got his orders to cut your boy to pieces, and he's plenty willing."

**A**T RINGSIDE, the odds were two to one on Grosso with few takers. Tommy Grail sat in the dressing room as they taped up his hands.

"We're all covered," Pendleton said gloomily. "Every cent of the purse is on this fight. Good luck, kid."

Tommy went down the aisle with eighteen thousand in the Garden and Red Grosso already in the ring. At ringside, Tommy caught a glimpse of Joe Moran. The veteran fighter nodded slightly and then stared at the ring.

Grosso was wearing a black robe with a green four leaf clover on the back of it. He was brown and hard as he stood in the corner, shuffling resin into his shoes.

Tommy slipped through the ropes, danced a moment, and then sat down on the stool. He was in condition. Four weeks of intensive training at a farm in the Catskills had put him in the best shape of his career. He'd studied pictures of Grosso's fights and had had long conferences with Pendleton and Sam McCord who had come down from Highland Falls to help in the training.

"This guy don't have many weaknesses," McCord had stated. "He's smart and he hits hard. You stay on your toes, Tommy, and box him till the break comes."

"What break?" Pendleton asked.

McCord, lean, gray-haired, lantern-jawed, smiled slowly. "You haven't been in the ring, mister," he explained. "If you were you'd know that there's one break in every fight. You see it when it comes and the fight's yours."

Tommy had the old fighter in his corner to help watch for the break. The affair was for fifteen long rounds. Grosso came out with a short left hook to the body, bringing it up fast and with plenty of power.

Tommy Grail moved back, stabbing with the left to Grosso's face. He caught a glimpse of Doc Carriere in the corner, a cigarette between his lips. Carriere was the man he had to smash tonight—more than Grosso himself. Carriere was setting himself up as the czar of boxing, degrading the game and making helpless wrecks of a host of second-rate fighters.

"Work that left," McCord called. "Work it, Tommy."

Tommy Grail stabbed and moved away, avoiding Grosso's fast counter. He had an inch in height on the redhead and two inches in reach, but Grosso was five pounds the heavier man. Tommy stabbed the left twice to the nose without a return. Already,

he had the feeling that he was the better boxer of the two.

Grosso feinted with his left shoulder, came in low, and brought the right from the floor. Tommy took it on the elbow and hooked his own left into Grosso's jaw. The redhead stepped back, the grin leaving his face. Tommy came in fast with a left and then a right which set Grosso back into the ropes. He heard the noise from the big crowd.

Another left jab and then another to Grosso's nose. The champion swarmed in, trying to nail his man on the ropes and pummel him with both hands. Tommy went under a right cross and danced out into the center of the ring. He peppered Grosso's face with lefts and then threw the right from his knees.

The punch staggered Grosso and the crowd came up, yelling. Doc Carriere stood up and leaned on the ring floor with his elbows.

Tommy followed up his advantage with a series of lefts and rights to Grosso's head, sending him into the ropes.

"Get him!" McCord roared. "Now, Tommy!"

Grosso plunged into a clinch, arms swinging wildly. Tommy tried to break away as the referee darted in. Grosso's arms were high up around his neck and Tommy rammed a right into the body, making Grosso grunt.

The redhead twisted around, got his right glove in front of Tommy's face and suddenly rubbed the lace into Tommy's left eye. The pain was terrific.

As the referee broke them, Tommy backed away, tears streaming from the eye, half-blinded. Grosso bounded in with a long right which smashed into the body. He was on top of Tommy, hitting hard, when the bell clanged.

"The louse!" Pendleton raged. "You'll have to watch his dirty tricks, kid."

The eye was still red and swollen when Tommy went out for round two. He could see and he didn't back away when Grosso came in at him. They stood toe to toe in the center of the ring, and it was Grosso who gave ground first.

Tommy followed him into a neutral corner, hammering punches to the head. Again Grosso dived in to clinch. This time he got both arms around Tommy's waist and



swung him around toward the ropes. They stumbled out of the corner and into the ropes on the other side of the ring.

Grosso lunged again, literally picking Tommy from the floor and pushing him through the ropes. The reporters on the bench below yelled as the challenger fell toward them. Tommy felt the hands reaching up to hold him. He crashed down on the long table, among typewriters and typists. His right side struck the edge of the board and he went to the floor.

Dazed, he scrambled to his feet and stumbled toward the ring steps. The right side of his body protested vigorously, sending streamers of pain to his brain.

"Seven, eight—" the referee had chanted, when Tommy came back into the ring.

Grosso charged out of the neutral corner and Tommy met him with a stiff left jab. He hadn't been hit when Grosso wrestled him out of the ring, but the fall had not helped. For another minute and a half he stalled through, keeping Grosso away with a long left.

He went back to his corner and McCord looked at him queerly.

"You're keeping your right elbow down low," he said softly. "What happened?"

"I'm all right!" Tommy Grail grated. He almost screamed aloud from the pain when McCord's fingers pressed his ribs.

Pendleton bent over him anxiously. "What happened?" he asked.

"Couple of cracked ribs," McCord muttered. "He's through."

"Not yet," Tommy stated.

"This guy throws a terrific left hook to the body," McCord explained. "If he catches you in the ribs, you might be in the hospital for a year, and you might never come out alive."

"I'll take a chance," Tommy said. "Give me another round."

"It's suicide," McCord told him. "The referee will stop it as soon as he finds out."

The warning horn sounded and McCord had to get out of the ring.

"I'm stopping it next round," he said.

"There won't be a next round," Tommy Grail muttered. He went out carefully with the right hand cocked. Grosso tried to jab him and Tommy ducked in under the punch. He slammed both fists to the body and then shifted the attack to the head, driving Grosso across the ring.

The champion tried to hold him off but Tommy swarmed in on top of the man, hitting from every angle, realizing that if he relinquished the attack for a moment, Grosso would take the offensive and it would be all over.

The crowd stood up, roaring, as Tommy continued his attack. He took one terrific shot on the jaw but continued to bore in. Grosso was backed into the ropes. A right spilled him on the lower strand. He got up at three and Tommy smashed him with both fists to the jaw, knocking him down again.

Doc Carriere had dropped the cigarette from his mouth and was watching, wide-eyed. One minute of the round was over and there hadn't been a single lull in the sixty seconds.

Grosso got up at eight and lunged in with a wild right, hoping to fall in close and hang on again. Tommy Grail caught him with a terrific right uppercut to the chin. Grosso fell forward and Tommy stepped away. He walked to his own corner and waited. Grosso was on his face, arms outstretched. He moved at five and got to his knees at eight. He came to his feet at nine and Tommy Grail hurtled out of the corner, catching him with a wild right to the jaw. Grosso fell on the other side of the ring and the referee didn't bother to count.

AN HOUR later Pendleton sat in the dressing room as they worked on Tommy Grail.

"I already spoke to the Boxing Commissioner," he explained, "and I'm breaking the story in the paper tomorrow. Doc Carriere will be through in this country. He'll never send another man to the ring."

"Moran give his story?" Tommy asked without looking up.

Pendleton grinned. "After Joe saw the fight, he said he'd talk for nothing, kid. He's getting a few of the other boys to open up. It's a crusade, Tommy!"

"I don't care what you call it," Tommy Grail murmured, "but it's a good thing for boxing." He paused. "That's enough for me, mister."

"You don't ask much," Pendleton smiled. "There should be more guys like you—"

Sam McCord spoke from the other end of the rubbing table. "If there were," he grinned, "they'd all be champions."

# ONE HOSS TEAM

By JOEL REEVE

*There was only one thing that  
busher shortstop had to do—  
fill three men's shoes at once!*



He was safe by  
inches. . . .

**I**T WAS a tight spot for the Boars. The Cats were coming from behind in the ninth. The score was Boars, 3; Cats, 2, with one out and Macy of the Cats on first, Dauber on third and Louis at bat. But there were two down, thought Red Toole, sitting in the stands, his bag beside him. Morton was pitching and he was going



good despite his years and Louis generally hit into the dirt anyway.

On either side of second base stood two Boars who had done nothing that day to distinguish themselves. Young Woodley at short, an eighteen-year-old, could be excused. But with Tom Mackey it was another story. Tom Mackey was supposed to be the best second sacker in the business.

Red Toole kept his eyes on the keystone guardian. There was not a position in the infield—or the outfield—which Red had not played in his short and unpromising career. He saw Morton throw the ball low, saw Louis lace at it in desperation, saw Tom Mackey start into the path of the sizzling grounder. There was plenty of time to make the play.

Mackey was the picture of grace and ease. His hands were perfect for baseball, big, wide and strong. He covered the ball like a blanket. He rose and threw.

He threw the ball all the way to the stands, past the outstretched frantic hands of Fatso Ricker, the rookie Boars' first baseman. Red Toole whistled between his teeth, picked up his bag and started out of the park. The ball game was over.

Buster had said to meet him at the Dagger Hotel, so Red got a cab, went downtown and waited in the lobby. The Boars would be pulling out tonight for the last, long home stand. There was no use to unpack his bag. Maybe Buster wouldn't want anything but advice. . . .

In a few moments the lean, lugubrious manager of the Boars was beckoning from the bar. Red crossed over and sat down in a booth. Buster looked terrible. The strain of managing a war-time team composed of ancients, 4-F's and kids still damp behind the ears was making him old before his time.

Buster said, "You come from Tom Mackey's home town. You never were a real ball player, Red, and I'm givin' it to you straight. If you can help me with Tom, I'll give you a job for the rest of this season—at pay which will amaze you."

Red said, "Did he tear up his uniform after today's game?"

"Into a thousand pieces," groaned Buster. "Then he tried to lick young Woodley. Said he couldn't work with such a bum since Frosty had spoiled him."

Red considered. Frosty Forgiione had

been the shortstop of the formerly great Boars. Frosty had died in a bomber over a Pacific Island not so long ago. Red said, "Tom Mackey never did like me. When we were kids we had a little fight. He clouted me over the ear with a bat. Funny, ain't it, how a guy will hate a fella he's hurt pretty bad? I was in the hospital for months. . . . He sure is in a slump, Buster."

The Boars' manager said, "It's my own fault, in a way. I built this club around Tom. I lost about everybody but him. Well—I had Sack Evans and Charley Heim and Bugs. But the war got the rest. So I pinned everything on Tom. And it was workin'. I had the old ones and the kids thinkin' he was a god, and he was believin' it himself. I built that guy into a whole team—and now he's collapsin' on me."

Red was beginning to lose interest. He said, "I've quit baseball. I can't do anything with Tom. He just don't like me."

Buster said, "You were a fair utility man, Red. I can use you. The Camels are getting at us. We got a series at home with 'em and if they murder us we'll collapse. If you could think of something to snap Tom out of it—"

Red said, "I'm not hot about it—unless I could play regular." He waited, pretending more indifference than he felt.

Buster said slowly, "The team's set. It could win the pennant, all right, if Tom would come out of his slump. But Young Woody ain't hittin'."

Red said, "I get it. You want me to play short. I'm an outfielder, by rights, but you want me to play alongside of Mackey."

"A long time ago," said Buster seriously, "when you were with the Tigers, I noticed you were steady. I noticed you didn't worry about things. All right, you're a .230 hitter. You've got speed and a head. I'll take a chance on you, like I say, give you a regular contract. But you got to work on Tom."

Red said, "You're not telling me all you mean, either."

"All right," said Buster. "Is it a go?"

So that was how Red Toole, an ordinary, run of the mine ballplayer who had been kicked around more than a little, became the regular shortstop of a Boars club which might or might not have a chance to win a flag. It was on account of Buster Camp and his ideas about people. People said Buster did not know baseball, that he was lucky,

that he bought ball clubs. Red Toole knew different.

**TOM MACKEY** was a big man for a second sacker, with broad shoulders and long arms and a heavy, red face. Not many ballplayers liked Tom. Lobo Wolf, playing manager of the Camels, a rough and tough gent himself, said once, "Mackey is a baseball machine. He's not human. And he's always lookin' out for number one. He's a great Mackey man!"

Red joined the club officially in the home clubhouse, just before the series with the Camels. He was assigned to a locker and began methodically unpacking, wincing a bit at the name "Frosty" printed on the door. After a while Tom Mackey came in, stopped dead and stared at him.

Red said, "Hello, Tom. How's tricks?"

Tom said, "I won't stand for it! You can't do it, you bum! You can't take Frosty's locker!"

"I'm takin' Frosty's place, Tom," said Red easily. "I'm figuring to make a job for myself."

Sack Evans came in, and Charley Heim and Bugs Devoe, the catcher. Young Fatso Ricker poked his round face through the door. The pitchers were down at the end of the locker room, chewing the sock. Tom raised his voice, "This club has gone to hell! Young punks like Woodley! Bums like you!"

Red said without rancor, "Save it for the game, Tom. Wait'll I start blowing them. We got a pretty good team here. I mean to be a help to the boys."

"You couldn't help the Bloomer Girls!" raved Mackey. "You never were a ball player, even in school!"

"I never was," said Red into the silence of the clubhouse. "But somethin' tells me I'll do all right with this club."

Sack Evans, grizzled with years of patrolling left field, said, "Attaboy, Red. We're with you, boy!"

Tom glared about. Then he slammed his coat into the locker and began dressing. Rin Tin Collins and Chuck Tenery and some more of the oldtimers gathered around Red and began cutting up old tricks. Rin Tin said, "I remember you bust up a game for me in Philly that time you was with Mack. It was a curve ball—"

"It was a downer," said Bugs. "I re-

member I call for a curve and you gimme a downer. . . ."

It was very pleasant, listening to the good-humored argument between the veterans. Fatso Ricker edged up and said shyly, "Glad to welcome you, Red, I am sure. This is not a bad ball club if Tom would snap out of it, huh?"

"Yeah," grinned Red. "Sure. We'll do fine."

He went out for the hitting practise with the whole club behind him. It was always that way—people liked Red. If he had fought people a little more, maybe he wouldn't have been traded around the circuit until his ambition died. But he had never stepped on anybody's neck to boost himself. He liked people, just as much as they liked him.

The Camels were using Voodoo Ryan, who was 4-F in the Army but a bearcat on the mound. The Camels looked just the same to Red—they had been pretty lucky with their smooth, veteran championship team. Bitsy Dolan was on second, Manny Gomez still at short. Fiddle Crater was at first and shaggy Pitt Pittman caught. Lobo held down that third sack like a tiger and hated the Boars and Buster Camp with a venom born of the days when Buster had let him out because he was clumsy and surly—one of Buster's few mistakes on player deals. It was a good club, a club which should win the flag and Red knew it.

Yet there was something about these Boars under Buster Camp. It was not a matter of percentages nor figures on paper. Maybe it was because their leader was a nice guy and liked to have nice guys around him. Maybe it was because playing around Tom Mackey they had developed *esprit de corps*. They were in first place, and if they hung on through this series, they would ride in.

Not that it looked like they would win this series, Red amended. Tom Mackey was sulking all over the ball park. Tom's batting average had slumped from a neat .330 to a weak .235 since he had hit his bad days. During the infield practise Red gave him the double play ball an inch too far to his right and he growled, "That's right, screw it up! What can I expect?"

Red wanted to say, "Get off that dime!" but he held his peace. He had some observations to make and some thinking to do be-



fore he said anything to Tom Mackey. He took his own practise chances cleanly and threw straight as a string to Fatso Ricker. Red was not a great shortstop, he freely admitted to himself. But he was beginning to get the feel of the Boars team and beginning to like it—all but Tom Mackey.

The Boars went in to the bench. Buster said to them, "This is it, fellas. This series will make or break us. And there's only one thing I got to say: It's all a matter of guts." He looked around the circle, holding the eyes of each. He lingered upon Tom Mackey's sultry face and added, "I think you've got it."

They went out on the field. There were a lot of bombers going back and forth overhead. Mackey looked up at them while Rin Tin warmed up and Red saw his lips moving. Then the game was started and Red saw Tom squint, shake his head and try to settle into his playing position.

Bitsy Dolan was a great first ball hitter, Red remembered. The Camel second baseman teed right off, but Rin Tin had kept it low, like always, and the grounder skidded down to Tom, a mean one, but the kind Tom always ate up. He dove into it. Red called, "Easy does it!"

Tom threw. The ball was in the dirt. Fatso tried to scoop it up, but it went behind him and Bitsy, ever alert, scampered to second, laughing himself sick, shouting. "They're either too young or too old!"

From the Camel bench they were singing it, harmonizing on the chorus. "They're either too young or too old. . . ."

Red said, "Tough luck, Tom!"

"Shut up!" snapped Tom. "Don't talk to me during the game!"

The infield was silent, then broke into chatter for Rin Tin's sake. The hurler threw courageously to Melloe, who slapped the second pitch down to third, where Gil Morgan trapped it, faked Bitsy back and chucked Melloe out.

The new kid, Sley, took a long grip on his bat and Red backed up. Lobo was hollering something at Tom about flopping in the clutches. Red couldn't hear it very well, but then he read lips mostly anyway. It helped his concentration, and he never cared what the opponents were saying anyway, being a frozen-head. He saw Tom burning, watched Rin Tin's arm.

It was a curve on the inside and Sley

took it, cutting hard. It was mighty deep, and to the left. Red drove into it, pivoted and made his throw. He nailed Sley by a step. Bitsy rolled down to third on the bat, but there were two down and Rin Tin was steady. Red sighed, hoping.

Cash Moeser, Red remembered, was a place hitter and it was no good playing him until he shifted his feet. Rin Tin fed him bad stuff, then had to put one in. It was a little too good and Moeser leaned and laced it. The ball started right field way and Tom Mackey stretched, straining. He made the difficult stop. He had plenty of time, but he threw hastily. The ball rolled on the outfield grass. He had thrown it before his grasp upon it was solid. Bitsy romped all the way home.

Red took a deep breath. He walked around in a circle. He had seen ballplayers fall apart before, but this exhibition was the worst. He saw Rin Tin wilting under the strain.

He walked in and said, "Throw 'em where they'll hit to our side. Outside for lefties, close for righties. Don't let 'em push or pull them on you."

Rin Tin said haggardly, "That Mackey's gone nuts."

"Sure," said Red. "Make 'em hit to left."

Crater, the first baseman, was a great hitter. But Rin Tin's control was masterly. He threw them outside to the left-handed batter. Crater keelhailed a curve and sent it down to Red like a V-16, with the throttle open.

Red saw the bad bounce coming. He reached out his meat hand and snatched. He found the ball, came around. He had never made a better throw. He knelt, saw it beat Crater by a step. Fatso gave a whoop and threw his glove in the air. The Camels had only made one run after all. . . .

Buster said, "You'll bat second, Tom, ahead of Red. Make up for it, Tom!"

**M**ACKKEY was selecting a bat. His eyes were slightly bloodshot. He said deep in his throat, "You can bench me any time you want."

Buster said gently, "I'm not benching you, Tom. You're the best second sacker in the game."

Tom dragged out his stick and stalked away, growling like a mastiff. Red shrugged. Sack Evans led off for the Boars.

Voodoo's fast one had a hop like a Harlem jive dancer. He struck out Sack.

Mackey minced to the plate. Voodoo was careful. He worked around and got a three-and-two count. Tom tugged at his cap and relaxed, but swinging gently. Voodoo threw him a knee-high swift hook.

Tom slashed. The ball went back like a bullet, seemed to be a real hit. The Boars on the bench cried out in glee.

Voodoo stuck out his gloved hand. The ball hit it, dropped to earth. Voodoo was stupefied at his luck. He almost forgot to throw to first.

But it would not have made any difference. Tom Mackey hadn't even run it out. Tom was already stalking back to the bench, kicking at the turf. Tom had quit.

Red went to the plate, still disbelieving. He had never seen Tom quit. This was something new. He poised himself loose as ashes, choking his bat a little.

Voodoo unfolded a sweet downer that was in there. Red knew he had to hit and stepped into it, swinging almost gently. He pushed a little, aiming for the right field hole. The ball broke off his bat and shot between first and second. He ran down to first like a rabbit. It was a clean single.

Old Charley Heim stood up there and looked over Voodoo's curves. He had a good eye, old Charley. Red took a nice lead, but was cautious.

Voodoo bore down with his Sunday curve, but it was waist high. The crack of the bat sent Red off the base. He had a blurred glimpse of the ball sailing into right center, then put down his head and fled. He saw Buster in the coaching box, giving him the hurry-up sign. He spurned third with his left toe and hit the base path. He dove into the air, feet first, thrusting spikes at the bulk of Pittman.

He was safe by inches. He dusted himself off and Nick Toland was grinning at him, waiting to bat. Nick said, "What do we need Mackey for? You're the stuff, Red!"

Nick grounded out, but all the Boars said something pleasant to Red, and Rin Tin observed, "Gimme one run to work on and I'm still a pitcher. You gimme it, kid."

Lobo Wolf was up, foaming at the mouth, so eager was he to hit. The Camels were hollering and yelling.

The bomber zoomed its motors. Instinctively Tom looked skyward. Red yelled

and ran. Rin Tin had pitched and the indomitable Lobo lashed the ball toward Tom.

Tom made a try for it. He got his hands on it, bobbled it. He held it, staring blankly before him, his face scarlet. Lobo stood on first and chanted, "They're either too young or too old!"

Fatso, who was barely eighteen, almost wept. Rin Tin scuffled around the grass beside the mound. It was toughest on Rin Tin, who was making the ebullient Camels hit into the dirt on every shot, Red thought.

"All right, get two!" Red snapped. Gil took it up and even Fatso rumbled, "Get 'em both this time, Rin Tin!"

Lobo was cavorting like a giant ape. He was a hairy man, all muscles, ready to tear into anyone to gain a base. Red balanced, sensing something, giving Bugs a sign. Gomez, a left-handed hitter, was up. It looked like the hit and run.

Rin Tin threw. Gomez spanked the ball. Red shot for second base. Lobo was coming at terrific speed. The ball rolled to Tom.

Red shouted, "Up! Up! Up!"

Tom's head went down, he played the ball. Without looking he fed it to second. Red snatched it with his bare hands, spurned the bag and swung underhand to first. Fatso reached out and made the catch, completing the double play by a yard.

But Lobo had not stopped. Leaping to break up Tom's throw, he crashed on, smacking Tom amidships, knocking him into the air. Tom landed awkwardly, on his left shoulder, as Red swung into action. The base umpire grabbed Red by the elbow, but he got in one punch and Lobo tumbled into centerfield.

Red said, "He did it purposely!"

The ump said, "I ought to t'row you out but I'll fergit it if you shut up and git offen the field."

Tom was getting up. He was rubbing his shoulder and staring at Red. He said, "It's all right. Let's go." His voice was low and he kept looking at Red.

Buster walked off the field with them. He said, "We got two to their one. Let's hold the lead." He did not say anything about the fracas, but the trainer took hold of Tom's arm and in a moment there was consternation on the bench.

Red said, "Ligament?"

"Just a sprain," said the trainer. "It hoits him, though."



## ONE HOSS TEAM

Red said, "I'm sorry, Tom."

Mackey's eyes were clearer. He said slowly, "We pulled the double on 'em . . . It felt good." Then he scowled and walked slowly up the runway with the trainer. Young Woodley's teeth were chattering, but his jaw was set in a straight white line.

Red said, "You play with me, kid. We'll hold those stinkers. We'll give 'em fight. We'll murder 'em!"

**W**OODLEY sat near him during the ining, not speaking. Voodoo was pitching air-tight ball. They went out and Rin Tin shrugged his sloping shoulders and continued to pitch with his aging arm and keen brain.

Pittman laced one down toward second. Young Woodley came in, stooping. Red yelled, "Up, up, *up!*" The kid made the play like a veteran and the Boars' infield came in, chattering, and Gil Morgan gave Red a strange look.

Voodoo got lucky and scratched a single past Gil. Then Bitsy was up again and Red came in, sneaking. Sure enough, Bitsy bit the first ball and the old hit and run was on. But Red, a step behind the pitcher's box, cut off the rolling ball. He pivoted, snapped it to Woodley. The kid gallantly spun and heaved underhand to first. Bitsy was out by inches.

Red ran in. Buster met him, his eyes wondering. He said, "That was Frosty's play! I've seen Frosty do that a dozen times!"

"Me, too," said Red gravely. "I've watched Frosty a lot, too."

Nobody commented further. The Camels never did get untracked after the two twin killings that day. Rin Tin won his pitcher's battle, two to one. . . .

Down at the field the next morning Red got up and went over to Tom, saw him start and lift his head. He said, "How's the arm?"

"I'll play today," said Tom shortly. He made as though to resume reading, then said haltingly, "You didn't need to bust Lobo. I'll take care of him . . . but thanks."

"I should let him get away with it?" grinned Red. "He'd be runnin' over us all."

Amazingly, Tom said, "Go ahead and talk."

So Red talked, in a low voice, and when



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the others came in he stopped talking and mixed with them, joshing them, calling them dirty names, so that they all felt very good.

Tom sat there, lacing his shoes. He kept his head down and at the sound of several bombers over head he froze a moment, then went on, glancing aside at Red for only a second.

They went on the field and presently they were in a ball game against the bitter, battling Camels. Willy Sutter would pitch, and Willy was a notorious bean baller so Lobo was screaming defiance from the bench. Red threw a pebble out of the base path and said, "How we gonna go in here? Heads up, up, up!"

Again Gil Morgan looked askance, but answered firmly, "Up, up, up, gang! Here we go in there!"

Fatso's young voice took it up and then Tom's base chimed in firmly, "Heads up!"

Chuck Tenery looked at them and grinned. He wound up and threw his swift at Bitsy. The ubiquitous Dolan smacked at the low one. It ricocheted off Chuck's mitt and rolled towards Tom, who was in, reaching. Red said, "Up, up!" Tom chuckled hastily. The ball soared, dropped into Fatso's mitt.

There was a gleam in Tom's narrowed eyes. Red said, "You got him that time, Tommy ol' boy!"

Cat Melloe struck out. Rookie Jim Sley nailed one down to deep short. Red saw it going, threw his body like an adagio dancer. He had never made a play like this in his life before, he knew as he felt the impact of ball in glove. He wheeled and threw. Without looking, it was chance. It was a Frosty Forgione try. He saw the ball curve in to Fatso, heard the umpire yell, "Yer out!" and ran to the bench, making like it was nothing at all.

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Continued

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Willy Cutter had a wild look about him. Sack couldn't get set against the swift one which came under his chin. Willy slyly shunted strikes at the outside edge. Sack struck out.

Tom went up. Willy threw the first one right at his skull as Lobo bellowed with glee. Tom hit the dirt, came up grim silent. Willy tried his curve and Tom stepped into it. The ball spat out over third and rose. It went up and up and Tom rounded first. Far out at the bleacher's edge a gray arm shot high. Melloe made a circus catch.

**T**OM turned and trotted across the infield. Lobo said something to him and Tom actually grinned without answering. Red sighed with contentment. He took his light bat into the box.

Willy chuckled one at his head. Red swayed out of the way, laughed down at the vengeful Lobo who was demanding his ruin. Willy bent a strike over the corner. Then Red whaled at a low one and knocked it into right field through the hole he had long since picked for his own. Sley came in and in his youthful zeal attempted to make a shoestring catch. The ball got away.

Red hit second standing up. Moeser, in centerfield, was retrieving the ball, ready to throw it in. Red watched, saw that Moeser was aiming at the second baseman.

Red's spikes flung clay and he was off for third. He hit the dirt and saw Lobo stretching for the ball. He faded toward infield grass, hooking for the bag with his spikes.

There were two down now, but Charley Heim was up. Cutter began throwing for the far corners. There was no reason for an intentional pass, with Toland and Morgan batting next in order. But he was working carefully on Charley, who lumbered, a sleeping giant, awaiting a look.

Willy had to string a strike in there. He chose a low, swift-breaking twister. Charley bent his knees and swung gently.

The ball went into left field. Red ran home, laughing with glee. Charley rumbled down to first base like a sleepy old elephant. Cutter swore fluently. Nick hit to short for the third out, but the run was in.

Red ran on the field. He glanced over at Tom and said, "Up, up, up!"

Tom said, "I'm in there. Stay with me, chum!"

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The bombers came over. Tom started, then resolutely pulled his cap down over his eyes and squinted at the pitch. Chuck was nailing it down with perfect control. The Camels could not find his stuff.

The innings wore on and it was a defensive battle all the way. Each team got scattered hits, but no runner got to second base. Tom felt surreptitiously of his shoulder. In the Camel's half of the eighth Bitsy Dolan squeezed out a lucky blooper and roosted on first with none down.

Chuck had been bearing down with every pitch. He was no longer a youth and his elbow was giving him trouble. He rubbed a new ball and looked appealingly at Red. He threw to the dangerous Melloe. He was very diligent and got Melloe on a third called strike.

Sley, the new kid, was tougher. He waited for a two-and-two count, then picked on a bad ball and knocked it over Red's head. Bitsy went all the way to third. Sley stayed on first, but Chuck had to walk Cash Moe-ser to fill the sacks and give room for a double play at any stations.

Fiddle Crater, the Camel's first base man, could break up any ball game at any moment. He stood up there, big as a house, and Red was unhappy. Chuck squared his shoulders and bravely pitched.

The bat thundered, the ball seemed to go lopsided for a second, then reappear, a white flash zooming for the far reaches, labeled very plainly a double. Red went back a step. He turned his back upon home plate. He jumped very far into the air. He thrust both hands above his head.

The force of the hit carried him onto the grass, knocked him down. The ball got away from him and rolled and his leg buckled a little.

He saw a white uniform slide past, saw the ball go in one slashing motion to home. He rolled over agonizingly and saw the runner sliding, saw Bugs block him off yards from the plate.

It was a moment before he knew what had happened. Then he realized that the swift Sley had tried to go all the way home from second and Tom had caught him. But Bitsy had scored. If he had not lost the ball, Bitsy would have been doubled. He sat there, cursing himself.

Tom looked down and said:



## ONE HOSS TEAM

"Yuh damn fool, it was a hit!"

"I should of had it," mourned Red. "I had it in my mitts!"

Tom said, "It was a hit, I tell you!"

"There are no hits when you can get 'em," said Red grimly. He got up and Tom helped him walk around. Then he was all right and Chuck was grimly hurling to Lobo Wolf.

Lobo was beside himself, trying to get home the run which would put the Camels in the lead. He was all over the box, working on Chuck. Then he had to hit and he did hit, a driving ball which came over second base. Red started for it, but someone was ahead of him. He saw Tom jump for the high bounce, saw the ball lined to Fatso. It was a step ahead of Lobo. The rally was dead as a doornail. He limped in to the bench, pounding Tom's good shoulder.

Buster said, "It was like Frosty, all right. His style, everything." But Buster whispered and Red did not hear.

Red took his bat and led off. Willy was still dusting the hitters, but Red never cared about bean balls in his life, and had never been hit by one. He called, "Those things never went for strikes yet, you busher!"

Willy got mad and cut his high hard one, trying to throw it past Red. The bat met it exactly on the trademark. It rolled to the right field fence, but Red stopped at first base because of his leg and young Sley's admittedly great arm.

Charley Heim stood up there, frowning. He called, "Don't try to run, Red! Just watch me!"

Watching Charley was fun. He looked so indifferent, so clumsy. And then Willy gave him a look and Charley moved and it was all grace and sunshine and roses. Red had to run as the ball hit the top board in center, and Charley only got to third. But Red scored easily enough and again the Boars were ahead.

That was all. In the ninth, with three men to go, Chuck's elbow was worse. Red could tell, and Buster came from the bench. Chuck said, "I'll get 'em."

He was all courage, but he walked Gomez and Pittman got a life on a scratch single and there were two on. They brought out Ace Hutchins to pinch hit for Cutter. Buster waved an arm.

Red turned and there came Rin Tin,

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trudging in from the bull pen. The old hurler hadn't been kidding. Buster yelled, "I called for Gould!"

Rin Tin spat tobacco juice and said, "Can't see it thataway. Bus. This is mine. I choose it."

Hutchins was hitting about .400 in the clutches, Red remembered. He was a crouching, swinging veteran with an eye. Rin Tin knew him well enough. Rin Tin fed him down-twisting drops. The count went to three-and-two.

Rin Tin turned and gravely surveyed his infield. He said clearly, "I think I'll let this old bum hit."

"Up, up, up!" snapped Red.

Rin Tin laid it in there hard and fast and game. Ace hunched forward and stroked. He was trying to punch one through the pulled-in barrier of Boars, and send it just

far enough to score Gomez from second.

Red backpedaled. He saw Tom in motion. He wheeled away and touched up at second. He saw Tom Mackey grab the sailing ball inches from the grass behind second. He took Tom's perfect toss, kicked the bag as he lanced the ball with all his strength to Fatso. The hit and run had been on and every base runner was scrambling in motion.

Fatso held it at arm's length, screaming at the top of his lungs, "Triple play! Triple play!"

The unps were all spreading their hands, palms down. Lobo was bellowing, "He never caught it! Mackey trapped that ball, the dirty soandso!"

But Red was already making for the clubhouse. He had seen a slumping, disgraced ballplayer come over from nowhere and



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## ONE HOSS TEAM

make a phenomenal, impossible catch to start the most thrilling defensive play in baseball.

LATER, in Buster's little office, Red said, "It was Tom's eyes as much as anything. He couldn't help looking up into the glaring sky at those bombers, thinking of Frosty and how he died in the tail of one. Then his already weak eyes would go back on him and he'd bobble one. Then he'd lose his confidence and think that everyone hated him and then he would blow."

Tom, standing straight against the wall, said, "That's right. I was nosin' into a paper when Red got wise. Y'see I always had kinda weak eyes. Frosty would yell 'Up, up, up!' and I knew the play was mine and a guy gets used to that sort of thing. I'll be all right when I get glasses."

Buster said, "We're as good as in the Series. You two have pulled the team back together. And Red you *are* a ballplayer. Just like Frosty."

Tom said quietly, "He don't hear so good, Bus. I—I hit him with a bat and made him deaf . . . I was an unhappy guy about not gettin' into the Air Corps on account of my glims—but I kept him outa Service and he comes here and plays he's Frosty and helps me along— You know what, Buster?"

Red said, "Aw, forget it, Tom. You got to think people like you, and then—why, then they will. You're all right—"

"You know what?" Tom went on. "I believe he's played Frosty so good that he's beginnin' to *be* as good!"

Buster said, "Get out of here. Go get your wounds attended to . . . You're both okay . . . Both of you. . ."

They went out. Tom said haltingly, "Would you room with me, mebbe, Red?"

Red said, "Why sure—Look, for tomorrow I got an idea."

"Yeah?" asked Tom eagerly.

"If that Lobo ever gets on and comes down to second," said Red. "We'll put the squeeze on him!"

"Right!" cried Tom happily. "We'll murder the bum!"

On this tender thought they repaired to the trainer and his ministrations and the half-dressed Boars made merry about them and a championship ball team was born. . . .



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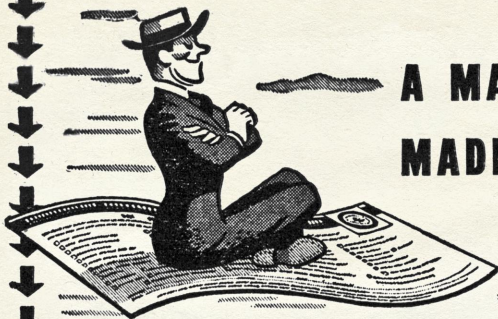
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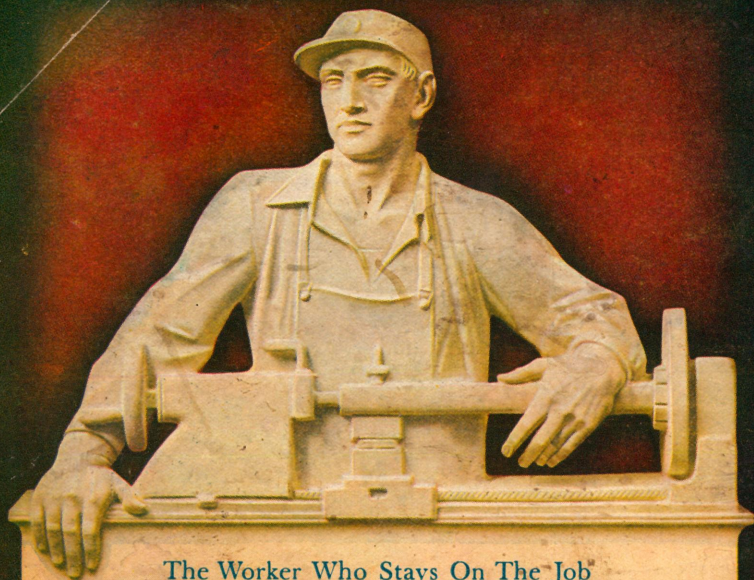
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