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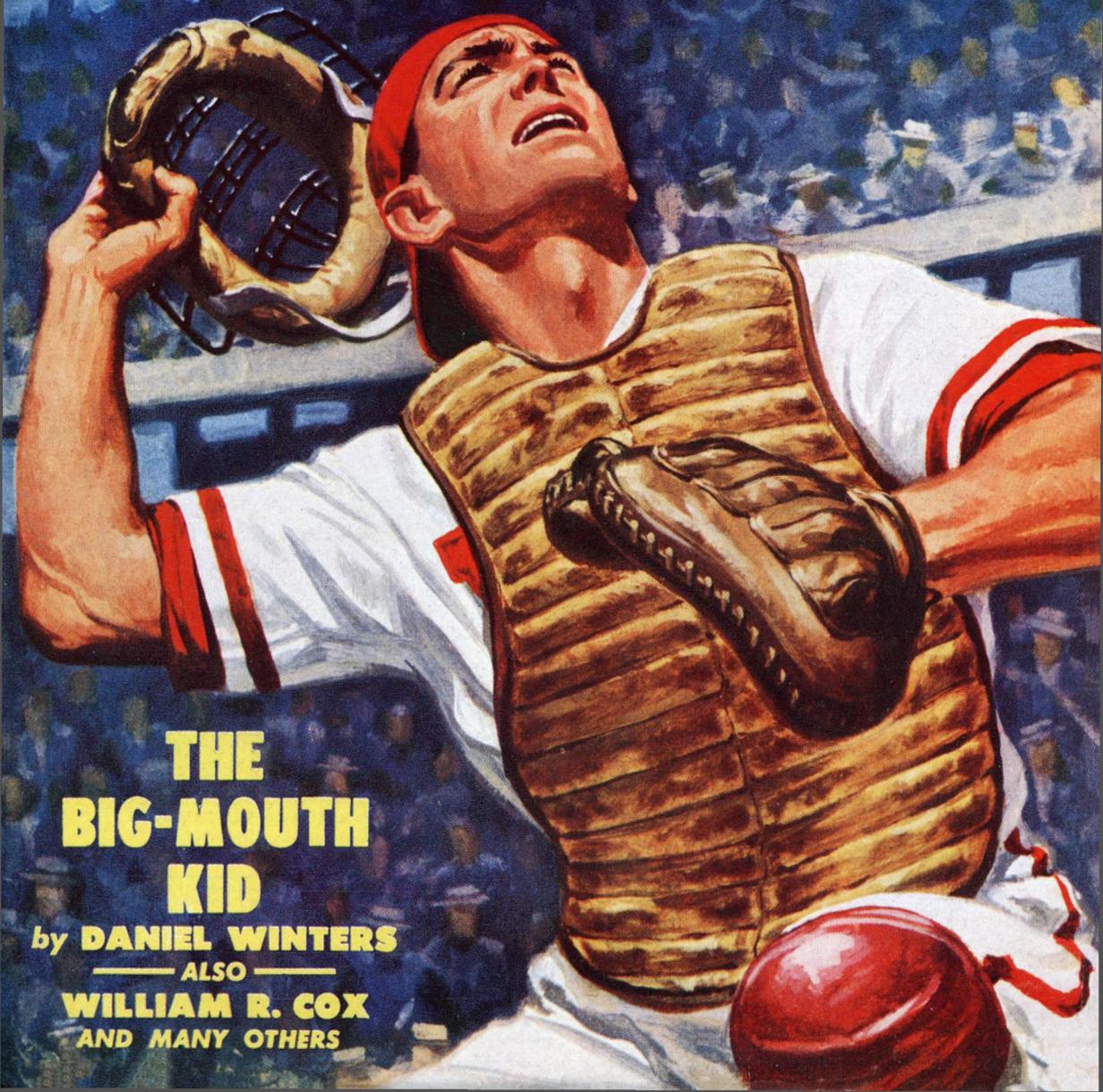
OCT.

SPORTS

15
STORIES

STORIES

25
CENTS



THE BIG-MOUTH KID

by DANIEL WINTERS

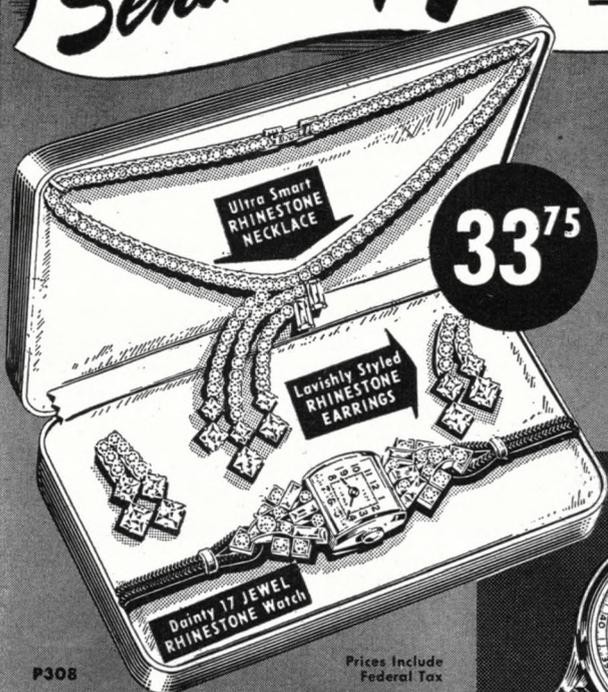
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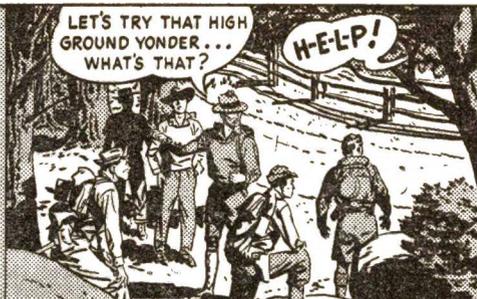
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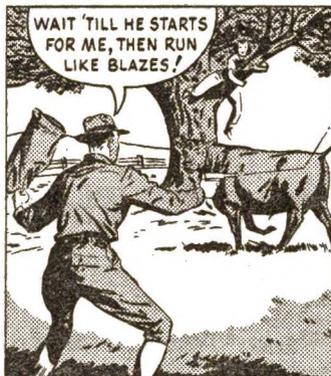


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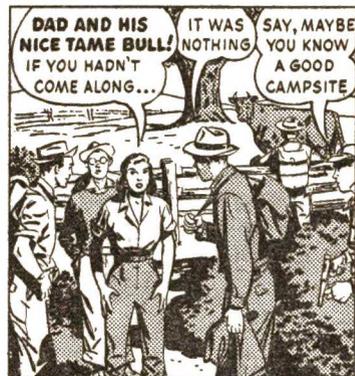


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15 STORIES 25 CENTS

VOLUME 7, No. 3



OCTOBER, 1951

Three Power-Packed Novelettes

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2. **PUNCH PROOF** *William Hartley* 70
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Smashing All-Sports Fiction

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==MURDER

MITTS==

COMING up next issue is a different kind of yarn. It's about the days when ring titans fought bare-fisted, and anyone who dared could enter the ring. Old Chan Chilcote had been one of the best, but that was before he'd spent fifteen years in prison. And when he went in against Soldier Brown, he knew he was in for trouble—but here's the way author Dee Linford tells it . . .

The cowbell clattered, and Chan Chilcote reacted instantly, like an old fire horse hearing the alarm. Soldier Brown came out swinging powerfully. Chilcote boxed him, as Corbett had done Sullivan.

Chilcote avoided the looping, cuffing blows, and jabbed with his left, keeping it in the Soldier's face. Kid Chilcote had always had a left. The Soldier didn't know what to do about it. He kept up his cuffing, slashing drive. Chilcote kept out of his way, and kept his left in the other's face.

The Soldier's nose was bleeding, and Chilcote smeared the red all over his long horse face.

"He never touched you!" his second said, when the round was over.

"He will," Chilcote said leaning back on his stool. But there was a strange lilt in his voice, and ill-founded jubilation in his inside. For he'd found he still could fight. He'd found that five years of training back-country kids, working with them regularly and fighting their fights from the corner—weaving and dancing and uncorking the heavy ones with them—had put him back in touch with the game.

At forty, he could still keep away from a tough campaigner like Soldier Brown. After fifteen years in prison, he could still draw blood.

But his self-deception didn't stretch very far. He still didn't think in terms of winning, or even of fighting to win. He hadn't hurt the Soldier. He couldn't hurt the Soldier. And he was tiring. He couldn't keep away from the trooper much longer.

But even knowing what the end would be, Chilcote found that one moment worth

the whole ordeal. He wouldn't have believed, a week ago, that he could last even one round with a tough professional ten years his junior.

The next round was a retake of the first, except that Chilcote, crazily, got ambitious. He began fighting two-handed, trying out his right. But hitting the trooper was like hitting a wall, and once he thought he'd broken his hand. Then, toward the end of the round, he blundered into one of the Soldier's swings. The next thing he knew, he was on his back, and the carbine lights above him were wheeling around like buzzards.

The bell saved him. But he had to be helped up and back to his stool.

He was still shaken at the start of the third. And his left had begun to fail, just as he had known it must. It no longer kept the Soldier blinded and off balance. Brown's belting swings had started to connect. So far, Chilcote could roll with each punch. But his legs would be next to go. Then it would start to end.

And it started, the next round. Now the Soldier's blows began to land solidly, and Chilcote could only take it.

There are some things a man shouldn't ask of his body; some things it simply can't stand. Chilcote was down, and up, and down again. Once or twice, he had the Soldier off his feet. But like the giant in the Greek myth, the Soldier bounced up each time stronger than before.

The crowd was making such a racket that neither heard the bell. Their handlers had to come out and part them, drag them back to their stools. And it was well for Chilcote that they did. He couldn't have made it back unassisted . . .

And that was only the third round of what was supposed to be a twenty-round fight! The rest of the story of Chan Chilcote's fight with Soldier Brown will appear in Dee Linford's novelette, "The Bare Fist Massacre," coming up in the next issue of this magazine.

THE EDITOR



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ALL-SPORTS QUIZ

By M. KANE

RAIN or shine or transportation strikes, here's one sports event you don't have to miss. You don't even need the price of a ticket. Play it against yourself, against an imaginary opponent or a friend. It's conceivable he might even still be a friend of yours when the dust settles. Score as indicated. (*Answers on page 51*)

Baseball:

1. Who holds the National League record for most homers in a single game? *A single if you make it—a strikeout if you miss.*

2. When was the first New York subway World Series held? *Another single or strikeout.*

3. Who holds the record for catching a hundred or more games per season for the most seasons? *A homer on this one, or a strikeout.*

4. How many no-hitters were pitched during the 1950 season? *Another bingle—or three whiffs.*

5. What major league ball player became the governor of Pennsylvania? *A single again, or loss your turn at bat.*

Fight:

6. Who is Giuseppe Bernardinelli? One clue, he's a world titleholder, under another name. *A round for you—or the other guy.*

7. What is the longest, in actual fighting time, that a championship bout can go? *A round, either way.*

8. Where can a fighter be ruled out for life, without having done anything reprehensive? *A round, win or lose.*

9. Who was the first American bare knuckle champ? *Same as above.*

10. Who formulated the first rules of boxing? *A TKO.*

Hockey:

11. During the '49-'50 season the three top scorers in the game were all on one team. Can you name them? *Rack up two red lights, either way.*

12. How often has the above situation held in hockey? *Score one.*

13. What is hockey's cleanest series? *Score one.*

14. Which noted baseball umpire won the Stanley Cup as a hockey team manager? *Score two.*

15. Army's top hockey player is nationally known in another sport—which one? *Score one.*

Miscellaneous: (Score one for each.)

16. How often was Man o'War defeated?

17. Match the following:

- Art Larsen football
- Pat O'Dea track
- Charlie Paddock tennis

18. Can you name two sports in which it is possible for a player to strike out?

19. What is the marathon distance?

20. Which team has played most often in the Rose Bowl?



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THE BIG-MOUTH KID



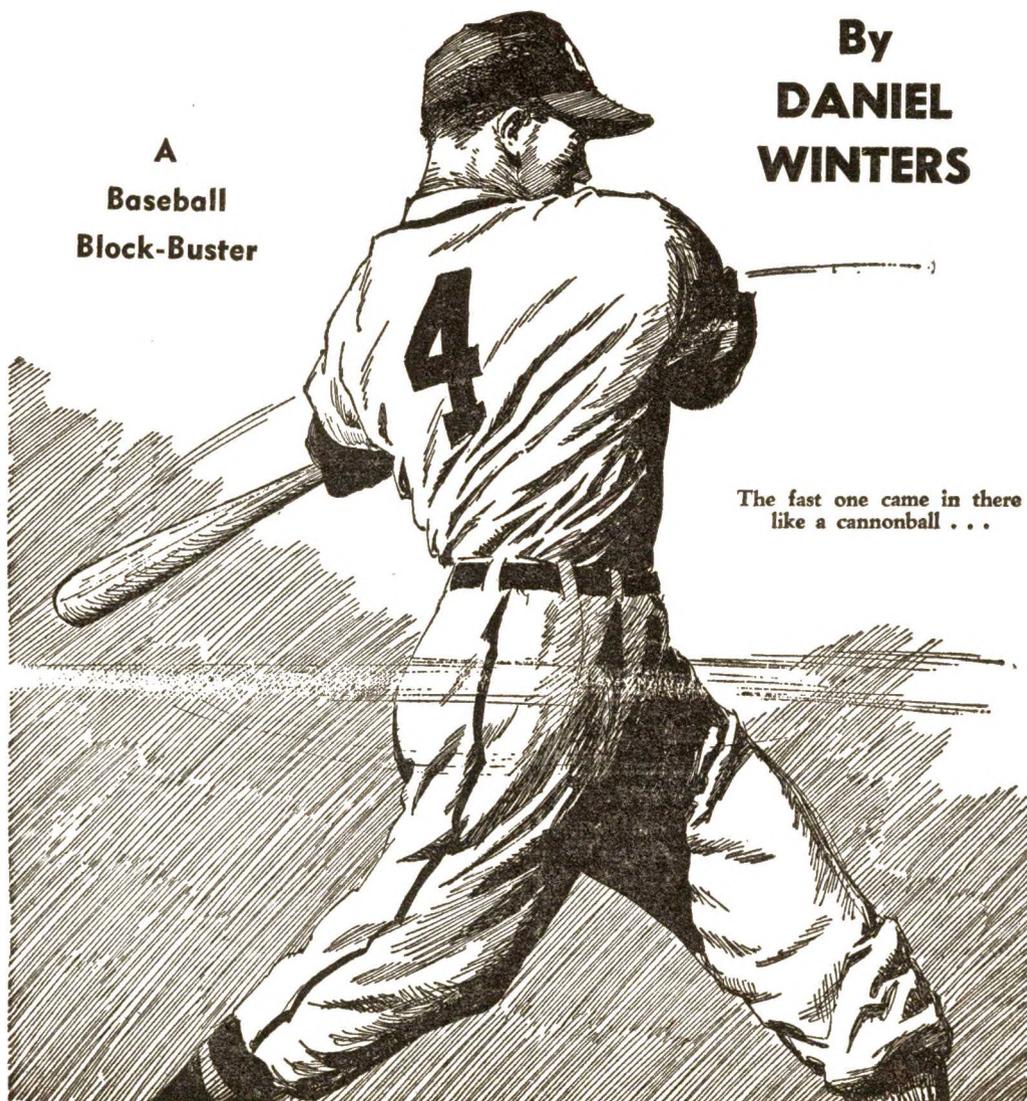
Rookie catcher Dan Brady had the biggest bat on the team, used the biggest mitt; and he seemed a big asset to the Bucs —until he opened the biggest mouth in the league!

DAN BRADY went out to the Buc's training park remembering what his father had told him. "Danny," his father had said, "don't be impressed by anything you see or hear. You're a good ball player and you can stay up there if you really want to. You can hit, and you are very good behind that plate. There is only one thing that might lick you. You're too shy, too bashful."

Danny had said, "Yes, Pop."
"You can't be any gentle lily up in that big league," his father had told him. "You've got to stand on your own two feet and holler just as loud as the next guy. If you clam up, the way you always do, they'll think there's something wrong with you, think you lack something. I don't mean for you to be a big-mouth, understand. You don't have to shout. But be sure that you

**A
Baseball
Block-Buster**

**By
DANIEL
WINTERS**



The fast one came in there like a cannonball . . .

don't let people walk all over you. Speak out when you have something to say. Hell, you're twenty-four years old, you're six-foot-two and strong as an ox, you have a great arm and you can hit, and you know the game. There's no reason why you should sit back in a corner. Assert yourself. Don't sell yourself short. I never did."

Danny had said again, "Yes, Pop," and had picked up his valise and gotten on the train. The trip gave him plenty of time to think of what his father had said.

Tommy Brady had been a big league ball player only fifteen years before. He'd been a fine fielding second baseman, but he hadn't been able to hit his hat size. But his hustle and his holler had kept him in there for a long stretch, ten years of active playing. He'd been a mainstay of the Bucs for that period of time.

And Danny knew that his father expected him to follow in the tradition. It would be impossible. Perhaps mainly because his father had been a holler guy, a dominant personality, he himself was quiet and retiring. It had been that way all through school and college. He certainly couldn't be expected to start bellowing now.

The field was swarming with activity, and he looked on for a while. Then he asked which man was Hap Horner, and a fellow pointed down the field to a tall, thin man conducting an infield drill. Danny walked down toward the plate.

He waited for five minutes before the thing was through, and then Hap Horner, who managed the Bucs, turned and saw him standing there in his civilian clothes. Horner came over. He said, "What can I do for you, son?"

"I guess I'd just like to get a suit," Danny said.

"A suit, eh? What do you do, son?" Horner's face was shrewd but cut in kindly lines.

"I'm your new catcher," Danny told him. "Name is Brady."

"So you're the new catcher," Horner smiled. "Didn't anyone tell you we had a catcher? Name of Joe Connors. Pretty good man."

Connors was merely one of the very best. Danny knew that, and he also remembered what his father had told him. He told Horner, "Guess you won't be needin' Connors much longer. Ought to do you some good

as tradin' material, though. You've got me, now."

Horner looked at him and there was no laughter in his eyes, now. He said, "What did you say your name was?"

"Brady. Dan Brady."

And then Horner did smile, and he shook his head. "I should have known, all right. A chip off the old block. Tommy Brady's son."

His hand came out and Dan took it. Horner said, "Welcome to camp, son. If you're half as good as your Dad was, you'll be a lot of use to the Bucs."

Dan looked at him evenly. He said, "Pop was a fair country ball player, but he didn't know what to do with a bat." It sounded just a bit like treason.

Horner stared at him, then grinned. "Your father had a lot of brass, but he certainly was a piker compared to you." He nodded in the direction of the clubhouse. "Boy up there'll give you a suit. Come on back when you're ready."

Dan said, "Yes, sir," and walked away. He felt the eyes of several of the players on him, also felt the old, shy blush coming on and rubbed one big hand over his face to hide it.

He was given uniforms and a locker and in half an hour he was dressed and out on the field again. He had his own glove and spikes, of course, and he walked again the long way to the infield and told Hap Horner, "I'm all set, Mr. Horner."

Horner nodded and smiled. "Good. Go find yourself a pepper game some place. I'll see you later."

Dan took the brush-off for what it was meant to be, not an unkindly thing, but merely a notice that Horner couldn't be bothered with every punk catcher that came along the pike. From here in it would be a matter of waiting for an opportunity to show his stuff.

FINDING a pepper game was an ordeal for him. There were a couple of them going on, but the mere act of intrusion was painful. He knew no one here. No one.

He picked the smallest game of three, one which had only four men in it, with the hitter. He took one end of the line and said, "All right. Let's get goin' in here. Let's look alive now."

The man with the bat stared at him,

and the man next to him turned, looked at him for a long moment, then said, "Howdy."

Dan nodded. "Hya. Name's Brady. Just got in today."

The man looked at the glove. "Catcher, eh?"

Dan nodded. "The new catcher." He noticed that the game had paused, that no one was speaking.

The man next to him said, "I see. My name's Miller." He jerked his head to the left, indicating the men beside him. "Wally Pound, Navlon and Sid Rivers."

Dan gulped. The cream of the Buc. The Old Guard. The real class of the outfit, the men who had held the team together for more than five years. He'd walked right into the elite crowd—the stars who, by common consent, grouped by themselves.

And then Miller, Bill Miller, the best shortstop in the league, waved with his glove toward the batter. "This is Connors, Joe Connors. Up until you came along, he was the catcher."

They laughed, then, Miller and the others, letting the sound roll out, loud and hilarious. All but Connors. He stood there with the big bat in his hand, and his face was strained with his anger. He said nothing at all, just looked at Dan. And then he spat.

Dan said, "Let's get goin'," and Rivers, who had the ball, threw it into Connors. The big man took what was almost a full cut. The ball screamed down at Dan, low, right at the top of the grass, taking one filthy hop directly in front of him. If there had been time he would have jumped to one side, gotten out of the way, out of the damn park.

But there wasn't time. He acted almost entirely by instinct. He stooped over fast, felt the ball come off the ground and stab into the glove with a jarring force. He flipped it behind his back to Miller, beside him, and said, "Let's look alive." He'd made use of the miracle.

And Miller was caught flatfooted. He dropped the ball, staring at Dan. Dan said, "Pick it up by the handle, boy. Always grab it by the handle." And then he crouched there, waiting. The group was silent for a moment, then Miller picked up the ball and threw it in.

And Dan waited for another drive. It

was all he could do, he knew. Wait. He'd opened his mouth big, and now he had to take what they sent along.

But Connors didn't dare do it again. Maybe he was too surprised. Dan didn't know. But they came off the bat crisply, as they should, but with no lethal force. It was a pepper game again.

How long it lasted Dan did not know. He had not recovered from the initial shock, the roaring good luck, of that first smash. He just kept talking, playing the ball. Connors retained a tight-lipped silence but did not attempt again to resort to murder.

They went in near the plate to a call, then, and as they broke up the game, Miller said, "Kid, you were lucky. But don't ride it."

And Dan, remembering what his father had said, told Miller, but quietly, this time, "That wasn't luck, Miller. I'm a ball player."

Miller looked at him and then said, "Well, what the hell. You might be, at that."

In the afternoon workout Horner told him to warm up a pitcher, a big, lanky kid with ears like palm leaves. His name, the kid said, was Jimmy Darrow. He was just up from the Three-I League, and he said, apologetically, "I sure don't expect to stay, but it's nice gettin' a look at the place, anyway."

He pitched. He had a motion that was as loose as a wet rag. He warmed slowly, easily, and after about fifteen minutes, he said to Dan, "You want I should throw a few in there?"

Dan said, "It's early in the year, Jimmy. I wouldn't try anything fancy."

But the kid upped the delivery a bit, and he threw them nice, the ball coming out of that smooth motion of his, fast even now, low and controlled.

In another ten minutes Dan said, "You had enough. How's the arm feel?"

Jimmy grinned. "Good. I come from a little town down near New Orleans, an' I been throwin' for a month or so. And I jus' never get sorearm, somehow."

Dan could appreciate that. The wonderful easy motion was oiled and smooth and would never damage the muscles. This kind of a kid could pitch forever.

"What makes you think you won't

stay on with the team?" Dan asked the kid.

The boy shrugged. "Can't control the fast ball. Goes ever' which way when I turn it loose. Never could control it. Don't expect I'll be able to up here."

Well, there was always some flaw, in a kid like this. Dan asked, "How old are you?"

"Twenty. Twenty last month."

"Well, you've got a lot of time."

The boy nodded. "But that fast one. Seems like I'll never learn to keep it where it belongs. Time I do, I'll be eighty-eight years old an' a little stiff."

They walked back to the hotel together, Jimmy Darrow talking easily, Dan silent. He'd done enough talking for one day, he supposed. He'd opened his mouth nice and wide and nonsense had come out. His lack of tact had almost got him brained.

But he'd put on the cap, now, and he'd have to wear it. It was likely, too, that his father knew more about these things, the reactions of ball players to various personalities, than he did. He'd follow along for a while, anyway, and see what happened.

But he'd be careful what he said, if he were in a pepper game and Connors held the bat.

HE SAW the girl that evening. He was sitting in the lobby with Jimmy Darrow, after dinner, and Bill Miller and Sid Rivers were standing by.

She was tall and slender, and her dark hair fell to her shoulders. Her face was lovely and held the trace of a smile, as if something she had just heard had amused her. Her walk, Dan thought, was the most graceful movement he had ever seen.

She passed close by the group and said, "Hi, Bill. Hello, Sid."

And Miller and Rivers chorused, "Evening, Margey." And then she was gone. "Who," Dan said, "was that?"

Miller and Rivers turned and looked at him, and something in his expression brought a smile to Miller's face. He said, "That? Margey Blake. Thought you might know her."

Dan looked at him. "Me? How would I know her? I just got here today."

Miller shrugged. "You were probably corresponding with her before you came down here. She didn't write you any letters?"

And then Dan remembered some of the stuff he'd had in the mail from the Bucs. He remembered the signature, "M. Blake." He turned to Miller. "So that's M. Blake, eh?"

Miller was grinning, now. "Sure. She's Hilby's secretary."

Ray Hilby owned the Bucs, had bought them the year before. The picture was becoming clearer, now.

Miller was still grinning at him. "You like that?"

Dan looked at him. "I like it very much." And then he didn't know what impelled the statement, but it came out easily and naturally. "Like her so much I'll probably marry her one of these days."

Miller and Rivers stared at him, and he could feel Jimmy Darrow's eyes. And he wished at the moment that the floor would open under him. Of all the damn things, to say!

Miller said, "So you're going to marry her, eh?"

Dan's stupid remark was sitting right out there in front of him, staring at him. He could not ignore it now. He said, "Very likely."

Sid Rivers said, "You talked with her about it yet?"

And Dan said, "Talked with her? Hell, that's the first time I've ever seen her."

Jimmy Darrow said, "Man, you sure get acquainted fast!"

It was just the beginning of the trouble. One day with the club and he'd butchered everything beautifully, put himself high in the limelight, but it was not a pleasant spot to be in. He'd come out of his shell, all right, as his father had advised him. It was working out just wonderfully.

At the park the next morning he found that his locker had been adorned with streamers of paper, a great cluster of red cardboard hearts were pasted on it, and a huge sign said:

WELCOME, LOVER BOY!

Everybody in camp had the news. Guys he didn't know at all grinned at him and said, "How do you do it?" or "Let's in on the secret, Mr. Gable."

And there was nothing to do but grin right back at them. There were almost fifty guys in camp, and he couldn't fight

THE BIG-MOUTH KID

them all. Besides, he hadn't any desire to.

Joe Connors was particularly merciless. He kept needling Dan through the morning workout, his heavy voice reaching to all corners of the park. He asked pertinent questions, invented stories of the heart to which Dan had supposedly been a party. He was insistent with his "Lover Boy" label.

Even Hap Horner had something to say. He came over to Dan. "You don't waste any time, do you? Just speak right up." His face wore a puzzled expression.

Dan said, "Guess that just slipped out, last night. I didn't expect it would be repeated."

"A thing like that? Hell, they'll *never* let you forget it! You'll be hearing that as long as you're in baseball."

And Dan wondered just how long that would be.

He took batting practice with the rest, that day. There was a machine out on the hill, a mechanical pitcher, and the balls were lobbed up without anything on them. Dan took his cuts, hammered the ball far and wide, then stepped away for the next man.

Someone said, "You always hit them like that?" and Dan turned.

The man had been pointed out to him. Sam Lawson, who had pitched for the Bucs some years before and was now a coach on the team.

Dan said, "Well, we try to. Except you never get a soft pitch like that Iron Arm throws." He walked over to where he'd left his glove. Lawson moved with him.

"I had a letter from your father," Lawson said. "We used to play together. He thinks you're quite a ball player."

Dan was going to enter a polite denial, then remembered what his father told him. He said, "Pop might be right."

Lawson looked at him. "You talk just like him, anyway." Then he said, "You played ball in school, is all. Not in the minors."

"And in the Army," Dan said. "We had a pretty good club."

"You were in the Army?"

"For a couple of years," Dan told him. "I got back from Korea a month ago. Got my discharge last week."

Lawson looked at him. "You seem to be in good shape."

Dan nodded. "A heavy mortar landed

alongside me and busted an eardrum. That was all. I was lucky, but they don't want me around anymore."

He picked up his glove and pounded his fist in it. Lawson said, "I saw you warmin' up a big kid yesterday. Name is Darrow. What do you think of him?"

Dan shrugged. "Says he can't kept a check rein on his fast ball. He's got a rocking chair motion that ought to keep him going for twenty years, if he's got anything at all."

"He came up on the say-so of a friend of Hap's. We don't know anything about him, much, except that he didn't do bad where he was last year." Lawson chewed on a blade of grass. "Keep an eye on him. While you're around."

Dan looked at him. "I'll be around," he said. "For a long time."

Lawson nodded. "Sure. But if something happens and you can't stay, I could easy get you a job in a brass factory." He walked off.

2

The Kid Catches Hell

AFTER a week they began to play inter-squad games, and after the first one, in which he'd made three hits, Dan found himself on the second team. He worked hard, with the younger pitchers, and he continued to hit. He'd never had any trouble hitting, and it seemed that in the last year he'd developed more power than ever. He knew the pitchers weren't up with the hitters yet, but it didn't matter. He walked up there every day and powdered the ball, and the rest of the club let down on the kidding and took a good look at him.

Especially Connors. The big catcher never let up on his riding, but now he kept it tighter, more personal. And Dan knew why. The veteran catcher was trying to rattle him, trying to throw him off stride. Because of the job itself, and not only for reasons of dislike, not only because Dan had talked coming into camp and had stupidly rubbed Connors the wrong way. There was a touch of fear in the man, Dan knew, and Connors was trying to get him

out of there as quickly as possible. The sooner the better. If the threat could be removed at once, fine.

And after a week of it, Dan said to Connors, "All right. You've had your fun. I admit I asked for it, shooting off my big mouth. But you've been paid back, and with interest. I don't want any more of it. From you."

Connors was a big man. They were alone in the dressing room. He put his fists on his hips and looked at Dan. He said, "You don't talk so big when there's no crowd around to hear you, do you, Brady?"

"The crowd has nothing to do with it." Dan flushed. "It's just that I thought it would be better to speak to you personally. Lay off."

And Connors looked at him and laughed and walked out of the clubhouse.

That day he was worse than ever. His "Lover Boy!" was a huge shout with subtle intonations. He tipped Dan's bat twice during the squad game. His chatter was intensely personal and then became tinged with foulness.

Dan steadied himself. He drove out three hits, two doubles and a single—and off Fred Taylor and Joe Harris, the aces of the staff. They weren't really slamming it in there yet, but there was plenty of stuff on the balls he hit. He played a nice game in the field. The Yannigans topped the Regulars, 5-2. Connors was good and sore.

And in the dressing room, full, now, of players peeling off their stuff, Dan went up to Connors and said, "Connors, I asked you once before today to lay off me. I asked it quietly. I told you I'd made a mistake and rubbed you wrong the first day I came out. Okay." Then he jabbed the big man's chest with a heavy finger. "Now I'm not asking you. I'm telling you. Lay off, Connors."

And Connors looked at him and spat.

It was a rugged business. Connors was big and tough and knew what he was about. It lasted for almost five minutes, before Hap Horner and Lawson and a couple of the others, down the corridor, heard the noise and came in and broke it up.

They were just a bit late, anyway. Connors was on the floor, spitting out two loose teeth. His nose was broken, his face a mess. Dan had a lip like a burst peach.

Horner said, "And what the hell was this all about?"

Still on the floor, Connors said, "This is a wise punk. He got snotty and I had to take it out of his hide."

Lawson looked at him and grinned, but said nothing. Horner said, "Okay. You've had it, now forget it. I don't want any more of this. No more at all. You get me?"

Dan said, "I get you."

Connors just nodded. The group broke up, showered and dressed in some silence.

Dan went back to the hotel with Jimmy Darrow. The big kid said, "Gee! I guess I never saw one like that!"

"The fight?"

Jimmy shook his head. "Your lip. You look like a Ubangi."

Dan grinned painfully. "Well, it'll keep me from shooting my mouth off for awhile, I guess."

Jimmy put his hands in his pockets. "Connors was gettin' pretty rough, anyway. Had it coming to him. Some of the fellows said they've been waiting a couple of years for that to happen."

Dan looked at him. "Yeah?" This could be interesting.

Jimmy nodded. "He's beat up on a couple of them before this. Joe Harris says he causes more trouble than a hatful of chiggers. Always has."

They were mounting the steps to the hotel porch when the girl came out. Margey Blake. He tried to turn away, but he was too late. She saw them. She came right over and stood in front of Dan.

Her voice was even lovelier than he remembered. She looked at him and there was scorn in her eyes. She said, "So you're the man I'm going to marry!"

Dan looked at her and said the only thing that came to mind. "That's right."

Her eyes blazed, then. "Of all the fresh rookies I've ever seen, you take the prize! What ever gave you the nerve to say anything like that?"

Dan shrugged. "Just seeing you, I guess." His face, he knew, was scarlet. The words he spoke seemed to be coming from some other person. He knew he should apologize, but for the life of him he couldn't think of what to say.

The girl, her eyes glinting sparks—lovely sparks, Dan thought—looked at his

lip. "I see you've been talking out of turn to someone else. Oh, sometimes I wish that I were a man!"

He looked at her for a long moment. "That," he said, "would be a grave mistake, Miss Blake."

She colored, then. She said, "I just hope someone keeps your lip in that condition permanently. It would probably save me some future embarrassment." She turned and walked away.

Dan gazed after her. At his side, Jimmy Darrow said, "Man, she's sure crazy about you! When did you say the wedding was?"

He dodged the punch Dan threw at his shoulder. He said, "Careful! That ain't no arm, mister, that's my bread and butter."

And Dan suffered again as he grinned and followed him into the hotel.

THEIR first exhibition game was set for the following day, with the Indians. Dan went out to the park and dressed. The lip was a lot better. He'd had a stitch taken in it and had used cold compresses on it for several hours. He looked almost human. In the dressing room, Bill Miller looked at him and grinned. "Good thing you're not a trumpet player."

"Little tough eatin' soup, too," Dan told him. And he noticed that the atmosphere was a little easier, somehow. Hal Garner, the centerfielder, looked at him and grinned, then took the sting out of it with a wink.

Sid Rivers came past and said, "Hiya, Champ!" without malice. Dan grinned at him.

Connors, he noticed, was not present.

He caught against the Indians. He took three innings of Joe Harris, three more of Fred Taylor, and three of Karno. He handled everything well, got two bingles that drove in a couple of runs. He looked at Hap Horner, after the game, but the manager said nothing to him.

Joe Harris was the ace of the staff. He'd won twenty-two games the year before, even though the Bucs had finished in fourth place. He'd been up for five years and was a big, taciturn man with a world of stuff, most of which he still had under wraps. After the game he said to Dan, his face impassive, "Look, kid, I have trouble enough without you giving me any. When I work

out there, I like a nice stationary target. You move around like you got worms, or something."

Dan felt himself flush. He said, "I'll watch it." And he noticed Hap Horner standing in the doorway of the dressing room.

He worked the next day. Morris, the second-string catcher, was evidently not pleased. He sat on the bench and eyed Dan with a total lack of good will.

He worked for four days running, against the Indians and the Tigers, until Connors came back. The nose had been set and there was a piece of tape across it, but the eyes were still discolored. There was hatred in them, now.

Dan collected ten hits in the four games he played. He remembered what Harris had said about moving, and once the pitcher went into his motion, Dan was a crouching statue behind the plate. He went after bunts like a hungry mouse after a piece of cheese, and when he was on the field he drove everything else out of his mind but the ball game, gave it every ounce of his concentration.

He discovered that news travels fast in baseball circles, too. Both the Indians and the Tigers gave him a loud but good-natured riding about his amorous talents. He went to bat to the sound of kisses being blown upon the air and shouts of "Yoo-hoo, darling!"

He grinned and took it. There was nothing else he could do, and the riding was not given in malice.

He played in a game against the Wolves, and this time both Connors and Morris both rode the bench, both looking ugly. Dan took advantage of every break. He singled in the third, blasted a lovely triple against the fence in the fifth, driving in two runs. He wondered how long he could keep it up.

And the very next day he got the big news. Hap Horner called him into the private office. The thin man's was lined with worry and strain. He said, "Son, sit down."

Dan sat. He wondered what this was all about.

Horner lit a cigarette. He looked at Dan and said, "Mr. Brady, as of today you are the Buc's catcher."

It was a little difficult to take. Dan had

said it himself without believing it. Now this man was saying it. He didn't know whether to believe him or not.

Horner said, "Today we sold Joe Connors to the Cats. I went out on a limb for you, told Hilby that you'd do, that you could fill Connors' job. It was what he wanted to hear, so I told it to him, even though I wasn't sure I was telling the truth." He looked at Dan and said, "What do you think about it?"

Dan answered truthfully. "I don't know." It was a big thing for him. He hadn't expected it to happen like this.

Horner shrugged and got up from behind his desk. "It's a thing I swore I'd never do, use a catcher who's never spent some time in the big leagues. Hell, you haven't ever been in the *minors*! I must be out of my mind."

He walked across the room to a window that looked out on the park. "I'm either a genius or a plain damn fool. I've either made a real smart move or put us into the second division and myself out of a job."

And Dan felt suddenly a little humble—as he usually did when he wasn't following his father's advice. He said, "I'll give it a good try, Mr. Horner."

Horner turned to him and there was a ghost of a smile on his face. "I know you will, son. I know you will."

DAN left the office, went in and changed to his uniform. Connors was there, packing his stuff. There was a smile on his face. "Well, you guy'll have to drop around and see us in the Series. At last I get some extra money out of this pastime."

He noticed Dan, then. He said, "Brady, I owe you a vote of thanks, I guess. I shake this outfit and go with the top club." Then he said, "But you won't last, Brady. I'll tell you that now. You'll be gone in a month. Morris'll have to play out the season. You won't."

Dan looked at him and said nothing. He finished dressing and went out on the field. He was walking in toward the plate when Sam Lawson drew up alongside him.

Lawson said, "I see you got the news."

Dan nodded. He was thinking the whole thing over. He turned to Lawson. "How come, Sam? Why did they make this switch?"

Lawson rubbed his chin. "Well, you've been hitting."

Dan grunted. "Hell, I could stop tomorrow, for all anyone here knows."

Lawson shook his head. "You won't stop tomorrow. Not with the swing. And you're fast, and you're smart. We figure you can go the distance."

"Connors is a hell of a catcher."

Lawson nodded. "That he is. One of the best. Maybe the best."

"So it doesn't figure."

"It figures if you know the angles. All of them." Lawson was silent for a moment, and Dan said nothing, waiting.

Lawson frowned. "This club is broke, kid. Second division for a couple of years before Ray Hilby bought it, and last year was the first time we'd managed to creep into the first four in a hell of a while." He turned to Dan. "You know what the Cats paid for Connors?"

Dan shook his head.

"A hundred and fifty thousand bucks. Big dough. But not wasted. Not a penny of it. They figure it as insurance for another pennant. They were a little weak behind the plate with Landers, and they figure Connors will do the trick for them. And they might be right."

Dan hadn't thought about the Bucs being broke.

"So," Lawson said, "they get a catcher they need and we get a hundred and fifty thousand we need. And Hap is gambling that you'll be able to fill the bill, that we've wasted nothing. And let me tell you something. You're going to have it tough. You think you took a riding down here? Wait until you get out there with the other clubs and the money is on the line. They'll burn your ears off. And the fans won't like you, either. They were fond of Connors. The Lord knows why."

Dan looked at Lawson.

The coach said, "A troublemaker, all the way. Big and tough and sullen. Mean. A one-man dog. He was all for Connors and the hell with anyone else. But a whale of a ball player. You don't see one like him in ten years."

Dan could see that it would be a tough row to hoe.

Lawson said, "Okay, about all that. You know what your job is. And this kid Darrow. We'll work him today. He ready

for a little hard labor out on the field?"

"He's dyin' for it," Dan said.

Jimmy worked the first three innings against the Cubs. They got a hit off him in the first inning, and then, going out for the second, he told Dan, "Gonna heave that hard one, Dan. See if it'll stay in the ball park."

He threw it to the first hitter when Dan called for it. His motion was the same as for any other pitch, it seemed to Dan. The ball roared in, a white blur. It was high and inside, and the batter went into the dirt, got up pale, saying, "What the hell!" It was one of the fastest pitches Dan had ever seen.

He called for it again. It was high. The next was just as fast, and in the dirt.

And the Cubs got onto Darrow, riding him hard. He forgot about the fast one for a while and just concentrated on getting it in there. And the Cubs were aware of that, too, and they swung from the heels and the base hits clattered out.

So Dan had him throw the fast one again, and once more that blazing streak came in there, but high and low and to the side. Uncontrolled.

Then the smooth stuff again, and the Cubs belting the soft, controlled pitches.

Horner took him out in the second inning, and Dan wondered what could be done about the problem.

After the game he spoke to Sam Lawson. The coach grinned and said, "I spotted it the third time he threw the swift. We can cure that. I think."

The next morning they went out to the park early, Dan and young Darrow and Lawson. Lawson told Jimmy, "All right. I saw what you were doing with the fast ball. You give it the big effort, and you unconsciously kick that left foot three, four inches higher than you do with another pitch. You're trying to get everything into it, and you're kickin' at clouds. Warm up and start throwin' it and remember what I told you."

So Dan warmed him, and then they settled down to the work. For a half hour. And at the end of that time there was no visible improvement.

Lawson was not discouraged, though Jimmy was crestfallen. Lawson said, "Hell, you've been doing it for years, you can't expect to cure it in ten minutes. Just keep

thinkin' about it as you throw that ball."

Jimmy, walking to the clubhouse with Dan, said, "I'll never beat that, Danny. I'll be out of here in a week."

"You stick around," Dan grinned at him. "We could use fifteen, eighteen games from you this year."

Darrow looked at him. "Fifteen games! Hell, I won't see fifteen games."

3

A Pitch in Time

DAN saw Margey Blake at the end of the week, when he went to the room in the hotel that was being used as an office for the club, to get his paycheck.

She looked at him. "Well, no longer Mr. Big-Mouth, from the outside." The lip had gone down.

Dan said, "No longer Mr. Big-Mouth. Just quiet-like, I'd like to ask you to have dinner with me."

"Not," the girl said, "if I were starving to death and you owned all the food in the world."

Dan scratched his head. "That seems a bit definite."

"Ask a foolish question and you'll get a foolish answer. Have dinner with you! You certainly have a nerve! You make me the laughing stock of baseball, and you have the nerve . . ."

Dan got the idea. He walked out.

They went North, and the papers were filled with comment on the disastrous sale of Connors. If the Bucs had ever had a chance, the opinion, was, they'd certainly thrown it away now.

And Danny made them look good by going into a slump. He went hitless in three games, got a miserable bingle in the fourth one, was skunked in the next three.

He looked at Hap Horner, and the lean man said, "Sweat it out, son. Sweat it out."

But Dan didn't know whether or not it was a slump, or whether now, that he was running for the first time into good big league pitching, it was a lack of class in himself. The hurlers were ready, now, after weeks of work. The stuff was com-

ing in there fast and nice, and he wasn't getting any good wood on it. Would it continue like this? Had he overrated himself?

He worried about it. He was still in the slump when they opened the season at home.

It was a little frightening. The park was jammed with an enormous crowd. Harris would pitch. The ace of the staff had not said two words to him since bawling him out for moving behind the plate.

And when they announced the batteries and he went out there, they booed his brains out. There were cat-calls, and the shouts of "Lover-Boy!" rocking the stands. They didn't like him, resented the fact that he had cost them Joe Connors, and they made no bones about telling him.

So he got three hits. Harris pitched a shoutout against the Braves. Dan drove in the two runs that were the only scores of the game. The stands were silent, puzzled, wondering if they had made a mistake. And Hap Horner wore a big grin.

He said, "Out of it, son?"

Dan shrugged. He'd felt good up there, but he really didn't know. He said, "I'll have to wait and find out, Mr. Horner. It seemed all right, but I'm not sure."

Horner told him, "Don't worry too much about it. You got those hits, and all nice, clean hits, off Harry Haskins. He's one of the best."

And every morning Dan and Jimmy Darrow were out at the park early, working on the fast ball. Jimmy was discouraged, in the dumps. He could sense no improvement. Neither could Dan. But Lawson was quietly confident. He told Dan, privately, "He'll get it. And soon."

"He's worried," Dan told him. "He's afraid he'll be let go."

Lawson looked at him. "A kid like that, with his stuff? Let him go after telling him what's wrong with him, so some other club can pick him up? You crazy?"

And Dan felt better about that.

He took a licking, verbally, in each game. They would not permit him to forget the colossal blunder he had made in the hotel lobby, his first day in camp.

Some of them got a little rough. The first time they played the Cats, the world's champs, the club Connors was now with, Dan took it heavy. Most of it came from

Fred Daley, the big first baseman. Connors kept his mouth shut, remembering, Dan hoped. But Daley was rugged. Very rugged. Dan took it and kept his mouth shut.

And the real cause of all the trouble, Margey Blake, he saw twice a month when he went to the office to get his paycheck. Always, she handed it to him silently, her face expressionless. He was getting absolutely nowhere with Margey.

He met the owner, Ray Hilby. He had expected to see a man of middle age. Hilby was all of thirty, thirty-one. Handsome, clean-cut. He called Dan into his private office on one of Dan's visits. He shook hands warmly, thought here was a quizzical look in his eyes.

"I hear you're having a little trouble," he said. "Boys on the other clubs riding you."

Dan flushed. "They yammer."

"Very unfortunate," Hilby said. "Particularly since Miss Blake's name is mentioned."

"It was stupid," Dan confessed. "I wasn't thinking at the moment."

"Well, maybe they'll forget about it," Hilby said with no conviction in his voice. Then he said, "You know how we're depending on you, Brady. We let Connors go because Horner thought you might fill the bill. If he's very wrong about it—" He left the rest unsaid, but Dan knew what he meant. The team would go down the drain, Horner would be looking for a job.

There was nothing much for him to say. Merely, "I'll be in there trying."

Hilby nodded. "Good. And about that other thing, Brady. Your . . . er . . . declarations of intentions toward Miss Blake. I wish you'd do all you could to stop that talk. You see, I'm—ah—rather personally interested in the matter."

And Dan could read that one, too. But all he could say was, "Okay."

THEY went into the outer office. Margey had a lovely smile for Mr. Hilby, then frosted Dan with a glance. As he left, he could see Hilby leaning over Margey Blake's desk. They were laughing about some private matter. Probably laughing at him.

The season was a month old, and Dan and Lawson and Jimmy Darrow were out

at the park early one day, when it happened.

Jimmy warmed slowly, and when he nodded that he was ready, Lawson said, for the thousandth time, "All right. Chuck it in there and remember about the leg."

And Jimmy, with no hope on his face, reared back and let it go. It was low, knee high, and right across the plate.

"A mistake," Jimmy said.

So he threw it again, and it was right in there, a blazing fast ball with a hop on it, right at the knees. Lawson just walked over to the plate they were using, a bat in his hand. He stood in the batters' box and told Dan, "Call them for him."

And Dan called for them inside, outside, low, chest high. And they came in there.

Jimmy Darrow said nothing at all. He just stood out there with a dazed, happy expression on his face and fogged the bullets in.

Lawson let it go on for five minutes. Dan watched the beautiful, loose movement of the kid out on the hill, felt the ball hammer into his glove, wherever he held it. He'd need a sponge for this kind of

work, he knew, and he smiled to Jimmy.

Then Lawson stepped away. He said, "Okay," and Jimmy came in from the hill. Lawson looked at him and grinned. "You see how it happens? All at once. And hell, we didn't even spend a month at it."

Jimmy hadn't said a word. He grinned like a lunatic. Lawson said to him, "Well, what do you think of it?"

Jimmy said, "Gee!"

That was the night Bill Miller asked Dan to dinner. The rangy shortstop said, "Dan, the wife is a sympathetic gal, figures you could use a home-cooked meal once in a while. Told me to ask you over to the house for dinner tonight."

Dan was delighted. He said so.

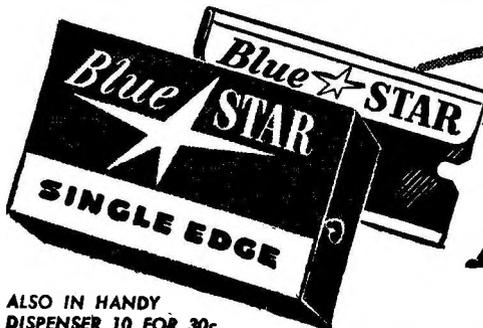
He was surprised, too, when he walked into Miller's apartment. Dot Miller was a small, handsome girl, all smiles. Dan had met her several times in the South. She said, "Welcome, Dan. I have a nice roast of beef I think you'll like. Some more company, too."

She led him into the living room, and Dan stopped short. Margey Blake was sitting in a big chair. She looked up at him,

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and he could see the shock and surprise in her eyes, too. Then she turned to Dot Miller. "Dottie Miller, if I hadn't known you for years, I would—"

"You will nothing," Dot said. "What's wrong with you? Behave yourself like a nice young lady." She turned to Dan and smiled. "I guess I forgot that you two don't get along very well."

Dan said, "Not my fault. I'd sure like to get along. Miss Blake isn't very cooperative."

Margey looked at him. "You!" she said. "Big-Mouth Brady, the people's choice!"

It was one of the few things she said to him all evening. Bill Miller fidgeted uncomfortably as they went through a game of bridge. His wife smiled mischievously. And when the evening was over, Dot Miller said, "You don't mind taking Margey home, do you, Dan? She lives in your direction."

"I'd be delighted to," Dan said. He wondered what Miss Blake would do about this.

She looked at him and there was no abatement of the dislike in her eyes. "I can get home very well by myself."

Dot Miller said, "Margey, don't be ungracious. You're acting like a six year old."

So Dan took Margey Blake home in a cab. She sat stiffly in a corner and said nothing. He said, "Look, Miss Blake. Can't we forget what happened? I'm terribly sorry. I just didn't think before I spoke." The cab rolled to a stop in front of her door. Dan said, "Can't we bury the hatchet?"

She opened the door so quickly he couldn't help her. She said, "I would very gladly bury a hatchet. In your thick skull." And then she was gone.

This, Dan decided, was no romance.

JIMMY DARROW pitched his first game in Chicago. He walked out there looking a little pale, and the Cubs had the story on him. They hooted, told him to throw that balloon ball.

He struck out the first three batters with twelve pitched balls. And then he proceeded to shut them out for the rest of the game. The Bucs took that one, 5-0. And Jimmy grinned. He said to Dan, "You know, I sort of like it up here. Guess I

might decide to stay, after all." He ducked the wet towel Dan threw at him.

They were in third place in July. It was not a hitting club. Dan had been moved up to the fourth spot and was, besides Wally Pound, the first baseman, the only power hitter on the team. Miller ran around .280 and Valerno, in left field, clung to the .300 mark. But neither of them hit a really long ball.

Runs were hard to get and they had to work for them. They were a smart, hustling club, but they had to go all out in every game.

The Cats were five games out in front. Connors was having one of his best years, hitting .335 and driving in his share of runs.

And Sid Rivers invited Dan to dinner. "The missus says you look half-starved. Come up and eat, she says."

Dan looked at him. He knew Marie Rivers and Dot Miller were great friends. He said, "Sure. I'd love to, Sid."

And when he walked into Rivers' apartment, he was not surprised to find Margey Blake there. But she was genuinely astonished to see him. She glared at him, then at Marie Rivers.

"A conspiracy," she said. "A plot. Teaming me up with this moron."

"Temper!" Marie said. "Temper! Act like a grown-up girl, Margey. Dan here doesn't have the plague."

"It's only an accident that he doesn't. Just something he happened to forget." Margey glared at him.

He was getting a little tired of it. He said, "Look, if it would make you any happier, I'll leave. I wouldn't want to spoil your evening."

"You already have," the girl said. "So don't bother to go."

But it wasn't a bad evening at all. The meal was delicious, the card game fun. Margey lost some of her reserve and actually laughed at several points. He was going like a house afire.

And she raised no objection when he offered to take her home. Even talked to him in the cab and said a pleasant, "Good night." The world was looking up.

In the middle of September they were tied with the Blues for second place. Hap Horner was a nervous, strained man. Dan heard him muttering one day, "If we could

do it! If we could do it just this once!"

They were three games behind the Cats.

The sporting world was astonished to find them so high in the standings, and the big question on each sports page was, "When are the Bucs going to fold?"

Dan asked himself the same question. As for himself, he was doing all right. He was batting .346 and he knew he'd have no further trouble with big league pitching, this or any other year. He was a natural hitter, and his big frame gave him a lot of power. But the club was strained, tired. Weak-hitting, they had to work too hard for their runs and wins. The pitchers were overworked, and Dan wondered if they could last the distance.

Harris was the rock to which they clung. He went out there every fourth day and he had not lost a game in a month. Young Darrow had eleven wins, eight of them strung together.

And Dan knew how Hap Horner wanted to take that flag.

4

Beat Their Brains Out

THE Cats came in to town for a three-game series in the last week of the month. The Bucs and the Blues were still tightened up, the Blues leading them by half a game.

And Dan got a telegram from his father.

BE IN TOWN FOR SECOND AND THIRD
GAMES. BLOW 'EM DOWN, SON.

Well, that was just something else to think about, his father up there in a box, hollering his brains out. It would be wonderful to see him, but not just now.

Hap Horner pulled a fast one on the Cats. He started Tom Karno, the fine relief pitcher, in the first game. And Karno went all the way with his control stuff, sticking the ball in the corners, conserving his strength, pitching only to the hitters' weaknesses.

And the Cats had hitters. Connors, for one, big Daley, the first baseman, and Corio, the centerfielder. All long ball hitters and dangerous men in the clutch.

But Karno got by them, one at a time, the way he always pitched. Cool, unruffled. He gave them a single run. Miller, Rivers, Valerno and Dan each pounded in a run for the Bucs. The crowd loved it. And Horner still had Harris and young Darrow to go with in the second and third games.

Dan took a riding. It was bad, but it was contained just at the point of viciousness. Big Daley was, as usual, the chief offender. Dan held himself in check.

In the dressing room before the second game, which Harris would work, Dan was changing into his uniform when he heard the shout in the familiar voice. "Danny! Lad, how are you!"

It was his father, a privileged character, invading the clubhouse. So Danny had to introduce him around, and it was a big holiday for the elder Brady. Like old times, he said. He thoroughly enjoyed himself, for some fifteen minutes, and then it was time to go out there. Dan gave him the box seat ticket he'd secured, and another for tomorrow's game. He said, "Pop, I'll see you when it's over."

His father said, "And we'll have a beer together. Beat their brains out, son!"

So Dan went out there, warmed up Harris, and then they were under way. The Cats really wanted these next two games. They started their big man, Eddie Edwards; out of turn, to take this one.

But Edwards evidently hadn't had sufficient rest. He was easy to get to, and the Bucs got a run off him in the second, another in the third.

Harris was airtight, pegging that thing in there with the skill that only he and a few others possessed. He gave up a hit in the first, another in the fourth, and nothing in between.

Dan got a hit in the first inning, and in the third drove in Bill Miller with one of the runs. He was taking it today, the Cats going all out, using every means to cement the game, riding him hard. Giving him that old Lover Boy business with much gusto, adding curlicues that hadn't been tried before. Very rough.

He kept himself in hand, however, until Daley really started on him. Daley used everything. Everything. He could recognize that bull voice, now, and he made no error in assigning the remarks to Daley.

He got a single in the seventh, his third hit of the day. They were out in front by four runs, now, and with Harris going like a house afire, the game was in the bag. Daley was not happy about it. When Dan rested on the bag, Daley turned to him and said something that brought the hairs standing out straight on Dan's neck. He fought down an impulse to walk to the man and kill him. He said, "Daley, I'll see you when this is over. Under the stands."

And Daley grinned.

They won the ball game, 5-0. It had been one of Harris' masterpieces. And when the last man was out, Dan, the anger in him cold and murderous, now, headed under the stands for the Cats' dugout.

He had followers. Someone must have heard him speak to Daley. Several of the club held bats in their hands.

He met Daley, all right. Backed by half a dozen Cats. The big man had his shirt off, was standing there waiting.

Dan did not speak, did not wait for formalities. He just walked up to Daley and hooked a left hand to his head. There was no reason for words. Daley took the punch high on his head, whistled a right hand that Dan took on a shoulder.

It lasted for perhaps ten minutes, and that was just a testament to Daley's strength and endurance. Dan butchered him. Coldly, systematically, with a great relish. He chopped the big man to ribbons, and finally, satisfied with the destruction he had wrought, finished him with a left and a right to the head, both terrible blows that would have killed a horse. They merely knocked Daley unconscious, as the club doctor, hurriedly summoned, soon testified.

Dan stood back, the anger still in him, supporting his tiredness. He didn't give a damn about Daley. He just wished it could have lasted longer.

And then, beside him, his father's voice said, "Well. The man must have really said something nasty." There was no excitement in the voice, no rebuke.

Dan looked at his father and said, "Pop, he sure did."

His father looked at Daley's prone form, at the bunch of meat that was his face. He said, "Well, he won't be talking out of turn again for some little while. Let's get something to eat, lad. That is, if you can eat."

And Dan suddenly realized that his lip

was out like a cantaloupe again. But he felt clean, as if he had washed away Daley's words with his efforts of the last few moments.

HE AWOKED in the morning, and instantly he was worried. His left hand was swollen and sore, and when he touched it he knew what was the matter. The middle knuckle of the hand was broken. He thought the thing over and knew what he would have to do.

He concealed the injury successfully during breakfast, using the hand sparingly. He rested with Jimmy Darrow, and went out to the park with the rest of the club. He managed to keep the hand hidden while he got dressed, and then, with the glove on it, the rest was a cinch.

But he knew it would be no cinch catching Jimmy Darrow all afternoon with a busted knuckle on his glove hand, for Jimmy would work today.

Even warming the kid up was tough. Each time that ball came in there he thought his hand was going to fall off. But he knew Jimmy needed him. The kid had never pitched to Morris, and from remarks he had made, Dan knew Jimmy depended on him behind the plate, derived a lot of confidence from his presence there.

They started, and Dan took an extra sponge to put in the glove. Hap Horner looked at him questioningly, and Dan grinned, "That boy will be powerful today."

He was powerful, all right. Everything was working, all his stuff. And the fast ball came in there like a cannonball, banging into that sore hand, shoving the bad knuckle against the glove. Murder.

Dan took it, as he knew he had to take it. And there was one thing satisfying about the day. Daley was not on first base for the Cats.

But Joe Long was on the hill for them. The big left-hander, one of the best in the league, had always been poison for the Bucs. He'd stopped them five times during the season, and he was out to do it again today. He pitched beautifully, masterfully, allowing a hit here, a hit there.

And the game went down to the eighth without either team scoring a run.

Dan had not had a hit. He couldn't get a decent grip on the bat. His hand was one

huge roaring pain, and try as he might, he could not ignore it. He hit weakly, and three times to the infield.

In the eighth, Hal Garner, the center-fielder, led off for the Bucs. He was a cagey guy, and he worked Long for a walk after bringing the count to three and two. Long kicked about the last ball, but it did him the usual amount of good.

Then Wally Pound, the first baseman, rapped a beautiful single off the right field wall and was out trying to stretch it. But Garner was on third base, and there was only one out.

Valerno tried hard. He went up there and took his cut, but his best was a high fly to the infield. It made two away, and Dan was on deck.

He walked over to the bench. He said to Hap Horner, "Hap, give Garner the squeeze sign on the third pitch. I'll bunt him in."

Horner looked at him in amazement. "You'll . . ."

"Squeeze him in," Dan said, and walked to the plate.

It was as he had expected. Two out, a

power hitter at the plate. The infield very deep for him, because he took the heads off careless infielders.

He looked at a ball, then at a strike. The next pitch was a touch outside, but waist high. He stepped out and laid one down the first base line.

Garner was in to score almost before he left the plate. And he could have walked to first. No one covered the play.

And then it was the first of the ninth, the Cats up there hungry for blood, and their big guns, Corio, a pinch hitter for Sims, playing first for Daley, and Joe Connors.

Corio got a piece of a ball. It went high in the air and Pound took it down behind first base.

Harry Adams, one of the finest clutch hitters in the league, pinch hit.

Jimmy Darrow was tiring. Dan thought. He'd had a tough season, a tough day. But now he bore down and the pitches whistled in there, each smash making Dan think his arm was broken, not just a knuckle.

Adams took a full cut at the two-two pitch and it was a swinging bunt down the third base line. Dan was on it like grass on



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a lawn, whipping it down to Pound for the out. He heard his father's hoarse bellow from the box in back of the Buc bench.

Then Connors came up there. Dan said, "Hello, hero. You gonna put it in the stands? You gonna be the big man?"

Connors looked at him and said nothing. He stood in the batter's box, the big bat tight gripped and lethal.

And Jimmy Darrow struck him out with three pitched balls. He went to his knees on the last swing, and Dan, the ball in his good hand, told him, "Stay there. You look good and you might find a cigarette butt in the grass."

THEY got away from the crowd somehow, into the dressing room. There was a riot, there. They were tied with the Cats, with only a week to go. They knew, apparently, what would happen. The Blues had dropped two and were out.

Big Harris dropped an arm around Dan's shoulder. He said, "Kid, if you'll catch me, I'll pitch every day."

Dan thought of the knuckle. It had stood up under the beating today, and with some sort of treatment, and a needle before a game, it ought to last the season.

He grinned and said, "Let Darrow pitch

every other day. We'll coast in." And he knew they would.

A locker boy told him that his father would meet him outside, when he was dressed.

He finally made it, clean and refreshed from the shower. He escaped the crowds at the door, saw his father in a cab across the street, waving. He ran over and hopped in.

There was a third person in the cab. "Forgot to mention it," his father said. "Got company. A young lady sitting in the club box with me. Think her name's Margey Blake. Knew her old man."

And the girl looked at Dan and blushed. She said, looking at his mouth. "That lip again. Always seems to get into trouble."

"It won't any more," he said, and he thought he was correct.

His father said, "Kissin', now. Always heard it was the best thing in the world for a sore lip. Ought to try it, son."

Dan turned to him. He said, "Pop, it was your advice that got me into trouble in the first place. Real trouble. I'll never follow it again."

And Margey Blake said, "You ought to, just once. He could be right about this, you know."

THE END

POLIO POINTERS FOR 1951

IF POLIO COMES . . .

DO—Allow children to play with friends they have been with right along. Keep them away from new people, especially in the close daily living of a home.

Because—Once polio has appeared in a community, scientists say the virus probably is widespread. Your children probably have come in contact with it already and developed a degree of resistance to that particular virus.

DO—Watch for signs of sickness, such as headache, fever, sore throat, upset stomach, sore muscles, stiff neck or back, extreme tiredness or nervousness, trouble in breathing or swallowing.

Because—During an outbreak of polio, symptoms vary from the very vague to actual paralysis. Watch for all symptoms closely during this period.

DO—Put a sick person to bed at once, away from others, and call the doctor. Quick action may lessen crippling.

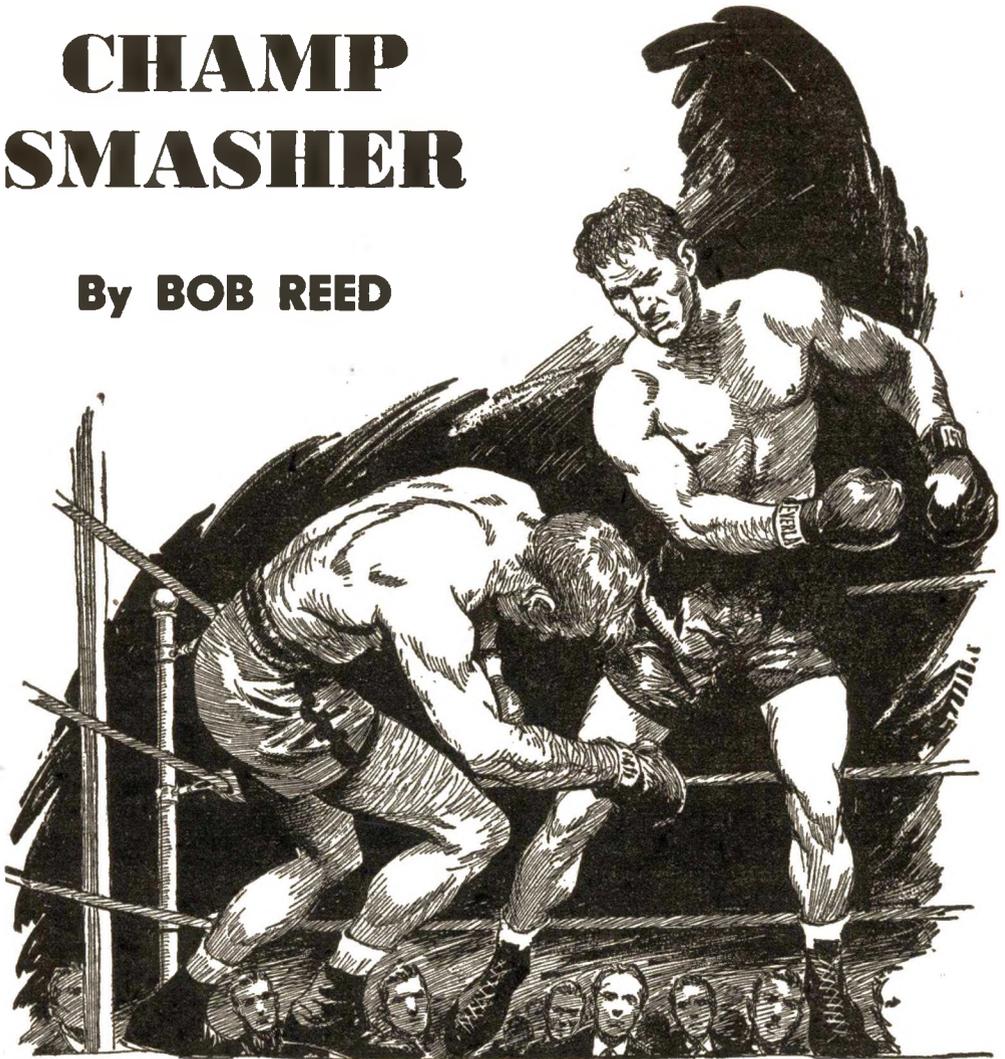
Because—While paralysis cannot be prevented, doctors have determined that early bedrest and prompt treatment may influence progress of the disease and lessen the severity of the deformities.

DO—Remember, at least half of all polio patients get well without any crippling.

Because—Recent surveys show that 50% of all diagnosed polio cases suffer no paralysis at all. Another 25% recover with no disabling after-effects. Seventeen percent are severely paralyzed and about eight percent die.

CHAMP SMASHER

By **BOB REED**



It was three minutes of taking brutal punishment and dealing it out.

The time had come for champ Joe Hanley to hang up his gloves forever—despite the taunts of the vicious contender . . . the man who had sworn to do more than take his crown away. . . .

IT WOULD be an hour before they went down to the Garden, and now they sat in the hotel room, Joe Hanley and Jimmy Bean, playing rummy. Solly Berg was asleep in a big chair.

Bean got up and stretched his lean length, walked to the window and looked out at the drizzling night. He turned and came back. "Joey, this guy could give you trouble tonight."

Joe grinned at him. "They all give me

trouble, these days. Each one gets a little tougher."

Bean sat down. "What'll we do about Lannon? Everybody's yellin' for the fight."

Joe thought about Lannon. Lumpy with muscle but fast. A hell of a puncher with a chin like concrete. It was no pleasure thinking of Lannon.

"I've fought him twice. What am I supposed to do, go with him once a week?"

"They all want it again. And it's right

there in the contract." He looked at Joe.

Joe yawned. "You worry about him. I'm tired." And the yawn was a familiar thing, the beginning of the pre-fight nervousness that gripped him anew each time he fought, and this had been his business for twelve years, since he'd been eighteen. Over a hundred fights, he figured, but always that cold hand in his guts that gripped him an hour or so before fight time.

He got up and started to put on his coat. He said, "Wake Solly and let's get out of here. I'm gettin' itchy."

The trip to the Garden was a short one, and there, at least, were things to do. The gear to be unpacked, a brief rub by Solly, talking to a couple of sports writers. One of them, Brady of the *Blade*, said, "Joe, how about Lannon? You going to give him another fight?"

Joe grinned. "What if I don't get past this guy tonight? He's a tough cookie."

"So you don't get by him," Brady said. "It's over-the-weight and the title isn't on the line. How about Lannon?"

Joe shrugged. "I suppose I'll fight the guy. If he wants the fight."

Someone in the room laughed, and Brady said, "He doesn't want the fight any more than he wants breakfast tomorrow."

And Jimmy Bean said, "All right, you guys. We'll see you after the fight. The champ's gotta get a little rest." And he herded them out the door. He came back and said, "The hell with this Lannon talk. You got a fight on your hands tonight. Lannon, Lannon, Lannon. The hell with Lannon."

Which was exactly what Joe was thinking. The hell with Lannon. He wished he could forget about the man permanently.

He concentrated now on Mendez, the man he'd be in the ring with very shortly. He'd seen the guy fight once, and Jimmy had dug up a movie of another of Mendez' scraps. The brown man was built like a middleweight around the chest and shoulders, and it was only his slim legs that kept him down in the lightweight class. And those slim legs were what made him so fast, too. He remembered how Mendez threw that right hand and that he would have to watch it all the time. It was a grenade, and it was loaded.

They got the call, then, and they went out. Joe climbed between the ropes as

Solly held them apart, and Solly said, "Not a bad crowd for a night like this, Champ."

He sat in the corner and looked at the house, and it wasn't bad at all. Not quite filled, but better than ten thousand. He knew it would have been bigger if it hadn't been for the weather.

And then he looked across the ring, and Mendez sat there, the brown face with the high cheekbones expressionless, stolid, the eyes without emotion. Mendez was not worried. If someone told him the world would end tomorrow, Mendez would not be worried. He would just shrug those heavy shoulders and go about his business.

And in a little while they were in the center of the ring, and Mendez listened to the instructions of the referee and stared at Joe with all the interest of a man staring at a blank wall.

Joe went back to the corner and Jimmy took the robe and towel off. He said, "Watch that right hand, kid."

Joe rubbed his chin. "I have an idea that with this guy I'll need a chair and a whip, like the gents in the animal act."

THE bell sent him out, and Joey got the bicycle pedals working. It was why they called him The Wheeler, The Six Day Kid, and all the other silly names. It was the way he fought, moving all the time.

Mendez moved, too. Forward. Always forward. He came at you with the shoulders hunched, the left hand hooking for the body, then for the head. He never stopped.

Joe fed him the left hand. Not much drive to it, but he fed it to him often. Quantity if not quality. He stepped sideways and backwards, the left hand flicking out, and every now and then he stepped in and threw the right. And then he was moving again.

And when Mendez came inside, driving those heavy shots for the body, Joey took them on the arms, the elbows. He turned Mendez out of the clinch and walked away from him. And always that left hand picking away.

After five rounds, he said to Jimmy, "How's it going?"

Bean's face betrayed no emotion. "Not too good. Very close. This bum is rugged."

Joey nodded. "Like a tank. He could go all night."

"You can't slow him up?"

"Sure. You just run out and get me a gun. I'll slow him up fast."

So he went out for the sixth and really turned on the juice. He gave an exhibition, that round. Mendez didn't put a glove on his face or body. He was the real will-o'-the-wisp, the shadow you couldn't catch. Mendez plodded after him hopefully.

The seventh and eighth were the same thing, and Mendez was angry, now. Angry and frustrated, and the jaw a little tighter and more determined. Coming in all the time.

The crowd loved it. This was what they had come to see. Joey Hanley giving an exhibition, the classiest of them all. The skill acquired over the years being put to exquisite use. Hanley the cutie, the cut and run boy.

After the eighth Jimmy Bean said, "You ain't been this good in five years."

"I'll never get over it," Joe said. He could feel the strain in his legs, in his tired lungs, in his arms. If he could get by the next two he'd be very happy. Not surprised, maybe, but extremely happy.

In the ninth Mendez finally caught up with him. The thing he'd been avoiding all night happened. He got lost in a corner somehow, and then there was that heavy hook to the head that made the lights wobble, and then the leather pouring in and trying to hide from it, get away from it. He somehow fought his way into the center of the ring and then fled before the storm. The legs somehow functioned, the left hand flicked out, and after some endless period there was the bell and Jimmy Bean coming up into a corner. Joe went to it.

He sat down carefully and Solly had the salts ready and he breathed deeply, then pulled his head away as they started to bite.

Jimmy said, "You got another round. Just one more round."

"For which I am very thankful," Joe said. "Any more than one would be too many."

"You can go the one?"

Joe nodded. I hope."

He went the one. He jigged and he stepped, and he went inside when Mendez didn't expect it. He stopped flatfooted and threw a right hand that jolted the other man and surprised him. He went back, the left hand busy. And then there was the bell again and it was over. He'd not only lasted

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the round, but he'd taken it from Mendez.

The crowd gave them a big hand. They'd liked the fight.

But Joe hadn't. It had told him too many things he didn't want to know. Facts that had been knocking on the door of his consciousness for some time, now. He was getting along. He was just starting down the wrong side of the hill. The years and the many fights were starting to catch up with him. As Mendez had caught up with him. As someone would really catch up with him soon.

In the dressing room he let the writers come in, told them, yes, Mendez was a tough boy and had given him a hard night. Yes, he'd been hurt in the ninth, the guy could hit.

And then it came again, the big question. Would he be fighting Lannon again?

He grinned at them. "Hell, not until I take a shower and a rub, anyway." Any stall to get rid of them.

The rub and the shower were good, made him feel a bit less than a hundred years old. He had no cuts, no bruises on his face as he examined it in a mirror. He told Jimmy, "I have to meet Marge. I wouldn't want my wife to think I'd been in a fight."

Jimmy said, "But you were, boy. You were." He was very serious.

Joe said, "You see what I saw?"

Bean nodded. "We're not as young as we used to be, kid."

Joe nodded. "Not by a couple of years. I'm goin' down the slide, Jimmy. I could feel it."

"Too far down for Lannon?"

Joe thought about it for a little while. He nodded. "I think so, Jimmy."

Then he went out and walked the four blocks to Murph's, the steak house where he always met Marge after a Garden fight, and on the way he had plenty of time to think about Lannon.

He'd fought him first almost two years ago. He'd been champion then, too, and Lannon was the up-and-coming guy, full of fire and fury and a cold, hard skill. And Joe hadn't paid too much attention to the fight. He put in no special licks in training. He was always in good shape, and he let it go at that.

And Lannon had knocked him out in the eighth round. Joe had taken a beating that night.

They fought again six months later, and for this one he worked as he'd never worked for a fight before. And he won that fight. Lannon had him on the floor as early as the fourth round, and dumped him again in the eighth. But Joe was really in shape. He got up each time, and everything was working, that night, and he took ten of the fifteen rounds.

Sure, there had been a ninety day clause in the contract. But you can stall on that. You can hurt your hand or your back, or you can be sick. And he'd dutifully hurt his hand and his back, and he had been sick. He'd fought in between several times, over-the-weight affairs that had brought in the money and had not been dangerous.

But now Lannon's crowd was screaming again, and the papers were on him, and he knew the fight would draw one hell of a crowd. It would have to be in the ball park.

But he didn't want to fight Lannon. It was not only that there was a good chance of not beating the guy, but he didn't want to leave him the title. He seldom had any personal feelings about the men he fought, but about Lannon it was different. He did not like the man, and he hated to give him anything.

So there it was. He could fight Lannon and probably lose—and he thought, *who are you kidding, probably?* He'd lose, sure as hell. He'd get his brains beaten out.

HE WENT into Murph's, and all the regulars were there and made a lot of noise, a lot of fuss about him. He grinned, took all the congratulations, and looked for Marge. Larry, the headwaiter, said, "She's over in the booth, Champ."

She was in their favorite booth, lovely as ever, her eyes anxious, searching for him, finding him and examining him, and then calming, smiling a little in relief. They had been married for eight years, but each time he saw her his heart did nip-up.

He slid into the seat and she reached for his hand, "You're all right, Joe?"

He grinned and nodded. "Fine. Didn't put a heavy glove on me."

She shook her head and said, "I always worry so."

She had never seen him fight, would never attend one. She said she would die if she saw someone punishing him. She said now, "I wish you'd quit, Joe."

He thought about that. Then he said, "You know you have something there."

Because they had enough to quit on. They had been careful with the money he'd earned, and there had been a lot of it. They had paid-for annuities that would take good if not extravagant care of themselves and the kids if he never made another penny.

He said, "How are the kids?" There were two of them, named strangely enough, Joe and Marge. Young Joe was six, three years older than his sister.

Marge nodded. "Fine. In bed early. Marie's with them." Then she leaned across the table. "Joe. About quitting. Are you serious?"

He said, "Pretty serious, kid."

There was great happiness on her face, as if she had received a gift she'd been waiting for a long time. "If you only would, Joe! We have enough Joe. More than enough. For everything we need or want for the children. Why . . ."

She went on, and Joe listened and it all sounded good to him. They could move to the modest country place and stay there, and he'd always thought of starting a really good small restaurant and bar in the town. He knew it would go. Hell, it would be real nice.

And he wouldn't have to fight Lannon. That was a very big consideration.

He said, "Kid, we'll do it. As of now, I am an ex-champion. Retired. Gonna open a restaurant in Maysville. Keep me busy, keep me in plenty of beer. In a year I'll weigh two hundred pounds."

It was a fine feeling. They had their steaks and Marge looked like a young girl in her happiness. It was a wonderful evening.

Until just before they were ready to leave. And then suddenly Lannon and Hays, his manager, were beside the table. Hays said, "Hello, Hanley."

Joe made the introductions. Lannon, blond hair slicked back and the sneering smile on his face, said, "That bum almost got to you tonight, Hanley."

Joe nodded. "Almost." He didn't like this.

"I wouldn't have let you get off the hook like that," Lannon said.

"You might be right," Joe told him.

Then Lannon said, "When are you going to quit stalling, Hanley? When are we go-

ing to get our chance at that title?"

Joe started to answer but it was Marge who spoke. She smiled, "Joe isn't fighting any more, Mr. Lannon. As of tonight." She smiled across at Joe.

Lannon and Hays took it in stunned silence for a moment, and then Hays was sputtering a jumble of incoherent words which were happily and amazing free of profanity.

It was Lannon who made sense. He was pale and cold in his anger. He said, "Well, it's no more than I could expect from a lousy rat like you. Getting out while the getting is good. I gave you your return shot, didn't I? And for big dough. Big. Bigger than I'll ever make with anyone else around. And now you run out on me. And when I need it."

Joe tried to keep it under control. "It has nothing to do with you, Lannon. We just decided an hour ago."

Lannon said, "Sure, you decided. That guy damn near took you tonight, and you know what would happen if you got into a ring with me. You don't like me and you don't like a licking, so you get out."

It was tough to take, and Joe didn't know how much more of it he could absorb. If he hadn't told Marge, he knew that at this point he would say, "Okay. In the alley. Anywhere." But he had promised Marge. And now he kept his mouth shut.

And Lannon looked at Marge, indicated Joe with a jerk of his thumb. "You must be very proud to be married to a punk like that, lady. That's no man. That's a rat."

And Marge, Joe noticed, was looking at Lannon with an intense and growing dislike. And she said exactly the right thing, as she always did. She told Lannon, "Yes, Joe's retiring from the ring. Immediately after he fights you, Mr. Lannon. That is, if he cares to."

She looked at Joe, and he felt all the dismay roll out of him. He grinned. "What I said, Honey." He turned to Hays. "Get in touch with Jimmy Bean in the morning. You can have the fight whenever you want it."

Lannon stood there for a moment, stunned, and then they both walked away.

Joe said, "Kid, if you didn't want me to—"

Her eyes were stormy and proud. "No

one can speak to my husband like that."

It was the first time she had ever been kissed in Murph's.

In the morning, Jimmy Bean was soured on the idea. "Quitting would have been better. If this guy really gets to you, Joe, that retirement is liable not to be so pleasant. You might get some rocks in your head."

"There are laws in this state," Joe said. "The guy positively can not bring a hammer into the ring with him."

"But I still don't like it."

"It doesn't matter. Hays call?"

Jimmy nodded. "And we got in touch with Hawkins." Hawkins ran the fight game. "In two months. In the ball park."

Joe nodded. "Right. So I'll go home and pack."

"For what?" Jimmy wanted to know. "Where are you going?"

"Up to the farm. As of two days from now, Mr. Joseph Hanley is in training."

IT WAS lonely up in the hills without Marge and the kids, but he'd thought it unwise to bring them along. He had other business to attend to. Mr. Lannon.

He gave it the business. He permitted himself three days rest, and then went at it. Easily, at first, then working up the pace. He was out on the road at six-thirty every morning, and alternated between work and rest until five in the evening, when he called it a day.

He worked on the bags, shadow-boxed, chopped wood. He had Jimmy send up all the available pictures of Lannon's fights, particularly those with himself, and he studied them for a couple of hours each night.

The days passed quickly into weeks, and then the sparring partners and Jimmy came up and the real work started. He did no less than ten rounds a day. He could feel the edge coming on slowly, and four days before the fight he knew he was right and he quit everything but very light work.

They went into town the day before the fight, and Joe went home to see Marge and the kids, and it was a happy reunion. And Marge told him, "I'd like you to win this one, Joe. This last one."

He said, "Sure, I'll win, kid. In the bag."

But that wasn't the way he felt. His head was filled with doubts.

He got a look at Lannon at the weigh-in. The guy was fit. He was always fit. Smooth-muscled, loose-couple. Strong as a horse. Terrific hitter. And very smart.

And young. Twenty-five. Those five years made one hell of a difference when you hit the thirties, Joe knew. They took a lot of your speed away, robbed your reflexes of some of the edge. You didn't hit exactly when you wanted to, you didn't move as fast. And you didn't last as long. Fifteen rounds was a tough trip for tiring legs.

Lannon said, "I'm surprised you showed up, Hanley."

Joe shook his head. "You'd never make a living as a comedian with gags like that."

Lannon looked at him. "Your wife have to argue you into coming here, Hanley?"

Joe nodded. "Yeah. She and the kids pushed me out the door. And why don't you shut up, you slob? Every time you open your stupid mouth you put both hands in it."

"I'll put both hands in yours tonight, Hanley."

"Be careful," Joe told him. "I bite."

They got through with it finally, and all the pictures were taken, and Lannon and Hays left. Jimmy Bean said, "How'd you like to go up to the hotel and play some cards, Joe?"

And then it was starting again, the old old story. The same routine. He was sick of it. He wished Lannon hadn't come into Murph's that night. Another afternoon and evening of cold hands on his belly.

And then Lannon. A very unpleasant thought.

There were a lot of people in the ball park that night. Thirty thousand of them. And they roared down a welcome when he went across the grass and climbed into the ring. It was a great deal of noise.

Joe said, "All these fine people should be home in bed. And so should I."

"You wouldn't own a bed if they weren't silly," Jimmy reminded him. "They got nothing else to do with their time."

"I have," Joe said. "There's a movie I want to see. I could have forgotten about this."

It was talk against the nervousness, that unbelievably huge chunk of ice inside of him. He jiggled in the corner, and Jimmy and Solly Berg put the gloves on him, and he ground his teeth while forty-two guys

were introduced from the center of the ring.

But finally he went out there and Marty Hearn, the referee, gave them his nasal talk, and he went back to the corner and Jimmy took off the robe.

Jimmy said, "Kid, be good tonight. And be careful."

"I will try," Joe said, "to be extremely careful. I am very fond of my nose and teeth. Also I will try to be good, since it is the best way of being careful."

He turned and went out at the bell.

LANNON was no Mendez, shuffling forward in that same, unchanging pattern you could count on. Lannon came to you, all right, you saw to that. But he varied his approach, and that was what you had to watch. He moved. Maybe not as cute as you, but very cute.

Lannon came to him, and Joe fed him the left hand and went away. And Lannon followed, his own talented left very busy.

There wasn't a man in the world Joe couldn't handle for a couple of rounds. He knew the tricks, all of them, and he was an expert in their use. Feinting and block-

ing were second nature to him at this stage, and his hands were merely obedient extensions of his mind.

He took the first, second, third and fourth rounds. Lannon took the fifth when he got to Joe with a heavy right hand and slowed him down.

He took the sixth by a close margin and was way out in front in the seventh when a whistling hook came through and almost tore his head off with a minute to go.

And Lannon really poured it on. Joe was in a corner and Lannon had no intention of letting him out alive. He powdered them in there and Joe blocked what he could, accepted what he had to. He was in a hell of a fix by the end of the round.

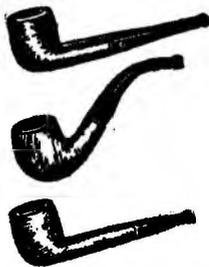
Jimmy and Solly worked quickly and silently. He was cut over the left eye and on the mouth, and these bits of damage were taken care of. He got a whiff of salts and his head was clear. By the time the buzzer sounded he was in pretty fair shape.

He went out at the bell, and Lannon came to him without wasting time. Joe stayed away from him for the first minute, then Lannon caught up with him. A left hook

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to the belly and a right to the head started him going. He took a beating before he went down from a bulleting right hand.

He didn't remember getting up, but there he was on his feet, Lannon coming to him, and then there was the trying to go away. Feebly and without success. Then trying to get close and the leather exploding in his face. Hanging on desperately, but in a corner taking the licking when the bell rang.

In the corner, the first thing Jimmy said was, "You want we should stop it?"

Joe looked at him. "Cut it out."

So they gave him the salts and ice on his temple, and the fog cleared.

Then there was the buzzer, and he took a deep breath and answered the bell. The crowd was in a frenzy.

He went out slowly. If Lannon was going to take this thing, he was also going to take a few souvenirs. Lannon came to him, not cautious, now, but ready for the kill.

And Joe led with a right hand. He was planted firmly and it was a nice shot. He threw it without regard of the too-brittle hands that had shaped his style of fighting. He threw it with all his back and shoulders and leg into it. It hit cleanly.

Lannon was the most surprised person in the park. He was hurt and he was surprised. And Joe hammered him again. Lannon went down.

The ball park was a madhouse.

Joe took the far corner and leaned in the angle of the ropes, wondering. It seemed silly. If Lannon didn't get up. . . .

But Lannon got up. He was tough and he was young, and he got up strong. He walked to Joe and it started.

Joe read in the papers the next day that it was the most terrific round of fighting history. He had but a dim memory of it. He vaguely recalled being down twice and once more seeing Lannon on the deck. It was three minutes of taking brutal punishment and dealing it out. He anchored himself to the canvas and hooked to the body, to the head, and threw the right hand.

He really came to on the stool. The salts were searing him and he jerked his head away. Jimmy was busy on the eye and muttering, "What a round! What a round! What a round!" Solly was washing off the mouthpiece and holding an icepack to the back of his neck. The crowd was a vast roar.

He got up at the bell, and his legs were somehow steady, and he blessed those countless miles on the road, the long workouts. Lannon came to him, badly marked now, and Joe stood there and stuck a left hand in his face and did not move. Lannon threw a right hand and Joe went inside and ripped at the belly with heavy, solid shots. He seemed at home in here, somehow.

Lannon broke, and for the first time that night Joe went to him. In a shuffle, in a crouch. He hooked a left into the body, crossed the right. It hit and Lannon was hurt. Joe took a left and a right to the head and it felt as if someone were working him over with a ball bat. His legs started to buckle but they held, and he hooked a left to Lannon's body, then drove the right hand home.

It was a terrible shot, and he felt the hand go. Lannon went back against the ropes, and Joe followed him. He blasted both hands to the head, then to the body. Lannon bent over and Joe clubbed him twice with the right hand. Lannon fell on his face.

He did not move during the count. They came and dragged him to the corner.

Joe didn't get out of his own corner for half an hour. His tiredness kept him there, and the screaming crowd kept him there, and it took twenty cops to get him to the dressing room.

Jimmy said, "It was the best fight you ever made."

Joe grinned a little lopsidedly. "And the last."

One of the cops on the door said. "There's a lady out here, Champ. Says she's your wife."

Joe said, "Well, I've only got one. Let her in." And he wondered at this.

Marge came in. She had been crying, but she wasn't now. Her smile was a joyous, proud thing. She came to Joe's arms and kissed his battered mouth tenderly.

And in a moment he said, "How come? You never saw one before. Why this?"

"Maybe because it was the last. Maybe because I didn't like that man. And maybe because I thought you might need me."

He held her just a little closer. "That last part I like," he said. "It is very true. And always will be." And silently he agreed with Jimmy. The best fight he'd ever made. None of the others had ever ended like this.

Duncan MacLendon's business career seemed doomed on that seventeenth hole. And instead of his most dependable iron, he found himself wielding that warped, unbalanced monstrosity, the spectral . . .

CLOOB FROM GLASGOW

He hit his drive harder than he had ever hit a golf ball before.

By John D.
MacDonald



THE matter of receiving a trans-Atlantic phone call created such furor in the MacLendon household in Hart's Point, Connecticut, that after it was over and Duncan MacLendon hung up the phone, it seemed a pity that he was unable to tell May and the kids what it was all about.

"Thought the old boy had died a long

time ago," he said, replacing the phone.

"What old boy? Where?" May and the kids demanded.

"My great uncle in Glasgow, Angus

Campbell. Good Lord, he must be well over ninety. Poor old boy sounded pretty thin over the phone."

"But *what* did he *want*?" May demanded, with an air of struggling to achieve calm.

"Darned if I know. Something about a cloob. Couldn't make it out."

"A cloob?" the kids asked in unison. The word fascinated them. They marched around the house chanting "Cloob, cloob, cloob," until forcibly restrained.

"It seems to me," May said later, "that when somebody goes to the expense of a trans-Atlantic phone call, the least you could do is understand what—"

"But honey, I talked to Uncle Angus back in '34, face to face for two hours. And when it was all over, I didn't have the faintest idea what he had been saying."

"Then you must write him a letter and ask him why he called you."

Duncan MacLendon made three drafts of the letter, and still he was not satisfied. The trick was to word it in such a way that it would sound as though he had understood, and wanted further details. By the time he was satisfied with the letter, he found that Uncle Angus' address had been mislaid. In fact, he could not remember where he had last seen it.

And then the cable arrived, stating that Uncle Angus had died. Duncan figured back and found that Uncle Angus had died the day after making the call. The members of the MacLendon family went around muttering to themselves, convinced that the mystery of the "cloob" would never be solved.

And then the cloob arrived. It was in a long narrow box. The eldest kid glommed onto the stamps. With the family gathered around, Duncan tenderly opened the box. The object inside was wrapped in tissue paper. He unwrapped that.

In unison they all shouted, "Oh, a club! A golf club!"

Duncan remembered someone telling him stories of Uncle Angus giving pointers to Harry Vardon when Harry had been a small boy, and something else about Uncle Angus being almost responsible for inventing the game. Looking at the club he could believe it. Compared with modern day weapons, the wooden head was grotesquely tiny, the impact surface no bigger than a

quarter. It had no bottom plate. The shaft was of wood, heavy greasy wood which curved this way and that from grip to head. The grip was of leather with the patina of age.

With what May described later as a faintly stupid look, Duncan swung the old club. It had no more balance or feel than half a crutch. It swung up, contacted the ceiling light fixture smartly and rained shattered glass onto Duncan's head and shoulders.

During the next week Duncan took it to a few antique dealers. Two of them laughed outright. The third one made a tentative offer of fifty cents. Duncan took the club home and put it in the store room off the garage. There was no more talk of the cloob in the MacLendon household.

In early May, as on every other year, Duncan MacLendon and Stu Finch and Ed DeRider and Mike Folsun began their annual attack on par at the Onondaka Country Club. Par won. Finch and DeRider were senior partners in the law firm for which both Duncan and Mike Folsun worked. Both Duncan and Mike were hoping for a partnership offer and their rivalry, though good-natured and casual on the surface, was intensely serious underneath. Duncan and Mike were both in their mid-thirties. Finch and DeRider were in their early fifties.

The set-up was Duncan and lean, nervous Stu Finch against muscular Mike and chubby Ed DeRider. Both senior partners were incurable dubs. A hundred and ten was a respectable round for either. Both Mike Folsun and Duncan operated on the theory of slamming hell out of the ball at every opportunity. As a consequence they were both in the middle nineties at all times.

Of the foursome, Duncan was the only one who hated golf. He detested trudging around eighteen holes and banging a silly little ball toward a sillier little cup. Yet he knew that, ridiculous as it seemed, the filling of the partnership vacancy would undoubtedly be based on the game. It wasn't who won. It was based on who was the most pleasant partner. The result was a weekend match which seemed to be a contest between Stu Finch and Dale Carnegie, against Ed DeRider and Dale Carnegie. Duncan would come home wearied not so much by the golf game as by the effort of maintaining a pleasant smile, even when a

drive went merrily into a water hole.

Tension ran high as the golf season neared. Duncan's secretary told him that Mr. DeRider's secretary had told her that a partnership was going to be offered to either Folsun or MacLendon. And soon.

Duncan firmly believed that the Onondaka course at Hart's Point had been laid out by someone who had an unhappy childhood. The fairways were smug and narrow and curved. The roughs were a jungle sneer along the sides. And no one who ever played the eleventh, fourteenth and eighteenth holes wanted to drink water again.

ON THE first Saturday in May when golf seemed possible, if not feasible, the foursome trudged squishily from club house to first tee. Only one caddy was available. He was assigned to carry double for Finch and DeRider.

"This year, Dunc, we'll make 'em wish they never learned the game," Stu Finch said with grim heartiness.

"Dollar, dollar all the way?" DeRider asked blandly.

"Sure," Stu said quickly.

Dunc leaned his bag against the bench. Mike Folsun put his beside it, then stared at Dunc's clubs. He reached out and pulled the cloob from Dunc's bag.

"What's the rule on secret weapons?" Mike asked. They all stared at Uncle Angus' cloob.

Duncan laughed a bit thinly. "Guess one of the kids or the wife stuck it in my bag. It was in the garage."

"Whittle it yourself?" Mike asked.

"My Uncle Angus sent it to me from Glasgow this winter," Duncan explained carefully. "It is the sort of club that was used when the game was first started."

That short-circuited Mike's attempt at humor—changed it to interest. They all swung the cloob, commented on its unwieldiness, until Ed DeRider slapped his hands and said, "Let's put the show on the road, gentlemen."

Duncan, with his pleasant smile firmly in place, tried not to think of the long weekends that stretched interminably out ahead of him, until the snow would fly again. Stu Finch teed up his ball, waggled, jerked back, lurched and chopped a drive down the middle of the fairway, half-topped, that went

no more than seventy yards. "Up to you, partner," he said with a nervous laugh. Ed DeRider hit the ball cleanly, but without much snap. Duncan banged one out two hundred yards, and it stopped just short of the rough. Mike whanged a screaming slice deep into the jungle.

The first hole was halved. Sixes for Mike and Duncan. Eights for Stu and Ed. Folsun and DeRider took the second hole by a stroke. The third was halved. Duncan and Stu Finch took the fourth hole by a stroke, halving the match to date.

On the fifth tee, Ed DeRider said, "Stu, I think we better tell these boys."

Duncan almost lost his smile. "Tell us what?"

Finch turned spokesman. "Like this, Dunc. We've been talking it over. There's a partnership opening. Both of you know that. And we know that you each want it. But, dammit, we haven't been able to choose between you. We don't want to embitter the man we don't pick. So this isn't as childish as it might sound. We decided to leave it up to the game, today. If you and I win, Dunc, you're in. If we lose, Mike gets his chance to buy in."

Duncan glanced at Mike and noticed that above Mike's smile, his eyes were like shale ice.

"We've gone over last year's cards," Ed explained, "and you boys are so evenly matched that it's going to be like the flip of a coin, only more interesting."

Duncan suppressed the urge to say that it seemed more sadistic than interesting from where he stood. He was conscious of the chill of tension on the back of his neck, of a trembling in his knees and elbows.

"Your honor, Dunc," Stu Finch said mildly.

Duncan managed to get his ball teed up on the third attempt. He stood over it. It seemed about the size of an aspirin tablet. The driver felt like a spaghetti wand. He swung. The fifth hole at Onondaka is a 340 yard dogleg to the right. Dunc's drive covered the forty yards, leaving him three hundred to go.

"You're all tightened up, boy," Mike said heartily.

Mike teed up his ball. Dunc watched carefully. Mike's backswing seemed smoother than usual. The wrist-snap looked almost professional. With a sound

like a pistol shot the ball fled the tee. It screamed toward the trees on the right. It kept rising, rising. Duncan stopped breathing. The ball cleared the trees. It was nauseatingly obvious to Duncan that the ball would come to rest on the fairway beyond the trees, probably only a short iron from the hole.

"Lucky!" Mike said with casual glee.

"Best drive you ever made, Mike," Ed DeRider said happily.

"I guess I do better under pressure," Mike said with becoming modesty.

Duncan managed to pull himself together. His fairway wood was out in the clear. His two iron was on the lip of the green. He almost holed the long putt, and took his five. But Mike had pitched on and two-putted for a four.

"Is this competition between Mike and me for holes, or total?" Dunc asked.

"Just like we said, Dunc," Finch replied. "The match."

For the next three holes, Mike Folsun played par golf. It put Folsun and DeRider four up. The little spreading vine of suspicion in Duncan's mind put down new roots and flourished. Mike's game fell apart, but not very much, on the ninth hole. On that hole both Mike's drive and Duncan's were on the right side of the fairway. The caddy and the other two men were laboring and hacking their way down the left side.

Duncan said coldly, "Okay, Folsun. Have your fun."

"What are you talking about, old boy?"

"Where have you been hiding that golf game? And why?"

Mike laughed. "Ever hear of customer golf? Funny you never figured it, even when, all last year, I kept the match just as even as I could. One week you and Stu would win and the next week we'd win. Makes it interesting. But now the gloves are off, baby."

"Congratulations, Folsun."

"My goodness, such bitterness! Don't worry, baby, I won't beat you too bad."

"No, you don't want it to show, do you?"

Mike addressed his ball. He winked at Duncan, took a mighty swing and topped it badly. "Cheer up, baby. You're going to win this hole and bring it down to three up. Maybe you'll win the tenth too. I'll have to think about it. Anyway, on the seven-

teenth tee, Ed and I are going to be two up, with two to play."

"Terrible chances you take," Duncan said. "Suppose I tell them?"

"Tell them what, old boy? That I'm in there striving?"

Duncan played along doggedly. He played as well as he could. But Mike never let the margin narrower than two up. When Mike and DeRider were in danger, Mike would take a little time over a stroke and make a recovery. Duncan was sourly surprised that the two older men remained oblivious.

AS MIKE had predicted, they came to the seventeenth tee with Duncan and Stu Finch two down. The seventh at Onondaka is a five hundred yard par five. The fairway swoops over two young mountains and the woods are thick on either side.

The hole before had been halved and it was Duncan's honor. He teed up the ball. He had long since ceased to smile. If they thought him a poor sport, it didn't matter. The only cheering thought was that this was very probably the last round of golf he would ever have to play.

He hit his drive harder than he had ever hit a golf ball before. It carried over the first hill and angled off toward the woods.

"Tough," Mike said. He hit a ball that never did get off the ground, but Duncan noted that it was pounded hard enough to get more than halfway up the first hill.

After the other two men drove, Duncan slogged off into the woods. He came to a quiet glade. His ball rested white and smug on the springy grass.

"Need help?" the call came, faintly.

"Found it!" he yelled back. He studied the shot. Ahead was a hole in the greenery, framing the distant green. Maybe an expert could use a wood and pound the ball through that hole with just enough of a fade to catch the roll of the second hill. Duncan decided to use an iron.

He set the bag down, took a club absently, and then discovered that he had taken the clobber. He grunted and jammed it back in the bag. It refused to stay. It bounded out. He tried again. It bounded out again. He stood very still, feeling faintly dizzy. The clobber actually seemed to demand to be used. The glade was very silent. In the distance he could hear the sound of run-

ning water. Small blue flowers were half hidden in the grass.

Duncan MacLendon had always been a relatively unimaginative man. Pixies were for other folk. For the first time in his life he felt the shiver with which we greet any manifestation of the supernatural.

There seemed to be nothing to lose. If the cloob demanded to be used, then the cloob he would use. He took his stance. The cloob felt awkward. He bit his lip and took a mighty swing. The ball took off. It hissed through the open hole in the surrounding brush. As straight as arrows, it flew. It diminished, a tiny white dot in the distance, and then faded off to the left just enough. It dropped behind the crest of the second hill. Duncan stood watching. It reappeared again, rolling and bounding. He could barely see it. It missed the yawning trap and rolled onto the green, rolling, rolling, up to the base of the pin, disappearing.

"Heavens to Betsy!" an awed voice said at Duncan's elbow. He jumped. It was Ed DeRider. "Came up just in time to see you swat it," he said, "One under par is a

birdie. Two under par is an eagle. What do you call three under par?"

On the green they added up the score. Ten for Stu and two for Duncan, making twelve. Five for Mike and nine for Ed DeRider, making fourteen.

"Well, one down and one to go," Mike said. Duncan was still too dazed to comment. He still held the cloob in his hand. He could not forget the look of that ball at it fled into the distance. Nothing had ever been as beautiful. If golf could only be like that all the time . . .

The eighteenth at the Onondaka is evil and insidious. It is a 275 yard par four. The water hole begins one hundred yards directly in front of the tree and it is precisely a hundred yards wide. The choice is limited. You either hit a ball which will go two hundred on the carry, or you play short with an iron and carry it on your second shot. Duncan had always played short. It was his honor. He stood up to the ball.

"Hey!" Stu Finch said, "Don't try to hit it with that antique!"

"That's what he used up there in the woods," DeRider said.



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In a trance-like state, Duncan swung at the ball. For the first hundred yards it was no higher than twenty inches off the ground. Then it began to rise. It went high. It floated. Duncan's eyes misted and blurred as the ball began to drop. Then Finch and DeRider were prancing around him, yelling hoarsely, "An ace! An ace!"

Duncan looked at Mike. There was an odd, uncertain look in Mike's eyes. Mike teed up his ball, banged it to within ten yards of the front edge of the green. Both DeRider and Finch played short and safe, cleared the water safely on their second shots, pitched their third shots onto the green. They took a pair of fives. Mike got a birdie three, but it was of no help to him.

"Even all," Stu Finch yelled exultantly.

"Got to have a play-off," Ed DeRider said. "Looks crowded over on the first. How about the tenth. Suit everybody?"

"Okay by me," Mike said. Duncan saw the knots of muscle standing out at the corners of Mike's jaw, the muscle bulge at the temples.

The tenth is a slight dogleg to the left, mostly up hill, 415 yards, par four. Again Duncan drove with the club. The ball streaked off, climbing as before, fading toward the left. It cleared the trees nicely, dropped out of sight. Mike drove. His drive was almost a carbon copy of Duncan's. Ed and Stu batted slow rollers down the fairway. They all walked forward, waiting for Stu's and Ed's second shots. Both were surprisingly respectable. Mike walked on ahead. Duncan walked with Stu. They went around the corner. Mike was standing in the middle, scratching his head.

"Here's mine," he called, "but I don't see yours, Dunc."

They all hunted. It was Mike who found it. The ball was nearly buried in the soft ground, just the top of it showing.

"Tough," Mike said. "Must have hit a soft spot."

Duncan looked at the ball and then glanced at Mike. He could almost see the cleat marks around the ball, and he was just as certain that Mike had stepped on it as he was that he couldn't accuse him. Mike was leaving nothing to chance.

Duncan felt an enormous anger. He took the club and braced himself.

"Wait!" Stu said, "Better use an iron on that, partner."

Duncan merely set his jaw and took a mighty swing. There was a chunking sound and a sharp crack, intermingled. The aged shaft splintered and the club head, with six inches of shaft protruding from it, bounded over and over, coming to rest twenty yards away. Duncan looked down at his feet for the ball. He looked at the others. They were all staring rigidly at the green.

"Six inches from the cup," Ed DeRider whispered.

Mike took a long time over his. It ended up on the green, at least twenty feet from the cup. Stu and Ed took their second shots. There were four balls on the green.

"We'll give you that one, Dunc," Ed DeRider said. "That gives you a three. Pick it up."

Duncan picked it up. Mike was away. He went back and squatted and examined the line. He fingered the grass. He removed an almost invisible twig in the path of the ball. Then he addressed the ball. Long seconds passed. The trembling started at the head of the putter, went up the shaft. Mike was as tight as a violin's E string.

Duncan knew that to Mike the hole seemed to be fifty yards away, and the size of a cavity in a molar. At last Mike made a jerky stab at the ball. It stopped six feet beyond the hole. Ed DeRider holed out for a par four, the first, he yelled, that he'd ever gotten on the tenth. Stu missed his putt, took a five. A five and a three made eight. DeRider already had a four. Mike lay three. If he could sink his six footer, the hole would be halved.

Again he addressed the ball. This time it was worse. Mike looked physically ill.

"Thought you thrived on pressure, boy," Ed DeRider said jovially.

"Shut up!" Mike rasped. DeRider flushed.

Duncan stood holding the parts of the broken club. By tremendous effort, Mike forced himself to loosen up. He stroked the ball. It trundled happily toward the hole, caught the rim, went off at right angles and stopped three inches away.

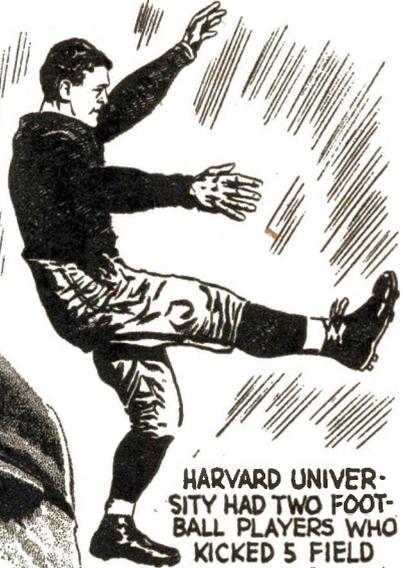
Slowly Mike stood up. He took a deep breath. He smiled. He stuck his hand out to Duncan. "Congratulations, baby," he said.

(Please continue on page 112)

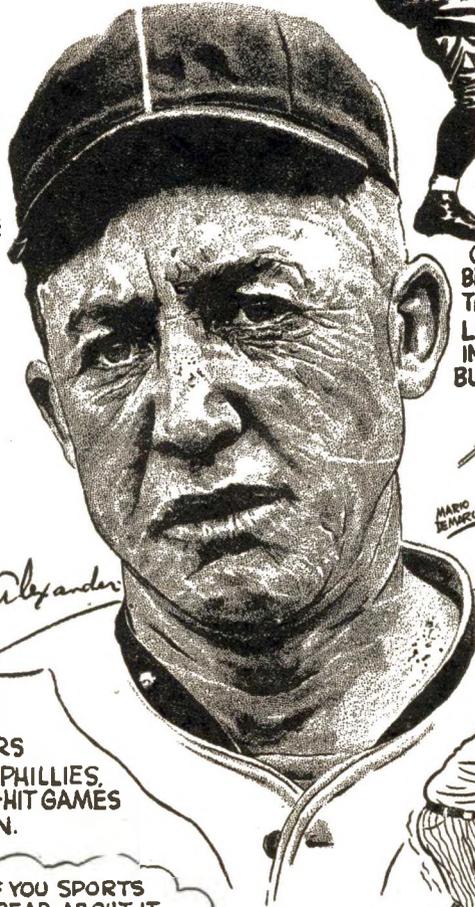
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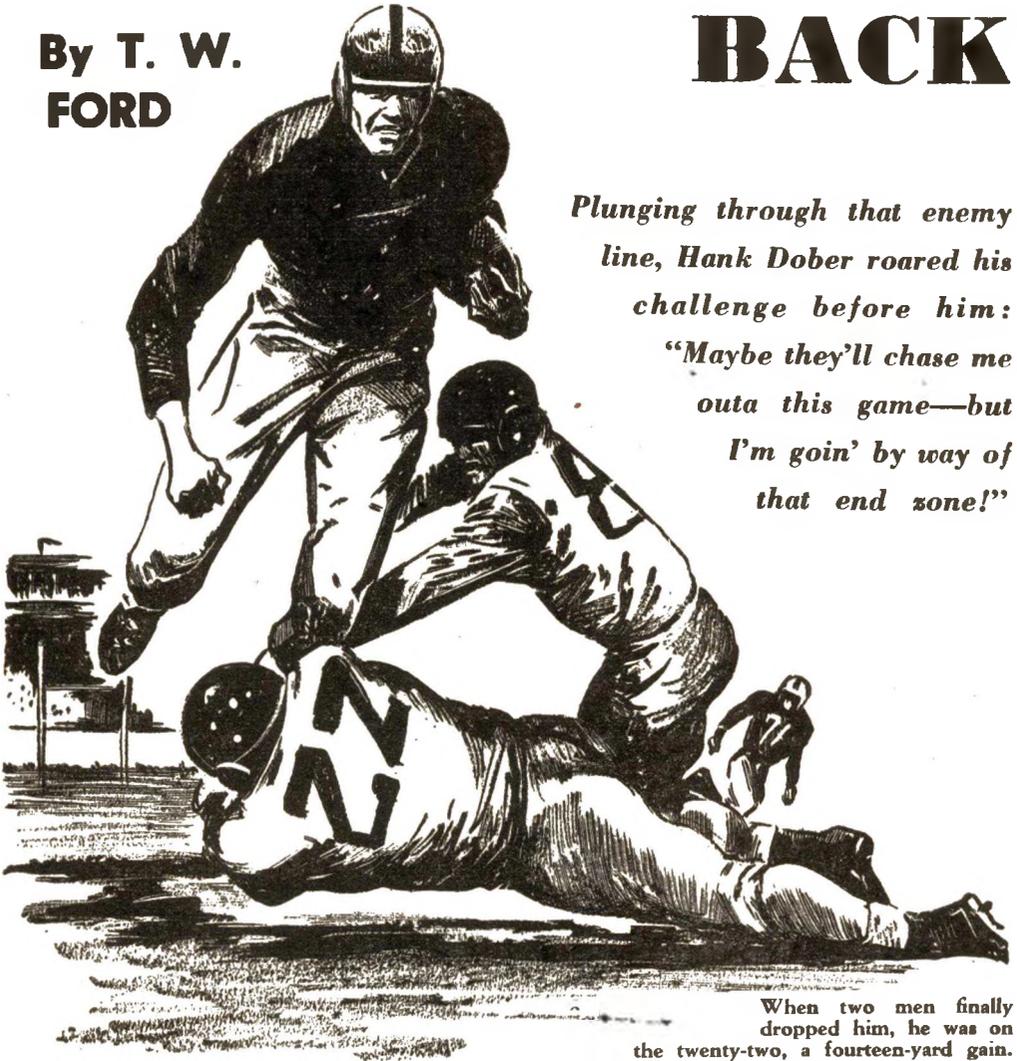


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ALL-OR-NOTHING

By T. W.
FORD

BACK



Plunging through that enemy line, Hank Dober roared his challenge before him: "Maybe they'll chase me outa this game—but I'm goin' by way of that end zone!"

When two men finally dropped him, he was on the twenty-two, a fourteen-yard gain.

HE HAD been to the well a few times too often. The fact came home again bitterly as he joined the Mustang huddle after Fowler had picked up three on a buck-lateral. Hank himself hadn't run since the second last play. But when they'd hit him on that one he'd felt like a sawdust-stuffed puppet doll. He felt the cramp building in that left foot and put all his weight on it. Somebody looked at the big clock and mumbled, "Minute and a half left, boys."

Potsy Lasculi, the quarterback, lifted hard black eyes to Hank and named it, the BC-82, Hank lugging it. It was third and four, the ball on the Mustang's own forty-eight. Fourth quarter and the score 21-20, the Mustangs enjoying the one-point lead.

They moved into the T. Stubby Lasculi was in his pivot, faking a feedoff to his right. Big red-headed Fowler sliced toward the left flank as if to make a pitchout. Hank charged, headed for the inside-tackle slot, pulled off short to take the backfield lateral.

"One more last pitch, pal," he muttered through clenched teeth. Then he dug to the outside, a variation of the in-and-out play as he veered deeper. It was Les Fowler shifting to get in front of him and give him protection. A Ram lineman, breaking through, lunged at him from behind. Hank tore free of his grappling hand.

"Dober-r! Come on, ol' Double Threat!" the fans howled.

He broke stride, cocked his arm in a feint, then sped further on toward the sideline. He faded deeper on springless, heavy legs. No receiver downfield was uncovered. A Ram barged in. Fowler threw a routine block. The Ram bounced off him, came through, leaping, arms upflung, as Hank drew back the ball again.

But old Double Threat never pegged it. Instead, he ducked under the Ram and streaked to the outside. He spun away from one tackler, the fans shrieking. He threaded the needle down the sideline, getting back the yardage he'd given up in fading, then the four more needed for a first down before he was pinned.

"That's the old stuff, Hank!" Pottsy Lasculli told him.

Two plays later, it was Hank again on a fake sweep for a short flip into the middle alley. "Just get it somewhere near me and we'll be in pay dirt," Fowler, the running halfback, had said as he broke from the huddle. Fowler was a glory hunter. Hank took the pitchout from Pottsy, breaking to the right that time. He didn't like the play, an aerial, at this stage. But Pottsy was a gambler. And there was the chance of moving the ball deep into Ram territory and really setting them back on their heels.

He cocked his arm once, fading deeper. The Ram tertiary was still back, on guard against one of his running kicks. Feron was covered over to the left. He checked Fowler, almost ferried it. But the halfback was still speeding toward the Ram goal-line without looking back. Hank pulled his hips away from a tackler, fainted to go inside, then whipped wider. Downfield, Fowler made his bid, cutting toward the sideline. But hawk-eyed Hank Dober saw that Ram safety man coming up fast to cover him. Too much danger of an interception.

"Throw it, Hank! Throw it!" the stands ranted.

A lunging Ram hooked onto a shoulder.

But he wrenched away, spurted, suddenly cut deeper. Then, still on the run, he got off a low diagonal kick. It was a honey, catching the Rams flat-footed as it angled across the field. It bounced once, then went out of bounds on the four-yard line. Hank didn't see it; he was slammed down savagely by two men, rose dizzy.

"Hell, Hank, you've given them the ball!" Pottsy barked.

"You going blind?" Fowler yelled as they moved down field. "I was in the open and—"

"With a chaperone in the form of the Ram safety," Hank said wearily, turning to go off as he saw the defense platoon trotting in.

With less than a minute to go and the Mustangs using a seven-man line, the Rams were compelled to take to the air. The third aerial attempt was intercepted. The Mustangs froze the ball till time ran out. The fans cheered Hank as he headed for the runway under the stands.

In the clubhouse, he lay back on the rubbing table and let Pappy Dave work on his bruised spent muscles. A phone rang. Hank closed his eyes. No sense in kidding himself, he was about at the end of the closed trail. Not that the years had tapped him so much. But his football had started early and followed a rough-tough trail. High school stuff in a back hills town. And pick-up semi-pro games on Sunday up the river to grab a much-needed few dollars. Then working in that upstate mill and playing with their club in a small industrial league.

The break into the ranks of the organized game in a leaky roof circuit, learning things the hard way. With no glamorous college rep, it had been some time before he worked up to the Mustangs in the Seaboard League, just a notch below the big-time majors.

He developed into a triple threat man as a rugged competitor. Then a couple of summers back, while changing a flat tire, the steel rim had dropped on his foot. Hadn't seemed much at the time. Just a couple of small bones broken. But the following autumn he discovered the extra flash that used to shoot him away from tacklers was gone. Now he was just a double threat man, a passer and a kicker. And time running out on him . . .

"That left foot's plenty swollen," Dave said.

Hank's thoughts swung to the future. There was that high school coaching job offered him in the small Midwest town. But that was pretty small peanuts for a man craving to get married. He thought of Marie back there. They were engaged, and he wanted to give her things. Of course, he might get something here on the Mustang coaching staff. Judith Ankers, Mustang owner, who'd inherited the club from her dad, really liked him personally.

Alf Benson, slim sleek business manager of the Mustangs came over. "That was Miss Ankers on the phone for you, Hank," he said, "you lucky dog. Seems she's staging a little cocktail soiree and wants the hero of the game there, boy. . . ."

THE Ankers penthouse atop the city's smartest hotel was big enough to be a railroad terminal. With Doc Lamb and Benson, Hank Dober moved from the elevator foyer into the long living room with its extreme modernistic decor. A café society columnist spotted the tall, good-looking fullback and pounced on him. Hank stood out with his sandy hair, barbered short in a crew cut for the sake of coolness under a helmet, his high prominent cheekbones that imparted a Viking touch, and his crescent-shaped dark eyes. He had an unconscious grace in even his slightest movement, the sign of a natural born athlete.

"Say, Dober," the gossip columnist gushed. "Give me the inside dope on that brush between you and Redmon. It looked like a fight for—"

Then Judith Ankers, with Stacy Van Wagner in tow, descended on Hank, brushing the columnist out of the picture. That was Judy's way—brush aside anything between her and her objective. She was lithe-bodied with auburn hair. Her radiant light-blue eyes sparkled up at Hank.

"Hank, you were wonderful! But really. And those last two pass plays when you seemed trapped—darling-g, you were positively superb!"

"Thanks, Judy. Of course, I did have ten other guys helping me." He knew he could have said "nine other guys" and been closer to the truth. Les Fowler hated to block for him. And if he hadn't been touchdown happy on that final pass attempt, and had pulled in midway down, Hank wouldn't

have been forced to gamble with the kick.

"Nice game, Hank," Van Wagner said, shaking hands. "You never let them be sure what your next move was. Really good stuff, man." He smiled beneath that silly thread of brown mustache.

Van Wagner was all the things Hank wasn't and the kind of a guy he shouldn't have liked. Van Wagner was Harvard and a son of one of the old families. Society, backed by several generations of wealth, and a corporation lawyer in the bargain. The type who'd never known what it was to wonder where the next meal was coming from. He'd been paying court to Judy Ankers for two years now, as patient, apparently, as only a swain with everything to offer could be. He was skinny and bespectacled. Yet for some unfathomable reason, Hank sort of liked the guy. He gave the impression of leveling and knowing what the score was as well.

"Ooh-h, but you haven't a thing to eat or drink, Hank!" Judy seized Hank by the hand and skipped off with him toward the buffet without so much as an apology to Van Wagner. She shoved a plate in Hank's hands and piled it with canapes and hors d'oeuvres and mice-bite sized sandwiches, put a highball in his other hand, caught up a double martini for herself, then led him down the room. The Old Man's daughter was adept at shedding people without hurting any feelings. In a few moments they were out on the sheltered wing of the huge terrace with its parapet of dwarf pines along the railing.

"Ooh-h, Hank, we're tied for the lead—with only one game to go! Honey! Match, please," she added, producing a cigaret.

Hank studied her, young but so terribly poised, radiantly attractive, charged with the nervous energy inherited from the late J. D. Ankers, her dad, former boss of the club. Three seasons back, when he'd still been the triple threat star, he had gone out with Judy some, lost his head and believed he was in love with her. Then, last winter, in the small town where he worked in the local plant in the off season, he had met Marie. And he knew the little brunette with the surprisingly level head behind the pert, hoydenish face was the dish for him. After the first of the year, if things went right, they planned to be married.

"I said, Hank—if you'll come out of the

fog—that we are now tied for the lead with the Moguls. They dropped a tight one today, twenty-six to twenty-one, to the Falcons on a last-minute touchdown pass," Judy said impatiently.

"Oh, yeah? Well, that's something." He had been so intent on that squeaker of their own that day he hadn't thought of the league standing. "Say, Judy, aren't you cold out here?"

The light-blue eyes looked at him sideways. "Honey, that approach went out with high button shoes—so they tell me." She took a quick, nervous puff on her cigaret. "The point is, Hank, that if we could win next week against the Falcons, the worst we could get would be a tie with the Moguls—then a playoff game. Hank, honey, I want that so very much that I'd—"

"Hey, Judy, come off Dream Street. The Moguls got the last-place Hornets—a sure win for the Moguls. Last time they slugged 'em by better than a fifty-point spread. While we gotta meet those Falcons. Right now, gal, they're the hottest thing in the league! You know that."

Hank was correct. The Falcons had a young team, a bunch in its second season that had begun to jell. Backs who could run all afternoon without tiring. Big, rugged linemen who were improving every week. And they had plenty of depth, the ability to replace a man anywhere in the lineup with a sub about as good. That was the very thing the older Mustangs lacked, that depth.

JUDY half turned to gaze out over the city. "It's so terribly important—to me. You see, Hank—well, Dad didn't die anywhere as near wealthy as people think. Of course, there are investments that will pay off some day. But on the other hand he

was in arrears to the government on corporation income taxes. And then there were the inheritance taxes to cut down the estate still more." Her voice was husky. "Things really aren't good, Hank, to put it mildly."

"Gosh, Judy, I had no idea!" He had instinctively taken her hand in both of his. When she had tossed away her cigaret, her left hand rested on the lapel of his suit.

"You see, Hank, I—I'm going to have to sell the club."

"Holy Pete, Judy! Why, old J. D.—"

She shook her head wearily. "It can't be helped, Hank. If I can—that is. There's a syndicate from Indianapolis I've been in touch with. They're definitely interested. Stacy is handling the details and doing the negotiating."

Being human, Hank chewed his lip as he wondered where he'd wind up. When a new owner took over, a house-cleaning job was the usual thing.

"So, you see, Hank, if we could whip those Falcons next week to tie for the lead—well, it would bring them to terms quickly and at my price. . . . Hank!" She gave him the full battery of the light-blue eyes. "Hank, if you could just pull that last one out—oo-h, it would mean so much to—"

He brushed her hand down from his chest brusquely. "I get it, gal. Pitch the woo to the sucker so he'll just about bust his neck to—"

With one of those quick gestures, she placed her fingers across his angry mouth. "Hush up, mister. Please hear me out. The deal—if it goes through—calls for you to be the new coach, Hank."

He just goggled.

"Apologize?" She wrinkled her nose in a little laugh, putting a hand on one of his

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shoulders. "It's all very hush-hush, though, and—"

"But Doc Lamb?"

She shook her head. "He knows nothing. But midway through the season he told me this would be his last year, that it was too much of a strain for a man his age. Win next week, Hank—and we'll *both* be in." She pulled his left ear, her eyes dancing. "You see, I meant to hold onto a block of my stock."

Hank breathed, "Holy sweet Pete!"

"It'll be fun running things together, won't it, Hank?" she asked softly. Her face was upturned to his, the lips of the bold red mouth parted.

Hank Dober was no plaster cast saint. He kissed her.

He meant it to be just a brotherly buss, of course. Only Judy Ankers wasn't having it that way. Her fingers dug into his shoulders. Somehow his arm got around her waist and time became a very unimportant matter.

Still dumfounded when they moved back inside, Hank pulled her up short with a hand on her arm. "Say, I sorta thought—well—your name and Stacy's have been linked—and you're always around together and—"

"Oh, pouf! Stacy's a dear boy—but he's damn dull, Hank. Hank, you and I—next year, we'll have a winning team—together, Judy and Hank!"

WHEN he reported for Tuesday's drill, Hank Dober was still mulling the thing in his mind, weighing it, seeking some kind of an out. Around the locker room the talk was of the news that Scooter Burns, the great breakaway runner of the Falcons, would be ready to go against them, recovered from his month-old injuries. Offhandedly Hank also noted that Les Fowler wore a scowl like a bear with the bellyache. Hank could figure that fast enough. There had been too much talk, in the sports pages, about his clutch kicking and not enough about Fowler's forty-odd yard dash plus two pass receptions to satisfy the halfback, Fowler.

But it all seemed of minor importance to Hank compared to his own problem. "Maybe I'm a fool," he muttered once as he laced up his shoulder harness. A lot of guys would have jumped at the chance of

becoming the husband of a girl like Judith. Attractive. And she would be wealthy too, if she succeeded in unloading the controlling interest in the club and franchise.

Because the mercurial Judith had decided she wanted him, a big manager husband, in the same way in days past she'd decided she wanted a new green convertible or an Afghan hound. He'd watched her for several years, spoiled and pampered by the widowed J. D., headstrong, accustomed to get about anything and everything she wanted.

"You men displayed two basic weaknesses Sunday—at least a lot of you did," Doc concluded his skull session lecture, readjusting his glasses on his snowy head. "No sharpness in your tackling. And again and again, a lack of authority in the blocking. So now we'll all retire to the pits and put in a session with the tackling dummies." That was after they'd seen the films of the Ram contest.

But there was little snap or iron behind his words. Doc was a weary man, worn out, unable any longer to inject fire into his men, to give them anything of himself. And a successful coach had to do that latter. The afternoon's drill was ragged.

They had some contact work Wednesday, a really heavy scrimmage on Thursday. Hank wasn't connecting on those running passes of his. Later a running punt was half blocked. And the second play after that, when he found every receiver covered and tried to run it as he saw an alley, he almost blew his stack. A really solid block on that secondary closing in, and he would have ripped off a nice gain. But Fowler failed to take out the man and Hank was pinned against the sideline.

"What the devil do you think you're getting paid for?" he flung at Fowler. "Peddling programs, maybe? Not that it isn't your speed!"

Fowler spat cotton into the brown turf. "Aw, take some of the lead outa your britches, ya has-been! You look like somebody's rheumatic grandmaw coming off those ends. Of course, having an inside track with our cute little owner helps, I guess. You'll be starred if it takes a miracle, Dober!"

Hank stepped closer, hands balling up. Then he got a grip on himself. A row in the family at a time like this would be crazy. "Forget it, Les."

He walked away. Over by the sideline he saw Judy, smart-looking in a pair of blue slacks under a mouton fur sports coat, with Stacy Van Wagner. When he came off, Judy beckoned to him and hopped a few swinging steps in his direction.

"How does it look, Hank?" she asked cheerily.

He didn't want to tell her. He didn't want to say that tired Doc no longer "owned" the club, couldn't give it the lift, couldn't get the gang up. Didn't want to talk about how the locker room chatter consisted of whether or not Scooter Burns would be as fast as ever after his ankle injury. And speculations on the Falcon aerial assault with two passers in their backfield. How nobody said a word about the Mustang chances of taking them.

He turned it personal, shrugging. "I sure was no ball of fire out there myself today, was I? Didn't seem to have the touch on those passes at all, at all," he said.

"Just so long as you have it on tap come Sunday, Hank," she said, her gloved hand pressing his arm. "You're the bell mare, mister. I feel that if you show them the way, they'll get hot and turn the trick . . . All right, right away!" She called to a reporter with a lensman who wanted to snap the owner with Doc Lamb. "See you later, Hank."

He headed for the clubhouse. "Some real protection and blocking in front of you—and you might connect on more heaves." It came to Hank from behind. He broke stride to look back at Stacy Van Wagner, who had followed him.

Hank never knew what caused it to pop into his head. He half nodded, asked, "Did the potential new owners notice that last Sunday?"

The lawyer flushed in a strange way. But Hank forgot the detail almost immediately as his own problem wormed back to the forefront under the shower. It was one of those "to be or not to be" enigmas. If they got the jump, maybe with a few breaks, the Mustangs might edge out the Falcons. That second-string end, Benburg, was really getting sharp at picking an aerial off a cloud. It could be. But if it happened and the sale went through, meaning he would be the new coach, Judy would expect. . . . He towed himself roughly, thinking of the old saw about a woman scorned.

He wasn't conceited on this angle. He simply knew old J.D.'s pampered daughter. He, to her, was simply the newest toy she'd set her heart on.

Yet, on the other hand, if the Mustangs lost, there would go a-glimmering his chance of a real coaching job in the pro ranks. And that high school mentor's position back in the hometown, even if eked out by work in the local mill during the off season—well, it would be darn little on which to get married and set up a home. And he wanted things for Marie.

It was a case of damned if he did—did pull the miracle come Sunday—and damned if he didn't. . . .

SUNDAY was one of those lead-gray days, windless, with the atmosphere a hazy-blue shade like thin smoke from a fire of leaves. And Hank Dober still hadn't made up his mind how he'd play it.

Coming onto the field, he had tried to tell himself that it was out of his hands anyway with the Falcons heavy pre-game favorites. Then fate took a hand with a bang. A Falcon fumble two plays after the kickoff, recovered by young Benburg, set it up. A buck-lateral by the yellow-striped Mustangs for no gain. Hank was banged hard as he uncorked a pass and it was short. But a Falcon secondary, trying to intercept, flipped it off the tops of his upflung fingers, lengthening its flight. Fowler, coming like up out of the ground, gathered it to his bosom and took it into the end zone for the first score. And within two minutes, the Mustangs were on their way again.

That time a fumble by the Mustangs, in their own backfield, set the stage. Lasculi pounced on it, jumped through the middle of the line, lateraled to Cave, the right tackle. Cave, intoxicated with the idea of lugging the leather for the first time in his career, lunged and stormed and bulled his way to the enemy twenty-two.

"All right, us guys, let's go places!" That was Les Fowler howling as they broke out of the huddle. Everybody yipped their answers. The club had suddenly caught on fire. They took it to the six before they were stopped, losing it on downs.

On the third down, after picking up four, the Falcons tried to kick it out. But the bad pass from center went into the end zone. The punter retrieved it, got to the

goal-line, saw he was hemmed in, and pitched it blindly upfield in the hope of saving a loss. Back in the second tier of the 2-2-1 secondary, Hank cut to the inside to get under it. He leaped on the twenty-five. And then that flash of indecision hit him.

An interception and the red-hot Mustangs would score. Then, emotionally drunk, they could go on to win. And his trouble would start . . . Judy had phoned him at the clubhouse before they'd taken the field, made a date to have cocktails in private with him after the game. Have to tell her he was engaged to somebody else. Ka-boom! It would be like that. The scorned gal would put the whammy on the arrangement with the new owners for him to step into the coaching job. She could do it, he figured.

He strained upward for the spheroid. A sly little voice whispered, *Even if the Mustangs lost—and she had to sell at a lower price—the new bunch might still give you the job. . . .*

His fingers brushed the pigskin, failed to hold it as it wobbled onward. The crowd's anguished screech knifed through the chill air. He half turned as he came down, then almost fell through his cleats. For a Falcon, streaking downfield over to the right, prepared to get under the expected kick, and unnoticed by Hank, had swept desperately over to get behind him. He snagged the pass, went on to the forty before Lasculi, playing safety, downed him.

It took the Falcons literally and psychologically out of the hole. Poise regained, they began to pour it on from their single wing formation. They struck with quick openers and short flips and off-tackle slashes. Though with the single wing, they didn't get the deep down-field blocking the T provided, holes were opened for the carriers and the close-up secondaries chopped down. And those speed merchants they owned could take care of themselves well once they were thrown free. Scooter Burns went over from the twelve after two plays were stopped. The score was knotted up at 7-7 when they converted the extra point.

Right after taking the kickoff, Hank tried to carry on the in-and-out play, a one-time specialty of his. But he was stopped after a couple of yards. That left foot was already swelling, bulging hard against the shoe-

laces, to slow him down. When he tried to connect on a pass, overshooting his man as he was hurried, he was slammed hard in the left leg.

On fourth down, he booted one from the deep spot in regular kick formation, angled it out of bounds neatly on the Falcon twenty-four. But as he went off with the defense platoon coming in, the left foot was wobbly under him. The second man to hit him as he got the kick away had come down on it. Word of his weak spot had gotten around.

HE HUNCHED on the bench and watched the relentless Falcons drive on a seventy-six yard march to make it a 14-7 game. The Mustang line was being outcharged now. The parka-shrouded figure on the bench beside him mumbled, "That tears it! It's all over but the wake now."

Then it exploded in Hank, what he had done. Just about ruined a club that had suddenly caught on fire! Sweat started in the palms of his big twisting hands. If he had latched onto that blind pass before, even knocked it down, the Falcons would still have been in the hole, verging on stampede. A sense of overwhelming guilt surged in him. Had he practically thrown the game?

He couldn't answer himself. He didn't know. He had tried for that pitched pigskin. But maybe he could have tried a little harder if that flash of indecision hadn't hit him. He had allowed the personal angle to get bigger than the game. He—Then Doc was sending him back in after the kickoff.

"Hell with Judy—and all of it, the job too!" he growled as he ran in. "I got some football to play."

Big Fowler cut back over the left side for three. Then it was Hank, with the fans giving the "ol' Double Threat" yell, wheeling off the left flank. You couldn't tell whether he'd flip one or loose one of those low running kicks. He was knifing back to the inside, racing over that tackle spot where Fowler had just hit. A tackler hooked onto him at the scrimmage line. But Hank burst free, reeled into the secondary, then began to zigzag. The crowd thundered his name as he picked up eight for a first down. But Hank's mouth was compressed against pain

as he went back for the huddle. Some Falcon had come down hard on the lower left leg again.

But despite the pain, he got off one of his low running kicks a minute later to set the Falcons back on their heels. Doc started to send in the defense gang with four fresh backs till Hank ran part way to the sideline and signaled him. Hank stayed in, backing up that line as they moved into the second quarter. Bombarding it would have described his play better as he performed like a one-man gang, stripping runner of blockers, time and again bashing a ball carrier back dead on his heels as he hit the hole.

Once, in a time out, Rocky Caves nodded at the big scoreboard. "The Moguls are a runaway. Twenty-eight to nothing 'gainst the Hornets in their first quarter."

When Hank had to boot again, the left ankle wobbled under him badly and it was a short kick. But he atoned for it with a pass interception almost immediately. Still, there was no denying that Falcon power forever. They scored again to make it a 20-7 game when they failed on the try for the extra point. But half a minute from the end of the second period, seemingly trapped, Hank Dober squirmed loose from a red-and-black shirted pack and rifled an aerial into Les Fowler's pocket. Fowler went all the way to make it a 20-14 game.

Stretched on the rubbing in the clubhouse, he opened his eyes as the slim man beside him said, "Look Hank, you don't have to go back out there and take any more if you don't want to."

"Little rest—be all right, Alf," Hank said, thinking it was Benson the business manager. But as the other turned away,

Hank recognized the thin black mustache of Stacy Van Wagner. Hank wondered what he was doing down there. . . .

MOST of that epic second half was pretty much of a blur to Hank Dober. He remembered Rocky Caves saying, as they came down the runway, "You want this one bad, eh, Hank?" And nodding. He remembered having a kick blocked back on his own eight, thanks to Fowler's half-hearted protection, and grabbing the rebound off a Falcon chest and running it up to the twenty for a first down.

And later, playing with the defense platoon, catching the scat-back, Scooter Burns, as he burst through the middle and prepared to pull his here-I-am-here-I-ain't act. Hank simply took off and rammed him in the middle. Both men had to be taken out. But the difference was that Hank returned. Burns never came back that day.

Into the fourth quarter with it still a 20-14 game. Again and again like a far-away cry, he heard his name roared from the stands. He was playing the game of his life, a magnificent swan song. But all he knew was that he had to get that game back. He heard somebody say it was less than three minutes left. That was after the trainer finished working over him again. Then there was that jump pass down the middle that he had sensed coming with the secondary pulled in against those degutting smashes from the middle.

The old Double Threat dug to his right, veering rearward. He went up, strained with one arm, juggled the ball on his finger ends for what felt like an eternity. Then he had it against his chest and came down and twisted half around to bash off a Fal-

AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

SENSATIONAL NEW **TING**
CREAM FOR
FOOT ITCH
(ATHLETE'S FOOT)
- REGULAR USE HELPS
RELIEVE ITCHING - SOOTHES
BURNING BETWEEN CRACKED
PEELING TOES -
AIDS HEALING
AMAZINGLY!



FIRST
USED
IN HOSPITALS
NOW
RELEASED TO
DRUGGISTS
GUARANTEED

TING MUST
SATISFY YOU IN
A WEEK - OR
MONEY BACK!

IN LAB TESTS
TING CREAM
PROVED EFFECTIVE
IN KILLING SPECIFIC
TYPES OF
ATHLETE'S FOOT
FUNGI ON
60 SECOND
CONTACT!



EVEN IF OTHER PRODUCTS
HAVE FAILED TRY AMAZING
TING CREAM TODAY!
GREASELESS, STAINLESS
ALL DRUGGISTS ONLY 60¢ A TUBE

con with a stiff-arm. Two strides and another man hit his right hip in the race toward the sideline. The field was like brown ocean swells, rising and falling, before his fogged eyes. Feeling like a man on a mad merry-go-round, he yanked free, stumbled badly on that left ankle. But he straightened and fought like some great cornered animal.

"No, Hank, no!" somebody screamed frantically.

The white stripes were going backward under his driving cleats. He ripped his shoulder free of a tackler who strangely resembled Les Fowler, stumbled on. Then somebody anchored onto his left leg and he hit the dirt with a sob because he hadn't quite made it to that double-barred stripe of the goal-line. He peered at the marker just off to his right and saw he was barely inside the ten. Then he realized the hush hanging over the field was unnatural. He looked down and it was Rocky Caves leeching onto his leg.

"Say, what the—"

"Geez, Hank, you sure got twisted around when you grabbed that pass," Potts croaked, shaking his head wearily.

It hit Hank, then, like a wadded wet towel out of the dark. He had gotten his directions reversed, run the wrong way, toward his own goal. That was why Rocky had tackled him. Hank stood there swaying. He had lost the chance to give his club the big jump on the attempted pass interception in the opening minutes. And now he had really torpedoed their chance to pull it out. He didn't think about Judy. Or of his chance of being coach under the new regime. He thought only of the team he'd let down so badly.

He was beside Potts, digging fingers deep into the man's arm. "I want the ball. I want it. Understand?"

It was the old cutback. Hank sliced toward the left flank, cocked his arm once in a pass feint, then knifed back to the inside. The hole wasn't clear but he literally hurtled his carcass through. Simply piled over a backer-up who cut in at him. Hank's fierce leg drive ripped him free of another tackler. When two men finally dropped him he was on the twenty-two, a fourteen-yard gain.

"Again," he heard himself husk to Potts. And on a quick-opener, Hank speared in there and ground out another nine. Morose

fans, smelling certain defeat, gave him a faint cheer.

"Me—again," he mumbled, bleeding from the mouth. He knew Rocky Caves was saying something to him. But it was unintelligible through the dull roaring in his head. *Maybe I'm a damned fool, his thoughts ran. Jackass maybe. If we get it over, we can win. Win—and I gotta face Judy. If I tell her it's no dice on the heart-to-heart angle . . . Woman scorned . . . Maybe I can't win no matter what I do.*

He couldn't remember what play Potts had called. But his great gridiron instinct directed his cleats. Fowler swinging wide, then lateraling back to him. He jumped through the line and was grinding off the yardage again. A big Falcon charging in. He hesitated. Could let himself get hit and nobody would know. They couldn't say he hadn't given it one hell of a try.

He heard somebody yelling, "We can do it! We can do it!"

Then he realized he was pushing himself off the ground, on the enemy forty-five after stiff-arming that would-be tackler fiercely. Doc Lamb was sending in a sub tackle to stop the clock. Fowler picked up seven on a double reverse. But an offside penalty nullified it. Everything swimming in a blurring haze before his eyes again, Hank ripped over tackle. He heard the crowd sounding like they were a few blocks away, cheering him madly. Potts was nominating him again.

A fumble. Yeah, that would do it. Happened to the best of them. After all, he'd spear-headed this drive. Groggy, battered. Nobody could blame him much. Just say hard luck and— He felt the leather in his hands and he was roaring on a cutback. A whistle and somebody howling, "A first down! A first down!"

POTTSY gambled then. Faked to Hank driving at the middle. The quick fade and the pitch. Benburg plucked the pass out of the sky and legged it to the sixteen. Just seconds left. It was going to be Hank again, but to the outside this time. Potts went into his spin, faked a feedoff twice. Then the knee-high pitchout to Hank laming to the outside off the end. Hank had it. He pulled the throttle wide, legged it on a tangent.

Just slow a notch, sweep out wider. And

he'd be forced out of bounds. And there'd be no problem with Judy. Might be the smart thing . . . Then, suddenly he made his decision.

He simply aimed himself for the coffin corner. Saw nothing else. One, then a second Falcon hit him. It was like trying to get cosy with a runaway steam-roller. He never even slowed till he roared into the end zone to tie it up, 20-20, as time ran out.

Doc sent in a placement kicker expert. The ball sailed neatly through the uprights to make it 21-20. Hank gave a big sigh and just sort of flopped over in his tracks, out cold. . . .

Pappy Dave and the club physician were working over him on the rubbing table. The latter gave him something to drink. After another minute or so he was able to sit up. A hand dropped on his bare shoulder. It was Stacy Van Wagner, smiling beneath his silky mustache.

"I won't tell you you were great, Hank. Every last man in that park knows it."

"Aw. . . ." Hank felt as if he were laughing and sobbing at the same time. "There—there were ten others Joes, y'know."

"But you were the big Joe, man. . . . Look, when you can get dressed, there's a little girl up in the private cocktail lounge waiting to see you and—"

"Yeah, I know." Hank felt chilled inside. Judy.

"And Hank," Van Wagner went on, "I

want you to understand about Judy. She's just a kid who went sort of crazy when she had a football team to run. She's terribly impulsive, of course. Flibberty-gibberty. And I guess she got the crazy idea that if she could get you emotionally steamed up—well, you get the idea."

Hank didn't. "I'm going to tell her frankly all bets are off, Van. Maybe it'll cost me the coaching job—"

"Stop worrying about Judy, man. After she's married and settled down with a couple of babies, she'll be all right. And I intend to take care of that. As for the coaching job—you're our man, Hank!"

Hank swung his legs off the table and stood up. "Your— What the hell do you mean, Van?"

"What I said. My dad happens to head the syndicate that's buying the club, Hank. After he saw the way you lifted that team, in those final minutes, he was sold."

Hank made foolish glug-glug sounds in his throat as he half crushed Stacy Van Wagner's hand in his grip.

"Easy, Hank. I need that hand to sign players' pay checks with. Now will you get into some clothes? That little girl of yours—yeah, Marie—I arranged for her to fly into the game—she'll be darned impatient upstairs there."

Then Hank Dober knew why he'd always had a hunch this Van Wagner was really a right guy. . . .

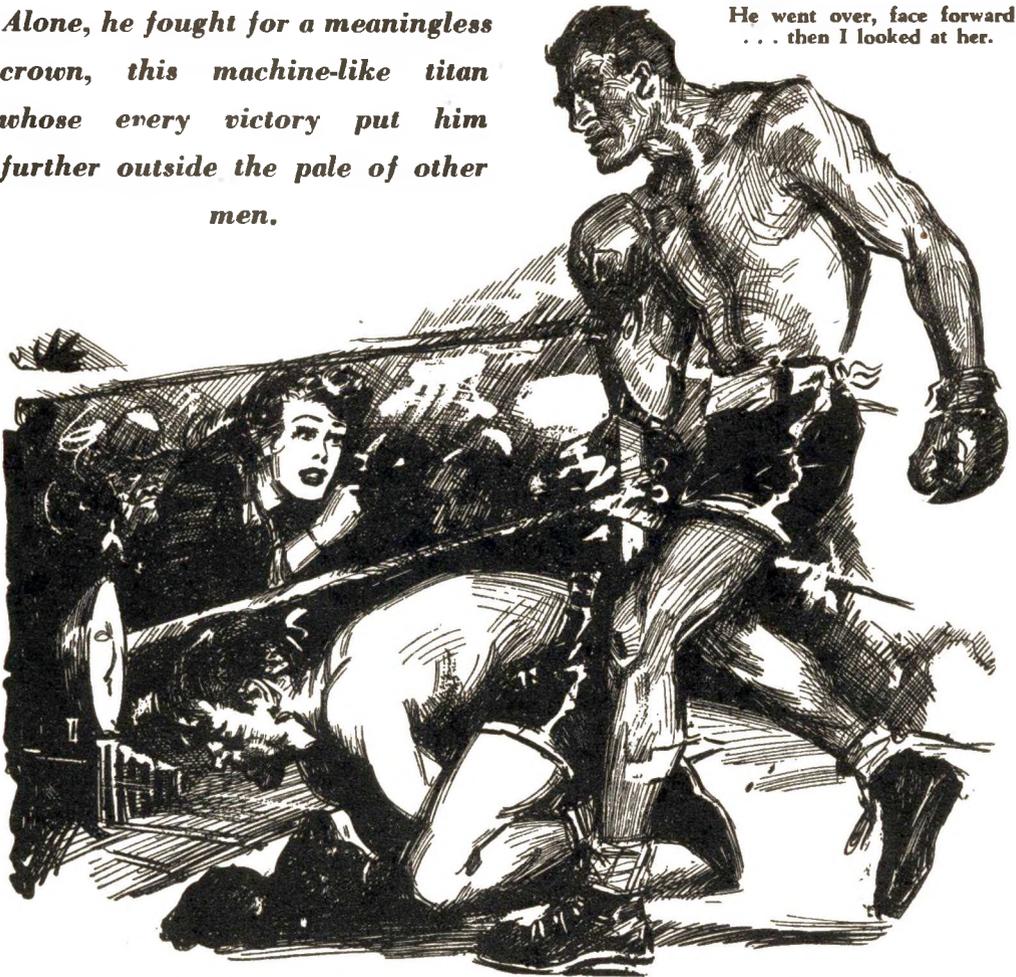
ANSWERS TO ALL-SPORTS QUIZ

(Questions on page 8)

1. Gil Hodges, Dodgers, 4 in six times at bat, 1950.
2. 1921.
3. Bill Dickey.
4. One, Vern Bickfords against the Dodgers.
5. John K. Tendler.
6. Joe Maxim, who won lightweight crown in 1949.
7. 45 minutes.
8. Australia, where the law requires an X-ray to test the thickness of a fighter's skull. Thin-skulled guys must look for another job, regardless of talent.
9. Paddy Ryan.
10. Jack Broughton, champ in 1740.
11. Ted Lindsay, Sid Abel and Gordon Howe, all of Detroit Red Wings.
12. Twice.
13. Army vs. Kingston, Ont., No penalties in entire series.
14. Bill Stewart.
15. Football quarterback Bill Blaik.
16. One—by a bangtail named Upset.
17. Art Larsen, tennis; Pat O'Dea, football; Charlie Paddock, track.
18. Baseball and bowling—and what a difference it makes!
19. 26 miles, 385 yards.
20. The home team, for whom every home game is a Rose Bowl game—the California Institute of Technology.

Alone, he fought for a meaningless crown, this machine-like titan whose every victory put him further outside the pale of other men.

He went over, face forward . . . then I looked at her.



SILENT VICTORY

CERTAINLY it must be a thrilling thing to hear the National Anthem. I've never failed to marvel at the still, attentive posture of the fans when it is played before the main event. Sometimes I've even seen tears in the eyes of husky men as they listened.

Of course, I, too, stand still when it's being played, but the music which sends chills up and down other spines does nothing to mine. In my ears there is no lasting note of brilliant music. In my ears there is only the frightful sound of silence, a heavy, shut-off void.

And that is how it was as I stood in my corner, knowing great music filled the air for others to hear, but knowing also that heavy silence inside my head. Many eyes were trained on me. I could feel them, the curiosity of them. I tried not to return their gaze for I always felt hounded when I did.

People liked to take me apart. They enjoyed trying to imagine what went on inside me, what made me tick. They had very little faith, I realized, in my ability to think rationally. To them I was simply a machine made of flesh and blood, but without

By TOM DOWLING, Jr.

a brain. For where there is no ability to speak or hear, it seems only reasonable that there would also be no ability to think. To the normal, a deaf and dumb man is a freak.

When I saw the hats go back on and the crowd beginning to sit down again I knew the Anthem was over and I turned to face Maxie. He grinned and rubbed the back of my neck through the robe. The lights shone on his bald head and I could feel his anxiety.

Commotion. There was a great deal of commotion in the arena, naturally. In such a mob there had to be a certain buzz of anticipation, a certain noise peculiar to the fight arena. But the stillness in my head was unchanged. Being deformed, as I am, I knew a silence such as no normal person could fully understand. But the silence of fifteen thousand people is something frightening. My eyes told me there was much yelling, whistling, stomping around, but my ears registered no sound in the shell of deafness.

It is in moments such as this that I felt the great loneliness more than at any other time.

She was there again. I didn't permit myself to look at her immediately. Perhaps I was afraid that when I did look for her she would not be there tonight. And then, perhaps I was afraid she would be.

When I finally cast a forced glance down at her our eyes met, and they kept each other for some seconds. Hers were the only eyes which never seemed to be probing into me, laughing at me, wondering what kind of ape I was. I looked away quickly and Maxie started pulling off my robe.

He was talking to me, I knew, for Maxie always talked to me even though he knew I never heard a word. He'd learned to use my finger talk when he took me under his wing three years before, but still he talked with his lips.

Sometimes I laughed at the way he'd try to talk with his fingers and form the words with his mouth at the same time. And sometimes I'd feel like bawling when I had something to tell him, but with the gloves on my hands I was as powerless to communicate as an infant.

MAXIE turned me toward the referee and I saw Jose in the other corner then. He was a dark-haired kid, being Mexican, and a good lightweight. He'd

come a long way, and I was going nowhere. I didn't care. Where could I go? They came out and filled the fight house every time I fought, but I wasn't going anywhere. I was Danny Simcoe, but they tagged me *Dummy*.

It didn't matter much. At least I tried to make myself believe it didn't. People thought of me as a stupid lunk who traded punches for a living because there was no brain in his head for handling another job.

The announcer was making the introductions now and I was nervous to get started. When I was fighting I was away from all those faces, those laughing eyes. I was in hell, but I was alone with my opponent. The eyes of the mob weighed heavily on me when the announcer waved a finger toward me and Maxie jabbed me with his fist.

I took a few bows to the sound of the silence, and walked out to the ring center when the referee motioned for me. As I stood there, Maxie's hand rubbing my back, Jose's fine body within arm's reach, the referee gave us instructions. He made many motions for my benefit and I nodded to let him know I understood. He never once looked at Jose, but kept his eyes on me. It was always me they watched. I was a freak, they didn't want to miss anything.

Jose stuck out his hand and grinned. He was a good-looking boy. I had three more pounds, five more years, and forty more fights than he. But he didn't look scared. Only curious like the rest. It was to be a strange experience for him—this fighting a freak, doing battle with an oddity.

I went back to my corner and turned just before the jab of Maxie's fingers which told me the bell had sounded. Jose dropped briefly to one knee and made the sign of the cross before he turned and came toward me, the grin gone now. He was now a man with a job to do. He hammered his right into my body five times before I could tie him up. I went to work with my left and at the end of the round he was red around the mouth. I was sore at the stomach.

Maxie worked on me and his lips were moving. I was trying to not think of anything but the fight, but I looked toward her again. Maxie pulled my chin so that I faced him. His fingers told me to use my right more. I nodded and just before the bell I made myself look at her again.

She wasn't beautiful, nor even pretty, I

guess. Attractive would fit her nicely. She was attractive. Her hair was black under a hat like you see French artists wear, and her eyes looked green from this distance, which was as close as I'd ever been to her. She had a long face, sort-of, nicely featured with full, soft-looking lips.

Maxie jabbed me in the back and I jumped up. I slipped the Mexican kid's sudden rush and rocked him with a right cross. His eyes were glassy when I spun him around and backed him into the ropes. I was in hell, but he and I were there alone. There was no one staring at me.

I shot over another right and he grabbed me. His arms shook, but he had strength in them. I could have shook him off easily enough and got to him with some real punches. But I didn't have any desire to hurt the kid much. He was going somewhere. I had nowhere to go.

As the referee parted us there was fright in Jose's eyes now. I wished I could whisper to him, wished I had the gift of speech which God had seen fit to keep from me from birth. I would have told him not to be afraid. I would have told him that I had a mind, a heart, a feeling just as anyone else. I would have told him I was not the savage he probably thought me to be. On the inside, I would have told him, I had a normal existence.

He grabbed for me when I came to him again. The fear in his eyes sickened me. I hit him hard and he fell over backwards.

The referee pushed me toward a corner, watching me as he counted over the kid. I looked down at her then. She was still watching me, just as she had every fight night for six, seven months now. Things I'd say with a voice if I had one buzzed around inside me when I looked at her. Things the crowd never would dream existed in the silence that was Dummy Simcoe: *You're lovely, lady with the black hair. I think of you often. Knowing that you might be at ringside makes the job lighter for me each time, soft-eyed lady. Lady with no name I know, I love you. I'd fight my way out of this hell if I had a voice to ask you to help me, if I had hearing to take your reply.*

JOSE got to his feet at nine. I went out to him very slowly. I wasn't going to hurt him. I'd box the rest of the round.

No use spoiling his fine record. He was going to the top where such a handsome kid should go. I was headed nowhere. Maxie always said I could get to the top of the heap. He always tried to make me into something of a champion. But Maxie was my manager. It was his job to take me as far as he could.

The papers said a lot of nice things, too. Time and again they said I had the makings of a champion. But while they said those nice things they talked of me like they would about an animal, not a man. Didn't they know I had eyes to read, a heart to feel with, even though no sounds came to or from me?

I had nowhere to go. The top would probably be more lonely, more unbearable than my present station.

In the fourth round I got hurt. I don't get hurt very often in the ring. But the kid hit me with something I never saw coming. I was on one knee and with startling suddenness, I realized I'd never been down before.

Pawing at the lower strand of rope I looked for the referee's hand. He flashed three fingers at me. My head was clearing up already, but I should have stayed down longer. I jumped up and Jose was on me before I could get my guard up. I fell again and in the silence there was now darkness. When a light came into the void I saw her face. There were tears on her cheeks and I tried to smile at her.

She shook a small, white fist, and it was the first time she'd really shown any real emotion at my fights. I pushed at the floor and my arms were leaden weights. The referee's hand whisked before my eyes. Eight! I dragged myself up, and he wiped my gloves on his shirt front. I stuck a left into Jose's face. He lunged at me again, but the left stalled him off until the round ended.

On the stool I smiled at Maxie and nodded to her. He grinned. He'd seen me watching her for months, but I wouldn't allow him to call her over or ask her to the dressing room after a fight.

Maxie started finger talk again, but I kept watching her. She never took her gaze off me and I was finding a breath of cool air in my own little hell.

Maxie's fingers pushed me out again and Jose was once more smiling. He was a good

(Please continue on page 113)

CALAMITY SPIKES



Kerrigan slammed into him and he went down hard . . .

The hurler they called the Farmer had a daughter he didn't want to give to the wrong guy—and in this fateful game, the Farmer had to pitch with his heart . . . and his head.

PATTING his glove and walking down the high wall of the bullpen, Reuben Jones thought ruefully of the days of his youth when all he had to do was hitch

his belt, adjust his cap, throw five balls, and then wave good-by to the batter.

It was different at thirty-nine, which was the age recorded in the major league record

By WILLIAM HEUMAN

books. He knew better, though, he'd been in his thirties three years longer than he should have, and that meant his right arm was three years older than many people supposed it to be. It meant a little more stiffness after a turn on the mound. It meant a longer period of warming up for the occasional relief stints, the way an old car takes a long time to get the coughs and grunts out of its system before rolling slowly off.

The bullpen catcher, Buck O'Dowd, said, "Easy does it, Farmer."

A faint smile slid across Reub Jones' lean, brown face. He rubbed the ball in his hands, moved the bare left hand mechanically up to the cap on his head, and then threw, lobbing the ball, feeling those first twinges in the shoulder.

He threw easily, a nice free motion of the body and arm, throwing no faster than O'Dowd's return throw, taking his time the way he always did out in the pen, letting the oil start to flow in the hinges.

The warm September sun felt good on his back. In recent years he'd dreaded those dark days and the chill after the heat of throwing. A dark day was a bad day for an old man, just as it had been a good day when he was young and the fast ones winged down through the gloom to the consternation of the batters.

After a while he put a little more on the throws, but it wasn't till the third inning that he threw his first hook, a little twister which made O'Dowd grin because it was so unexpected. He'd worked up a mild sweat now, and the arm didn't hurt any more. In another five minutes he felt that he'd be ready to go out, even though there was very small chance that he would get the call this afternoon.

The Grays had the ace fireman, big Ed Colby, sitting idly on the bench, cap tilted across his eyes, staring toward the field. The score was 2-0 for the Grays at the start of the fifth, in the second crucial late season series with the third-place Monarchs.

Manager Joe Seeley of the Grays wanted this opener badly, very badly. He'd started his left-hander, Johnny Braxton, hoping against hope that Johnny would come through, enabling him then to throw his two aces against the Monarchs in the remaining two games of the series. He was fairly sure his money pitchers would stand up,

but he hadn't been sure about Braxton. Now Johnny was throwing himself a shut-out, fireman El Colby was relaxing in the pen, ready to take over if Braxton faltered, and all was well with the world.

Then Reuben Jones heard the shrill, nasal yell of Skip Kerrigan, manager and shortstop of the Monarchs, and there was plenty wrong with the world, all of it attributable to Kerrigan, the heel of organized baseball.

Buck O'Dowd, who was also almost forty, was a little tired, and he wanted to watch the game from the bullpen bench. Farmer Reuben Jones motioned with his glove after his last throw—another of those pretty little deceptive hooks—that he'd had enough.

Both of them walked to the bench, a green-painted park bench which overlooked a low concrete wall. The infield was far away, and the players looked quite small from this distant point in right center field.

Ed Colby said, "Johnny's hanging that hook on the corner, Farmer. If he can keep it there he's in."

Reub Jones nodded. He put on his jacket and sat down, a tall, angular man with gray in his hair, and the deep-set blue eyes and the crows-feet, of a farmer. He'd been a farm boy twenty-odd years before when he came out of the sticks to set the baseball world agog with that blazing fast ball and the beautiful control.

Now he still had the control, but a dinky hook, a change of pace, an occasional screw ball, and a floater, had taken the place of the fast one. He no longer started games. Joe Seeley worked him in spots, an inning here and an inning or two there, very brief stints, never letting the batters gauge that slow stuff.

BUCK O'DOWD said sourly, "Listen to that lousy Kerrigan. He's scared as hell now. He figured on this first one for sure, and then if he could grab one of the other two he'd be tied up with us."

Reub Jones listened to Kerrigan, who was sitting on the edge of the dugout, trying to rattle Johnny Braxton, yelling at his batter at the plate. They rated Kerrigan the manager of the year, and possibly he deserved it, because he'd taken the sixth-place Monarchs and in one year lifted them to second, with a very good chance of nos-

ing out the Grays for the pennant. If he came in under the wire this year he'd be sitting on top of the world, crowing at lesser men, a great short stop; maybe a great manager, too, if success only meant greatness. But Buck O'Dowd was right. Kerrigan was a louse, despised by all men who knew him intimately.

Reub Jones knew him intimately because Skip Kerrigan was planning on marrying Sally Jones, who happened to be Reuben Jones' daughter. Sally didn't know him intimately. Sally knew him as a successful young ball player, one who dressed well, and spoke nicely, and made a nice impression off the ball field.

They'd met when Reub Jones played with the Monarchs, and Kerrigan had come up as the shortstop, a rash, loud-mouthed rookie who'd talked his way into a regular berth with the club, and then eventually talked the likeable Bill Craft out of a position as manager of the Monarchs. He was a club house lawyer, fomenting trouble with his remarks, and very cleverly palming off the responsibility for it on the shoulders of poor Bill Craft. He'd then talked his way in as manager of the team, and his first move had been to ask for waivers on the ancient Reuben Jones.

After nineteen years with the Monarchs, the Farmer should have been given his release and permitted to make a deal and a little money for himself. Skip Kerrigan didn't do business that way, even for his prospective father-in-law. He'd undoubtedly explained that little move to Sally, too, because some of the papers had mentioned it. He could explain everything to Sally, and this was supposed to have been a business proposition. He owed it to the Monarchs to collect that waiver money for them.

Reuben Jones had never tried to argue with his daughter, knowing how clever Kerrigan was. When they were alone he, Kerrigan, would explain everything—how he was disliked; how other men were jealous of him; how hard he'd had it, reaching the top; the bitter envies and jealousies of frustrated ball players who resented his becoming a big league manager at twenty-seven.

The sports writers weren't supposed to like him, either, because he didn't pay obeisance to them the way other players did.

He was a lone wolf in Sally's eyes, fighting his battles without help of other players or scribes, overcoming all obstacles.

Besides, he was the first man in her life, and she wasn't able to compare him with other men. She was fresh out of college, and Skip Kerrigan dressed nice, and looked nice. That meant a lot. Knowing all this, Reuben Jones didn't attempt to argue with her. Only after Kerrigan had released him to the Grays did he realize how serious the affair was. Kerrigan wanted him out of the way, too, knowing that the veteran pitcher had watched him come up the ladder by devious means and dirty.

Sally Jones had to find out pretty soon, but words wouldn't do it. Skip Kerrigan had a way with words, himself. Kerrigan had to reveal his true self in one devastating move.

Reuben Jones had thought of that all season since coming to the Monarchs; he'd thought about it frantically since Sally had called him long distance three weeks before to announce they'd set the wedding date for October—after the World Series, if Skip Kerrigan could drive his team to the pennant.

Buck O'Dowd was saying grimly, "Everything comes his way—all the breaks of baseball. He has no injuries to speak of all season; a couple of kids come through like they've been playing big-league baseball all their lives."

"It'll take more than breaks to win this game this afternoon," Ed Colby grinned, "the way Johnny is throwing out there. We win this and he's on the spot, we win one of the next two and we have two out of three of the series, and the pennant."

"Game ain't over," O'Dowd said laconically, and then a Monarch batter slammed a hard ball straight back at Johnny Braxton. Instinctively, Braxton put up his hand to ward off the batted ball. Reub Jones heard the sickening smack, and he watched the ball skitter away toward third.

A quick play by Lou Kalendish at third killed the runner, but Braxton was hurt. He was doubled over, holding his left hand, the pitching hand, between his knees.

Buck O'Dowd and Ed Colby got up as one man, and Colby trotted desperately toward the other end of the bullpen. Time was called on the field. The Grays gathered around Johnny Braxton, and then led

him in to the dugout where Doc Tucker, the club physician could inspect the injured hand.

Behind him, Reub Jones could hear Buck O'Dowd cursing softly, steadily, and the sound was interspersed with the sharp spat of the ball as it struck his mitt. Ed Colby was young, and he could start throwing fairly hard right from the start.

They were going to take a lot of time in that dugout, but Braxton would not pitch any more. Reub Jones was positive of that. They had to take time to let Colby get warmed for his task.

Skip Kerrigan was standing at the edge of the dugout, hands in his back pockets, looking across the field at the Gray dugout. The Monarch dugout was on the first-base side of the field. Sally was in the stands this afternoon, sitting behind the Monarch dugout. She'd sat behind the Gray dugout the previous afternoon.

Reub watched Kerrigan crossing home plate, heading for the Gray dugout, and he knew the reason why. Kerrigan was going over there to get this game started again, to jump on Ed Colby before he was properly warmed for his relief assignment this afternoon. He would put up a beef with the umpires over the delay.

There was some jawing at the edge of the Gray dugout with Kerrigan, Seeley and the umpires, and then Seeley walked out for a conference with the Monarch third baseman and captain, Lou Kalendish. This took a little more time, with Skip Kerrigan talking violently with the umpire.

When the ump again approached Joe Seeley, the Monarch manager waved to the pen.

Buck O'Dowd called sourly to Colby, "Take a few more, Ed. To hell with Kerrigan."

Big Ed threw two more balls, grinned, and came to the bench for his jacket.

Reub Jones said to him, "Put it out, Ed."

The relief pitcher nodded. He walked in slowly, looking down at the grass. Reub got up, slipped out of his jacket, and started to throw to O'Dowd again, even though he didn't think he'd be going in this afternoon.

Joe Seeley was sending two more relief hurlers out to the pen. They were coming up along the left field foul line, walking fast. O'Dowd said grimly, "What'd I tell

you about that damn Kerrigan, Farmer?"

"I know," the Farmer murmured. O'Dowd didn't have to tell him anything about Kerrigan. Skip Kerrigan had lined up for himself the finest girl in the world, and he didn't deserve her. He wouldn't make her happy because a man like that couldn't make anyone happy.

ED COLBY set the Monarch down in order, retiring the side, and the Farmer sat down again.

"Our ball game," O'Dowd observed. "They don't beat Ed too much out there."

Reub Jones wasn't thinking about the ball game any more. With Colby on the mound now, and a two run lead it seemed fairly safe. The other problem was the big one.

In the sixth inning the Monarchs picked up a run, making it 2-1 against them. The run was unearned—a Gray outfielder losing a ball in the sun.

In the seventh they tied it up on a single, a sacrifice, and a fluke texas league bingle to right. The ball just cleared the outstretched glove of first baseman, Andy Winters, who'd raced back after it. The runner scored, and Buck O'Dowd was fit to be tied.

"You can't beat him," O'Dowd grated. "He's got the luck of the Irish with him."

It was tied through the eighth and the ninth, and in the ninth Joe Seeley pulled Colby for a pinch hitter with a Gray runner on second and two away. The pinch batter popped up, and they waited out in the pen for Seeley's decision. It was two to two going into the tenth.

Seeley had the rookies Ben Shadow, and the right-hander, Rush McCoy. McCoy hadn't been going too well of late, and Shadow was a first year man, twenty years old. It would be a tough assignment to put him in this afternoon when one base hit might mean the ball game, and even possibly the pennant.

Reub was not too surprised when Joe Seeley called him out to take Colby's place. He hadn't expected to get into this ball game at all, but with both Braxton and Colby out, it was a logical choice. They knew he wouldn't walk anybody, and they knew he wouldn't crack under pressure. For an inning or two he usually had it, and this game might not go more than that.

O'Dowd said when Reub picked up his jacket, "Make 'em like it, Farmer. Twist it around their damned necks."

Reub smiled a little. He started across the grass, a tall, angular man walking like a farmer behind his plow, long, easy strides, long arms swinging a little, no hurry, jaws working on a wad of gum.

Eddie Smith, Gray second baseman, said to him when he came up, "They're all easy, Farmer. They're up and they're down."

"Sure," Reub said.

Winters, the first-sacker, gave him the ball, and he started to throw to Pete Halsey the catcher.

They stood around watching him for a while. When he threw that little curve they all grinned because it was a cute pitch. It didn't swoop and it didn't swerve; it just dipped a little, away from the bat, and they'd seen it work before.

"All behind you, Farmer," Kalendish said.

They liked him. They worked hard when he was on the mound because they knew he gave the best he had every time out. They could see from the record books how good he'd been when he had it.

Reub Jones picked up the rosin bag, patted it, and tossed it away. Skip Kerrigan was in the batter's circle, squatting, kneeling on a bat, watching him. Montgomery, Monarch leadoff man, was standing outside the rectangle, waiting to go in.

Kerrigan was on the slim side, reddish hair and eyebrows, a thin face, a great pair of baseball hands. He'd developed into a real shortstop.

Reub glanced over at Sally behind the Monarch dugout. She was smiling at him. She had on a blue suit, and a white hat with a blue feather in it. She had a good job with a style designer, and she didn't have to get married this early.

She had brown hair like her mother, and brown eyes, and if her mother knew that her father was letting her marry Skip Kerrigan, the mother would turn over in her grave.

Reub Jones went to work on Montgomery. He threw to the outside; he threw to the inside and low down but in the strike zone, and then he got Montgomery to bite at the hook, and the Monarch rapped it down to Mack Workman at short. Workman came up with the ball, threw to first,

for the out. And that brought up Kerrigan.

Kerrigan came in, grinning, tugging at his cap, hitting from the right side, not too much of a hitter, usually around .270. He faked a bunt toward first on the first pitch, bringing Winters in on the run. He didn't go for the ball, but it gave Reub Jones an idea. He turned that idea over in his mind a few times as he rubbed the ball after getting it back from Halsey. Kerrigan wasn't going to bunt this time, but he was known as a good bunter, and a pretty dirty base runner. He was known to have dumped bunts along the first base line, and then given the pitcher the hip as he went down to pick up the ball.

He wouldn't do that to Reuben Jones—not with Reub's daughter watching a dozen yards away. Kerrigan was too smart for that; he was too close to his prize.

Reub got him on a short fly to right field, giving him nothing good to hit at, giving none of them anything good. His control this afternoon was perfect, and the arm felt good. The knowledge, too, that he might be contributing to Skip Kerrigan's downfall was an added incentive.

Milt Rice, a left-handed sticker, came into the slot, and Reub got him with the hook, a little twister which broke down and in toward Rice. The Monarch slapped it into the dirt and it rolled out to the box. Reuben Jones picked it up and tossed to first for the third out.

Joe Seeley said to him when he came in, "You got it doing tricks out there, Farmer."

Reub nodded. He had his jacket on and he sat in a corner of the dugout, watching Kerrigan out at short, looking across at Sally in the box.

"Hold 'em for an inning or two," Seeley said. "We'll get you that run, Farmer."

"Plenty of time," Reuben Jones told him, and Seeley grinned. He was a short, squat man with graying hair, a wide face, heavy jowls. Everybody liked Joe Seeley.

THE Grays didn't score in the tenth, and it went on through the tenth, the eleventh and the twelfth, Reuben Jones throwing them up, throwing always away from their strength, hitting corners with that little hook, serving up an occasional slow one. He gave one hit in the eleventh, and another hit in the twelfth, but neither runner advanced beyond first base.

The big crowd cheered him when he came in at the end of the twelfth. He touched his cap faintly and ducked down into the dugout. He went through the thirteenth, the start of the fourteenth with the head of the Monarch batting order, Montgomery, in the slot, the score still two all.

Montgomery timed the hook and slapped it into right for a clean single. Reuben Jones watched the flight of the ball, his face expressionless. When the ball came back to the infield, Andy Winters, the first sacker brought it over to him.

"One little bingle, Farmer," Winters said. "That's all they get."

When he started to turn around to go back to his position, Reuben Jones said, "Andy."

Winters turned and waited. Reuben said to him, "Kerrigan will lay it down toward first. I'll cover. You play the bag."

The first baseman looked a little surprised, but he nodded.

"He might try to push it through second for a hit-and-run," Reuben said. "I'd like Eddie to stay at his position."

"Sure," Winters nodded.

It was a logical explanation. If Winters came in on Kerrigan's bunt, Eddie Smith had to cross over to cover first, leaving the keystone position opened. A smart hitter like Kerrigan might cross them up and push the ball out toward second instead of bunting.

He was going to bunt, though. Reuben Jones felt it inside of him. Kerrigan was waiting at the plate, waving his bat, tugging at his cap, hunching his shoulders a little.

The Farmer looked down at Pete Halsey. He looked over at Montgomery on first, and then he stepped up on the mound, knowing what he had to do. He gave Skip Kerrigan the perfect ball to bunt down toward first, and even as the ball moved toward the plate he saw the surprise on Kerrigan's face. He threw low and outside to the Monarch manager, nothing on the pitch, and not too fast.

Kerrigan had been expecting anything but a good ball to bunt at. There was a grin on his face as he held his bat out limply. Reuben Jones prayed that the ball would dribble close to the first base line.

Skip Kerrigan was a good bunter and he put it along the line, dropping his bat immediately thereafter, and sprinting for first.

Reuben Jones ran toward the ball. It was trickling down along the chalk line, about a foot or so inside the mark, coming out far enough to enable him to make his play on the ball.

He watched the ball and he watched Kerrigan tearing down the base line. There was room for Kerrigan to go by him, but it would be fairly close. Against another pitcher, there was the possibility Skip Kerrigan would lean his weight in a little, giving him the hip, thus breaking up his chance of making the play. Kerrigan wouldn't do this to Reuben Jones, not with the Farmer's daughter watching along that first base line.

The Farmer fielded the ball, keeping one eye on Kerrigan's flying legs. Just as the ball settled into his glove, he leaned his weight over toward the base line. He heard Kerrigan's startled yelp before the contact. He tried to brace himself as best he could against the drive of Kerrigan's legs, thankful that it was the left shoulder and not the right which would be taking the punishment.

Kerrigan slammed into him and he went down, hard, throwing himself backward after the first contact, rolling, losing his hat, sprawling awkwardly on the ground, a stunned expression on his face. He managed to retain his grip on the ball, but of course there was no play.

Kerrigan had stumbled past him, nearly falling himself, and then he'd continued on toward first. Reuben Jones tried to get up and he fell backwards, head lolling. His graying hair had been mussed when his hat fell from his head, and he made a pitiful spectacle as he sprawled on the ground.

The fans were roaring wrathfully. Lou Kalendish raced across from third, yelling, "Time—time!"

Kalendish went right past the Farmer on the ground, heading for Kerrigan, and Reuben Jones heard him cursing as he went by. Andy Winters and Eddie Smith grabbed him before he could hit Kerrigan.

Joe Seeley and a half dozen Gray players stormed out of the dugout, Seeley making his way toward the first-base umpire, protesting volubly.

"The louse!" Kalendish raged. "The dirty louse!"

Skip Kerrigan was yelling, also, shaking his head, stamping on first base, his face

red. Pete Halsey and shortstop Mack Workman helped Reuben Jones to his feet, but he staggered and nearly fell again, and the crowd howled some more.

"Giving him the hip," Halsey snarled. "Imagine a dog like that!"

"You all right, Farmer?" Workman was saying anxiously. He yelled at Seeley, "Get Doc out here."

"Get him into the bench," Halsey growled. "This guy's hurt."

They helped Reuben Jones into the dugout and he slumped down on the bench. Doc Tucker felt his shoulder for broken bones. He pressed the Farmer's ribs, and he said,

"Nothing broken. Just shook. It was a nasty fall."

"Fall, my neck," Halsey grated. "That rat Kerrigan hipped him."

"I'm all right," Reuben Jones mumbled. He sat there, shaking his head, rubbing his neck and his left shoulder. Doc Tucker held an ice pack to the back of his neck.

Joe Seeley came in, face grim. He said to Tucker, "How is he, Doc?"

"Nothing broken," Tucker repeated.

"I can pitch," the Farmer muttered. He kept rubbing the left shoulder as he sat on the bench. The home plate umpire was looking down at them from the top step of the dugout.

Joe Seeley looked anxious. He said, "Maybe you better get to the dressing room and rest up. You had a bad one, Farmer."

"All right," Reuben Jones told him. "I can go, Joe."

"Give him a few minutes," Seeley said to the umpire.

They were still booing Skip Kerrigan unmercifully as he waited on first base, face grim, sullen. This time he didn't dare ask the umpire to get the game going.

THE Farmer came out of the dugout after a while, and the crowd gave him an ovation. He walked to the mound, and Lou Kalendish gave him the ball.

"We're all behind you," the Gray captain growled. "I'm taking that guy Kerrigan apart after this game."

"Let it go," Reuben Jones said. He didn't look at his daughter in the box. She knew enough about baseball to know what had happened on that play.

It was Rice, Shepherd and McAfee in

front of him, none down, and runners on first and second. They were going to bunt again on this next play to advance the runners to second and third.

Reuben Jones got his signal from Halsey and walked to the rubber. He looked over at Kerrigan on first base, the first time he'd looked at the man since the collision. His face was bland, expressionless, but the humor was there in his blue eyes, deep down.

Skip Kerrigan knew. Reuben Jones could see that in his face. He knew, and that made it all the sweeter.

Milt Rice got a bad ball to bunt, high, inside. He got his bat on it, but the ball didn't roll very far. Pete Halsey stormed out from behind the plate, scooped up the ball, and pegged to third for the force.

Dick Shepherd waited for the fat pitch which he would never get in a million years. The Farmer worked carefully, shrewdly, touching the corners with his stuff. He put the hook on the outside corner, low down, and Shepherd broke his back going after it.

He sent one in on the handle, and Shepherd fouled it off for another strike, giving the Farmer the big edge. He didn't need much more. The pressure was all on Dick Shepherd now. He was hugging the plate, knowing the kind of stuff he would get—the tantalizing pitches which you couldn't let go with two strikes on you. It was the stuff you couldn't get the fat part of your bat on, and you were afraid the umpire would call strikes.

Sweating, Shepherd fouled one off, let another go by which was a ball by a matter of one inch, and then cut again. His easy roller out to Workman was converted into a double play, retiring the side.

The Farmer rubbed his arm thoughtfully and glanced toward the Monarch dugout. Skip Kerrigan was coming out, his face white with anger, knowing he'd been duped, and by an old man.

Reuben Jones smiled sweetly at the Monarch manager as Kerrigan went across the foul line out toward short. The big roar of approval for the Farmer swiftly changed to a storm of boos for Skip Kerrigan as he came in sight.

It was the worst booing Farmer Jones had ever heard in his long baseball career. It seemed as if every fan in the place was standing up, venting his wrath on Skip Kerrigan.

Kerrigan felt it, too, accustomed as he was to boos. Farmer Jones slowed down, suddenly aware of the fact that this little drama needed just one more nice twist, another turn of the screw.

After the third out the ball had been rolled automatically toward the pitcher's box. It rolled a few feet past Reuben Jones as he started toward the dugout. He bent down, picked it up, and then turned and tossed it the few feet to Skip Kerrigan who was crossing behind him toward his position.

Everybody in the park saw the little gesture. It was as if Farmer Jones was indicating to the crowd that things were all right between Kerrigan and himself; that he was forgiving Kerrigan for spiking him. It was a sportsmanlike gesture.

Not even umpire Tom Bolton, behind the plate, the nearest man, heard what Farmer Jones said. His lips scarcely moved, and he was smiling blandly at Kerrigan.

The Farmer said, "You liver-bellied rat. How do you like losing a pennant?"

Kerrigan had been under a terrific strain these final weeks of the season. This afternoon that strain had been stretched to the breaking point. The Farmer's clever act on the bunt, bringing the wrath of the crowd down upon the Monarch manager when he'd been innocent; and the Farmer's artful hurling which was upsetting the applecart for the Monarchs, had already been too much for Kerrigan.

Farmer Jones saw the wild light come into his eyes. Still smiling as if trying to make amends with Kerrigan, the Farmer said softly, "Crawl out to your position, you guttersnipe. You'll never get over being a bush-leaguer."

That was when Kerrigan hit him. The Farmer saw the punch coming, a wild, right swing, Kerrigan's white, hate-filled face behind it. He could have pulled away from the blow because Kerrigan telegraphed it from the ground, but he didn't. He turned his face a little so that he would take it on the cheek, and then he went down as if he'd been axed—an old man slugged by a younger man; a veteran who had been making overtures to a young, ambitious player who'd forgotten himself.

The Farmer flopped quivered, and lay where he was, listening to the sounds around him. The howls of rage from the

stands were punctuated by the short, savage curses of the Gray players who'd swarmed out of the dugout and overrun the hapless Skip Kerrigan. He could hear the sharp, sodden whack of fists colliding with flesh, and the quick yells of the umpires trying to separate the fighters.

They rolled him over, and after a while he opened his eyes, staring around dazedly.

"You all right, Farmer?" Kalendish asked grimly. "We took care of that guy for you."

"What happened?" the Farmer asked weakly.

"Get him in to the bench," Seeley ordered.

The Farmer sat on the bench, a wet towel held against the side of his face, the picture of blasted innocence. He watched Winters whack a double off the right field wall, leading off. Then Lou Kalendish picked out a waist high pitch and hit it through short.

Skip Kerrigan, of course, had been banished from the game, and the utility infielder there never had a chance. Kalendish hit that ball as if he were hitting it straight at Kerrigan, straight through Kerrigan. Winters scored with the winning run.

Sally was waiting outside the Gray dressing room when Reuben Jones came out. The father, rubbing the side of his face, looked at her in surprise. He said, "Thought you had a date tonight, honey."

"Not any more," Sally snapped.

The Farmer shook his head. "Skip forgot himself," he murmured.

"And he'll have to forget me," his daughter told him. "I've been thinking about the way he didn't give you a release . . . and all those other things he always explained away so easily. There must be *something* wrong with a man everyone else detests. Well, even if he could explain away what happened out there today, I still wouldn't have him," She finished.

Farmer Jones took her arm and led her out to the waiting cab. As they were getting in he said, "Those are harsh words."

Sally nodded, grim-lipped.

The Farmer leaned back against the cushions. He said resignedly, "Well, if that's the way it has to be, honey. You know, that Lou Kalendish is a nice boy. You ever really get to talk to him, Sally?"

The smile was in his eyes again—deep down where contentment lay.

ONE MAN'S RACKET

"You won't win," his coach told net-star Jeff Blake the day of the crucial tournament with Hadley College. "You're as good as anyone they have, and you're not yellow . . . but you just don't have the fight."

By W. H. TEMPLE

ON THE train ride to Hadley, nobody was doing any talking. Jeff Blake could feel the silence, looking at the other players and at the tennis coach, Pop Fleming. Jeff couldn't stand the quiet and finally he said, "How many years you made this trip, Pop?"

"This will be the twenty-seventh year," Pop Fleming said. "It gets a little monotonous. Maybe next year—"

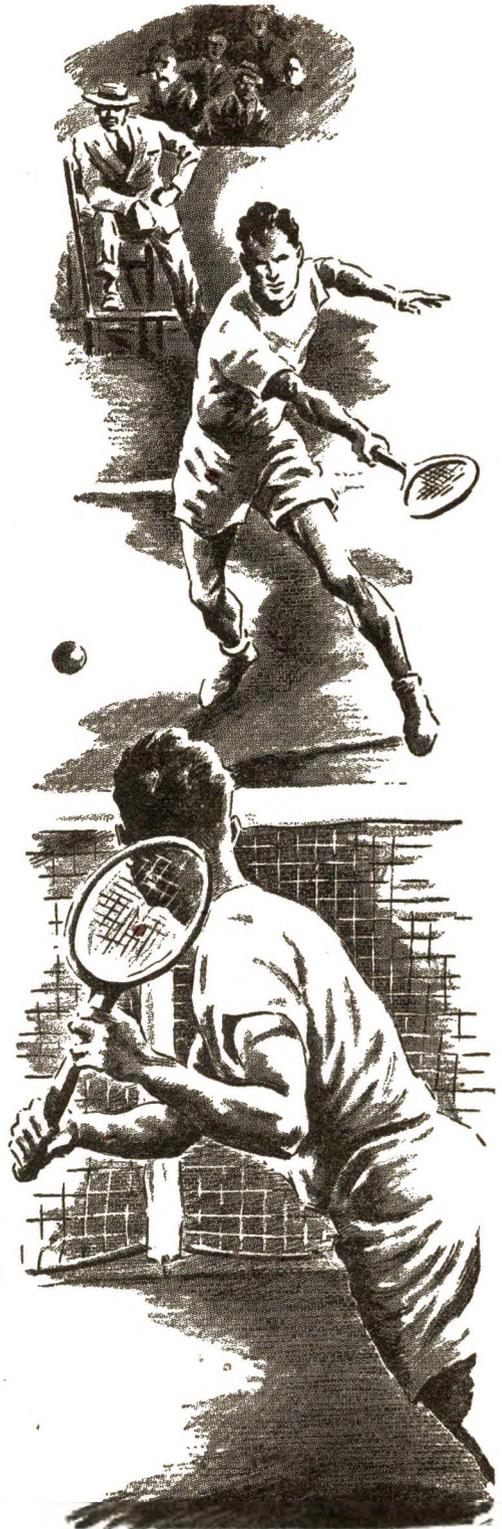
The train thundered through a tunnel and he let the words hang there. He didn't need to say anymore. The train emerged into sunshine again and Hal Finney, the number two singles player, pointed out the window. They saw the spire of the Hadley chapel first and then the other gray stone buildings. The train slowed down and went on past the campus to come to a stop downtown.

They were getting off at the junction, three miles south of the campus. It was all new and exciting to Hal Finney and to Morley and Cavanaugh, the doubles players.

Jeff Blake felt differently. He had been here before. He knew what it was like and he thought of Art Pike, seeing him across the net, broad as a barn door, hitting that ball back harder and harder all afternoon. It was not a nice memory.

They got off the train and stood there on the platform, four tennis players and their coach.

● Blake put the ball down
the middle . . .



"Maybe they got the signals crossed," Hal Finney said. "There's nobody here to meet us."

Pop Fleming shook his head. "They stopped meeting us a long time ago," he said. "When you beat a team year after year maybe it changes your attitude. Now they don't bother to meet us at the station. It doesn't matter. I know where we go."

They rode toward the campus in a taxi and then suddenly Fleming asked the driver to stop.

"We'll walk from here," he said. "Give us a chance to stretch our legs and I want to show you something."

They were in front of a small building and Pop Fleming led the way inside and into a room on the left. It was filled with trophies and the coach walked across the room to stand before a huge cup standing alone on a table.

"This is it," Fleming said. "The trophy we've been trying to get for twenty-seven years. The ironic thing is that the trophy was presented by a Hillside alumnus. Twenty-seven years ago. I remember it very well."

They crowded closer to look at the trophy, but Jeff Blake hung back. He'd seen it before. He didn't need to look to know that the only name inscribed on it was that of Hadley. The tennis matches between the two colleges, Hadley and Hillside, was played in a manner similar to the Davis Cup matches, four singles and a doubles match, and the winning team was the host each year. The series had begun at Hillside. Hadley had won, taken the cup back home and there it had remained since. The successive string of defeats was hard enough to take, but it was harder to take the complacency and the arrogance of Hadley.

"Let's go," Pop Fleming said. "We're probably quartered in the dorm across the street. It's the oldest one on campus, the facilities aren't too good, and that's where they usually put us."

Pop Fleming was retiring this year. Jeff Blake knew how much he wanted to see that cup come back to Hillside. There were plenty of years when he thought he had a chance. But when he came up with a star player, Hadley came up with a better one.

In the dorm across the street they found their rooms, their quarters not too well

cleaned, the whole atmosphere one of contempt. The doubles team and Hal Finney started out to see the courts and Pop Fleming came into Jeff Blake's room.

"We try it again," Jeff said. "We may not be smart but we're stubborn."

"We got a doubles team," Pop said. "I'm not worried about Morley and Cavanaugh." They had come to Hillside together as freshman and both of them were used to each other's game. In a year Pop Fleming had ironed out the wrinkles. Now with a full season of varsity play behind them, they were at their best.

"We should be able to count on the doubles," Pop said. "In the first day's play you'll meet Riker. Hal Finney goes against Art Pike. You'll take Riker, Finney will fold up against Pike. That will make the score one match all at the end of the first day. The second afternoon we win the doubles and have a two to one lead. Then on the third day Finney plays Riker and you tackle Pike in the final. Maybe Finney can take Riker and that will clinch it. That would be the easy way."

Jeff Blake didn't say anything. There was nothing that could be said. He knew that when he had enrolled at Hillside, Pop Fleming figured he had the player who could bring back the trophy. It hadn't worked out that way. Hillside had come up with Jeff Blake and at the same time Hadley had unveiled Artie Pike.

Jeff Blake could remember playing Pike as a sophomore. When it was over and he had lost, Pop Fleming had said, "This time you learned his game. You got the experience. Next year you will take him. Your form is better and your shots are better."

What Pop didn't say was that Art Pike was the mechanical man across the net. He didn't look like a tennis player. He just stood across the net and beat your brains out with his methodical play. He was a tennis machine.

This would be Jeff Blake's last chance against Pike. They were both graduating at the end of the year and there wouldn't be another opportunity. Blake thought of all that Fleming had patiently taught him over four years. This was going to be his last chance to repay him. But maybe as Pop Fleming hoped, they could do it the easy way, without his having to beat Pike.

THE tournament began the next afternoon. There was a good crowd on hand as always and it was a noisy tennis crowd. There was not the tension that was to be expected in a long standing feud, and there were not many Hillside fans on view.

Jeff Blake walked out on the court and Riker was across the net. They warmed up and finally they were ready to go. Blake remembered Riker from the past year. He had a big serve and that was his game. There was just one way to play Riker, that was to hold your own service and wait for Riker to weaken.

Riker was starting off and Blake crouched. The racket flashed overhead and the ball went past Blake. The crowd applauded noisily.

Blake crossed the court and waited for it again. The ball came in on his backhand, hit with terrific speed and spin. He lunged and got the gut of the racket on the ball but he could not control it and the score was thirty-love. Three points later Riker had held his serve and they changed courts.

Blake put the ball down the middle on Riker's backhand. The shot was cross courted and Blake hit a forehand straight down the line and took the net. Riker put up a lob that was dropping in center court. Blake got under the ball, timed it, then went into the air. His racket sliced overhead and he put the ball away with an overhead smash. He kept putting pressure on Riker's backhand and won the second game without much trouble.

It went along that way for fourteen games. Blake went back deep and waited for Riker's cannonball. The ball hit a foot inside on the forehand corner. Blake was concentrating on meeting the ball and keeping it in play. He returned down the middle and Riker tried for the corner. Blake was there in plenty of time and he put power into his backhand. Riker stood and watched the ball hit inside for the point.

Again Blake waited for the serve. The first ball was in the net. The second was good and he laced the ball for the backhand and raced in. A scorching shot was down the middle but Blake was right there. He dumped it across the net for the point.

Four points later he broke through and holding his own serve in the following game he had won the initial set. They began again and Jeff had it under control. He

won the second set at nine-seven and by then Riker had shot his bolt. His serve crumpled in the third set and Blake finished him off quickly at six-three. He walked off the court and sat down on the grass beside Pop Fleming.

The groundskeepers began working on the court, readying it for the Finney-Pike match.

"That was very good to watch," Pop Fleming said. "It was never in any doubt. We have a one to nothing lead. It's nice to be ahead."

"Riker's no better than last year when he took one set from me," Jeff said. "The big serve and nothing else. Finney will have a chance to take him if he plays his game."

He sat back to watch the hapless number two man go up against Pike. The match began thirty minutes later and it was not exciting. There was never anything exciting about watching Pike. He did not ever seem to run for the ball but he was always there, anticipating the shot, calmly waiting for it, stroking it back, and Hal' Finney was never better than even. He lost the first set at six games to four. The second set was six to three and Pike blew him off the court with a six to one third canto.

"Very educational," Jeff Blake said when it was over. "Very good to watch unless, if like myself, you have to play the guy some time."

"You're not afraid of him, are you, Jeff?" Pop Fleming said.

"Of course I'm afraid of him," Jeff said. "I am scared and no fooling. But don't worry about me not showing up. I'll be here to play the guy."

"I always had a notion you were a better player," Pop said. "You look better."

"I got pretty form," Jeff said. "If it was a beauty contest I'd win."

"It couldn't be heart, could it, Jeff?" Pop said.

He was not kidding; he was very serious. Jeff said, "What do you mean? I know I got a heart because half an hour before I play Pike I'll feel it hammering. When I'm inside the locker room tying my shoelaces I'll start to feel it. I'll think it's going to pop right out of my chest."

"Anyway," Pop said, "this is the last time. You'll never have to play the guy again."

Jeff didn't answer that but he knew it

wasn't true, although he would have liked nothing better. Jeff would be through with college, but not with tennis, and this summer he hoped to enter some of the tournaments and try his luck with the best. But he had already heard that Artie Pike was going to do the same thing. He did not look forward to seeing him.

He went back to the campus and at least the teams were even. The match was two days away, and it was not going to be an utter rout—if that was any consolation.

THE doubles match was the next day and it was a surprise to Hadley. They were proud of their doubles team and the Hillside boys were a sleeper. They were Ike and Mike out there. It was a very rugged and hard fought match but Pop Fleming puffed contentedly at his pipe all afternoon. The issue was never really in doubt and the Hillside duo gave up one set before winning. Hillside was out in front two matches to one.

The team ate in the Commons that night. Hal Finney didn't eat at all. He sat there and stared at his food. He was playing the first match the next day. He was playing Riker and if he won, the trophy was going back to Hillside. The thought of that had turned Hal Finney a pale shade of green.

"You can take him," Jeff said. "Stop worrying. Big serve, nothing else. Wait out the serve. Play his backhand."

"I will murder him," Hal Finney said, but he didn't sound like a man with enough nerve to murder a canary. He sounded panicky.

It would be very fine, Jeff Blake thought, if Finney could win. Then his match with Pike would be a formality. He could go out there and hit home runs over the fence and play for fun and it would have no bearing on the result. He thought it might even help him beat Artie Pike for once because the pressure would be off.

They heard the sound of hand-clapping throughout the big Commons dining room and looked up to see the Hadley tennis team entering the building.

They stopped by the Hillside players table. "Being taken care of?" Artie Pike said. "Getting enough to eat?"

"Giving us raw meat," Jeff said with a feeble attempt at humor. "Making us tough for tomorrow's matches."

Pike's eyes turned to him. They were curiously blank lackluster eyes. "Seen you before, haven't I?" he said. "Played you before?"

"Last year and the year before," Jeff said. "Name of Blake."

"I never remember names," Pike said. "Only scores. Beat you in straight sets last year, didn't I?"

"I never remember scores," Jeff said, but he did. He had planned his match with Pike very carefully the preceding year. He would go all out from the first serve and knock Pike off his feet. He would make it quick and he could remember that horrendous first set. He had thrown the book at Artie Pike and the first set had gone to twenty-two games. But it was Jeff Blake who caved in and after that it had been easy for Pike. His dinner suddenly did not taste so good.

Pop Fleming took them to a movie after dinner but that did not help much. It was about a guy fighting savages in the jungle and it looked easier to Jeff than playing tennis against Artie Pike. They went back to the dorm and put in a restless night.

"Zero hour, two o'clock," Hal Finney said the next morning. "I will ruin this Riker. I will take his big serve and drive it down his throat. I will make it easy for you, Jeff."

They went over to the courts early in the afternoon and found a mob milling around.

"News gets around quick," Pop Fleming said. "The fact that we're ahead two to one has brought a lot of Hillside alumni out of hiding."

They got dressed in the lockers and were starting out when Pop Fleming said, "Go ahead, Hal. I want to talk to Jeff a minute."

He waited until the room was quiet and the door closed behind Finney.

"Anything you want to ask about Pike? Anything I can do to help."

Jeff said, "Take a forty-five into the stands with you. When I give the signal plug him in one leg."

"Maybe it's my advanced age," Pop said. "I don't think that's very funny."

"Corny, I admit," said Jeff. "I haven't anything to ask. I know Pike's game. I go out there and play my game against him. It comes down to that." Jeff felt a little annoyed. "I do my best against him," he said. "I haven't got a secret weapon."

"All right," Pop said mildly. "I just thought you might want to unburden yourself, get something off your chest. Like your being convinced deep down that you're not good enough. Like your quitting."

Pop Fleming had never talked that way. In four years of college tennis, Jeff Blake had worshipped and idolized Pop Fleming.

"Pop," he said, "it looks like you're the man with something on his mind. The other day you intimated I lacked heart. I didn't take it seriously then. Now it looks as though you meant it. Don't hide behind an idea, Pop. You think I'm yellow?"

"Not yellow," Pop said. "Maybe not quite enough fight, that's all."

Jeff got up slowly to his full height. "I didn't present the trophy originally," he said. "I know you're eating your heart out to get it back. You've been waiting twenty-seven years. I promise to give you my game out there. I can't give you more than that."

"Unfortunately I want more," Pop said. "It takes more than that to beat Pike. Maybe I won't need you, though. Maybe Finney can do it. I spent a lot of time on Finney this year, although I never put my faith in him. I put that on you."

Pop got up and walked toward the door. Jeff Blake realized suddenly by the way he walked that Pop was really an old man. Old and disappointed and also, Jeff thought, unreasonable. He wanted this thing so much his judgment was impaired.

HE GOT up and went out to see Hal Finney and the news was what he had expected, the news was bad. The pressure had gotten to Finney and he was playing with an air of desperation that had affected his timing. He went down in three sets and the Hillside rooters who had come to cheer put no strain on their throats.

The groundskeepers went to work. Jeff Blake sat on one side. Ordinarily he would be beside Pop Fleming, but he was not anxious to listen to the coach. He was thinking about the last year. He'd given Pike everything he had and it hadn't been enough. The thought of it made Jeff angry.

He watched the court being manicured and finally they took away the mats and the lines were all freshly chalked, the net adjusted to the precise fraction of an inch.

Jeff got up off the grass and reached for a couple of tennis balls. He saw Pop Fleming coming toward him, his lips framing the words, "Good luck," and Jeff looked away and walked quickly onto the court. He stood there waiting for Pike, who came out a minute later.

Pike stood at the baseline and hammered balls at him. Jeff dumped them casually to one side or the other, then went back deep and gave Pike net practise. He tried a couple of smashes, rallied from the baseline, and experimented with a few serves. He could hear a buzzing in the stands, the Hillside fans liked his looks. They were beginning to start hoping once again.

Pike spun a racket finally. "Rough," Jeff said, and rough it was.

He went back to serve. He aimed for the forehand corner and blasted the cannonball. It was outside by half a foot. He put the twist service on the backhand, and Pike drove it straight down the middle. Blake angled for the sideline and Pike was there, stroking methodically. Blake took the ball deep on his forehand and lashed into it. He hit a low screamer just over the net and he had aimed it perfectly. It was inside by six inches and by all the laws of tennis Artie Pike should be somewhere at center court looking goggle-eyed at the ball.

But Pike was right there, not breathing hard. He smashed it down the sideline and Jeff put the ball in the net.

He walked back slowly to serve again. Pike took the heart out of his opponent. You gave him the big placement or the serve that was impossible to return and Pike returned it. You maneuvered Pike out of position and put the ball away, only Pike somehow got to it, and the ball came back at you.

Blake aced Pike on the forehand and made it fifteen-all. He forged ahead to forty-fifteen and Pike brought the game to deuce. They seesawed back and forth a half dozen points before Jeff scored an ace to take the game.

They changed courts. It began once again and Jeff could see the pattern. The trouble was he was helpless to do anything about it. This was going to be like last year.

The games went on. Jeff knew he was playing top tennis but he could not break through. They had done this last time and

finally he had wavered and had collapsed.

He mopped his sweating forehead, wiped his racket hand on his shorts and looked up at the scoreboard. Six games all. Grimly he served and went in to the net, reaching for a ball, smashing it past Pike for the point. Pike, unperturbed, won the next one and the battle continued.

He held his serve and Pike promptly retaliated. Games went to ten-all finally. Just like last time, Jeff thought.

He was serving. He took a return at midcourt, and cut the ball sharply for the sideline. He could feel his muscles relax. It was his point. Then suddenly there was Pike, awkward, ungainly, but lunging for the ball, getting his racket on it, sending up a lob.

A second too late, Jeff went back for it. His try hit the net and dropped back. Jeff could taste defeat. He'd made the perfect shot and Pike had gotten it. The mechanical man was up to his old tricks. Jeff swung savagely and his first ball was way outside. He served again and double faulted. Four points later Pike had broken through and was ahead eleven games to ten.

At midcourt Jeff halted to use a towel, to wipe his arms and face. He had given everything he had and he was losing. For twenty-one games he had blasted Pike with his best shots and he was losing. Nobody could expect anymore, he thought.

He glanced up and saw Pop Fleming watching him and he felt cold inside. There was no accusation in the coach's eyes. But his look was level, measuring, a look that told Jeff Blake he had been weighed and found wanting.

For a moment he hated Pop Fleming. Then he turned and went back to await service. The ball came in, hard on his backhand and he slammed at it, venting his anger on the ball. It was outside by three feet, and involuntarily Jeff glanced across at Pop Fleming.

Suddenly he had a notion of what Pop Fleming meant. He had heart but not enough. To put it in terms of this match he had enough heart to battle for twenty games. The spectators hadn't seen it but Pop was an expert. That lob he'd failed to cover quickly enough, the double fault that followed it. They were the signs of a frustrated man who had lost his courage.

Jeff Blake crouched at the baseline, wait-

ing for the serve, searching himself. He hadn't quit he thought, but he knew that the feeling of inevitable defeat had seeped into him. That was what Pike counted on; it was what won for him.

The ball came in and he hammered it back, fighting for position. He got it finally and hit for the corner. He was close to the net and he saw the ball land right on the chalkline. He saw the chalk spurt up.

Then the linesman spoke up. "Outside," he said.

Fury raged in Jeff. He tried to hold himself in. "I'd like a repeat on that," he said.

There was silence on the court. The umpire leaned down from the chair. "How was the ball?" he said.

The linesman was red-faced, a man who had made a mistake but didn't want to admit it.

"The ball was outside," he said.

Pike grinned a little. Jeff went back and when the next serve hit on his backhand he slammed it into the net. Immediately he looked up and saw Pop Fleming. And again he knew what Pop meant. Pop was looking for a guy whom nothing would stop.

Three points later Pike had the first set.

THE balls came across the net to Blake. He took a moment to think, to try and shake off the knowledge of defeat. He owed a lot to Pop and today he was going to give it to him. He was going to be licked but in the process he was going to make a liar out of Pop Fleming.

He blasted the serve in but not recklessly. He raced toward the net and Pike passed him with a perfect placement. Jeff walked back slowly, putting the shot behind him, concentrating on the next one.

It was the same pattern again. They were holding their own games in the second set and they went to five all. Jeff held to go ahead, changed courts and began again.

He lost two points he thought he had won when Pike recovered. He lost another and was behind at love-forty.

Pike served, took the return and angled for the sidelines. Jeff got there somehow, the ball tipped back over the net and Pike was in back court. For once he had given Pike a dose of his own medicine. Jeff started back to await the next serve and he was grinning to himself.

Pike served and caught the net. The twist was good, and Jeff hit the baseline. He fired from side to side and each time Pike returned. Jeff kept swinging and on the fifth rally Pike flubbed the shot. On the next point Jeff pulled up to deuce.

Pike looked annoyed. His first serve was long. Jeff slammed the second right at him and Pike put up a floater that Jeff smashed away for the point. On a long rally Jeff took the next point and it was his set. He was giving the Hillside fans at least a run for their money.

They had a set apiece and Jeff serving again. The ball was in and Pike drove it far out of court. Jeff stared at him astonished. He had learned something, he thought. Pike was now at the stage where he had been. Maybe this was what Pop Fleming meant, when a guy was ready to give up, maybe the opponent was not far away. You just had to keep going a little longer.

He held his serve and broke through Pike. He did not do it again but when Jeff had five games he saw that Pike was letting down. Pike was letting him have the set, trying to save himself now. Jeff walked off the court and into the lockers to change his shirt.

Pop Fleming was there. Jeff said, "I guess it's fun to watch. It will be rugged from now on though, Pop. And maybe not good. I'm bushed."

"You got it wrapped up," Pop said. "I can already see that trophy. I know just the spot for it. I can sit in my office with the door open and look at it. You've out-fought the guy, Jeff. He'll be tough, but you've got him."

Jeff went back out there and the mechanical man was in evidence again. Jeff gave him the big serve and the smash and the ball came back. He kept on giving it to him and the games were even, four-all, five-all, six-all.

It was seven-six in favor of Blake and they met at the net. Pike said, "Last year you cracked." He sounded puzzled.

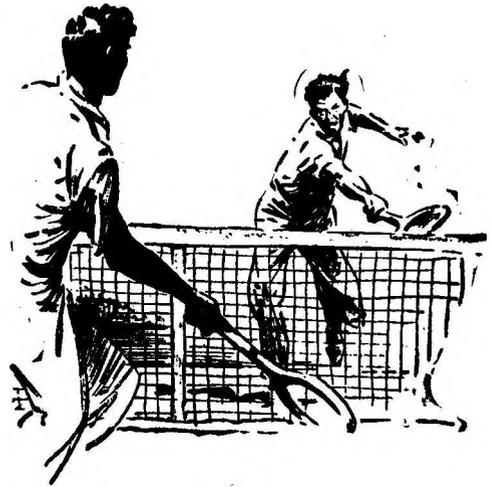
"It's a nice strategy of yours," Jeff said. "Only this time I decided not to fold up. You'll have to think of something else."

He went across the court, crouched and waited. The ball was in there, hard and bouncing high with spin. He chopped it back across the net and pulled Pike from

side to side. Switching tactics suddenly, Jeff hit to the same spot.

Pike had to shift quickly and Jeff took the net. The ball was right at him and he let his racket go loose. The ball dropped and died as Pike lunged frantically upcourt.

They began again and Pike lobbed him. He lobbed deep and the tendency each time was to go for the kill but Jeff played safe. He took the ball on the bounce, pounded for the baseline and took the net. He went in time and time again and had to go back under those lobs. His legs were shaking but he kept on. And finally waiting for another lob to come down he stepped back



and watched the ball fall just out of court.

It was love-thirty. Pike double faulted. He tried for the last time and Jeff put the ball down the forehand, pasting it down the line, a low raking shot.

Pike got there. He gave it the old try but the ball went off his racket and out of court and Jeff realized suddenly that the match was over, the trophy was headed back to Hillside.

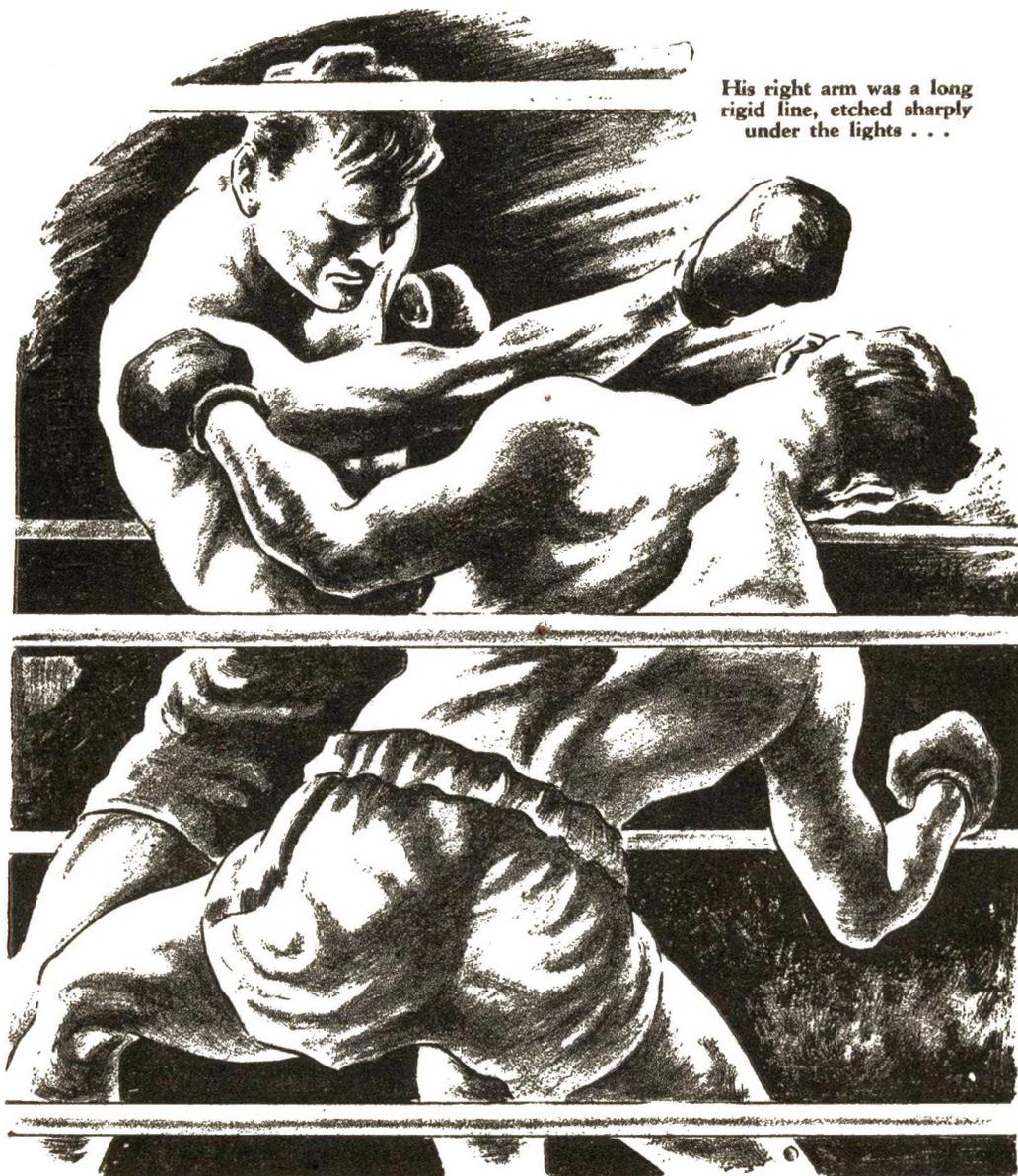
Pop Fleming, his arm around Jeff's shoulders said, "When I talked to you before, all I meant was that a champion needs more heart than most people. A champ is a guy who never knows when he's licked. Today you made the grade. When we take that trophy back you can carry it in your lap."

"We'll fill it up with beer," Jeff Blake said. "We'll have a fine ride."

When ex-con Poke Garrett entered the ring against Frankie Hipple, it wasn't the jeers of the crowd that worried Poke, or even Frankie's grim gloves . . . but the bullet in the back he'd get—if he landed a kayo on Frankie.

**Gripping Novelette of
Red Leather Courage**

His right arm was a long rigid line, etched sharply under the lights . . .



By WILLIAM HARTLEY

THE truck and trailer lumbered to a stop. Poke Garrett clambered down from the high cab and said, "Thanks, Bud. I'll grab a bite in the wagon over there and hike on in."

The driver waved cheerily and shifted gears. Poke watched the tail light disappear around a bend. He looked at his dollar watch. It was One A.M. The frosted glass of the diner windows gave out a mellow light. He started toward the entrance at the end of the wagon.

On the narrow steps which led up to the door he paused to see how much his pockets held. Voices from inside came to his ears.

Some guy was saying, "We been waitin' for a chance like this, wise guy."

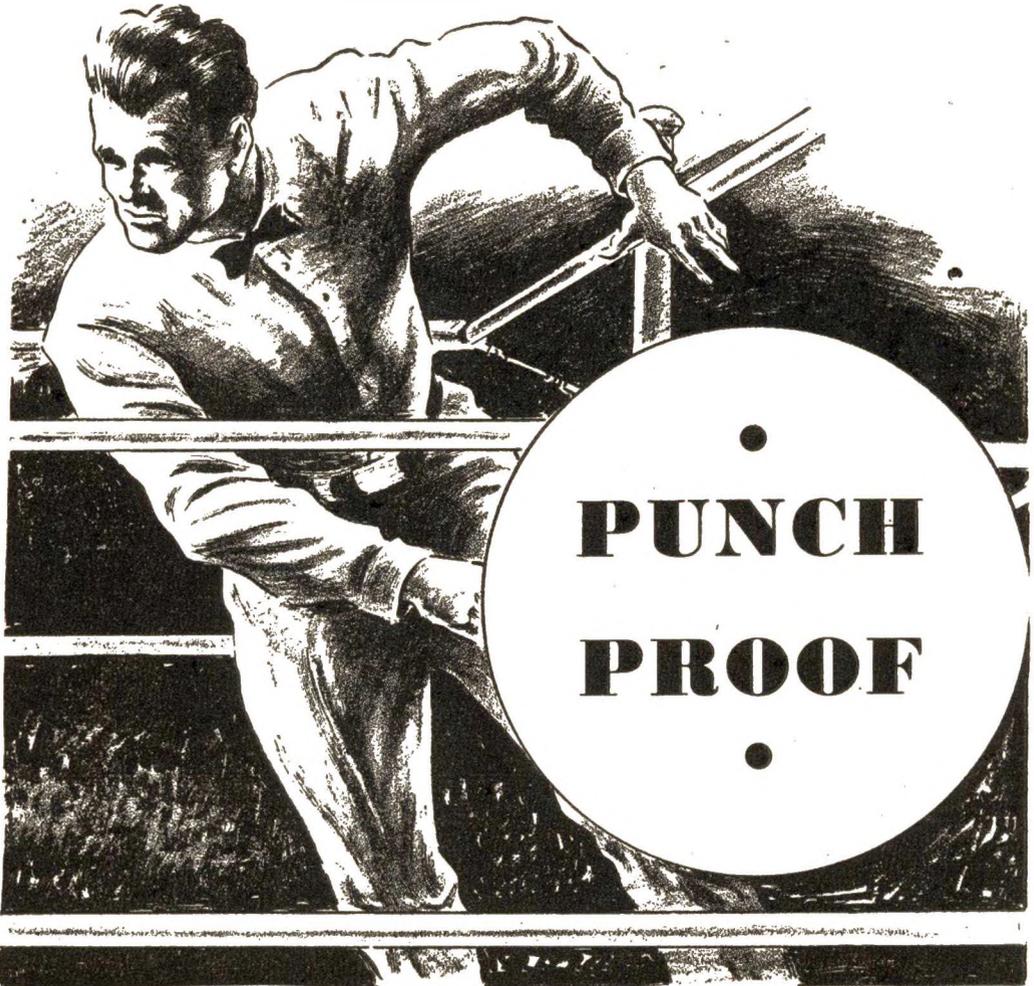
"Yeah. A chance t'get you outa town, away from yer nurse-maid pal."

"This is gonna do you a lotta good, schmalz."

A calm voice answered, "So hop to it. You got me covered. You better do a good job. If you don't, I'll have my day."

There was a slit where the frosting did not quite cover the glass. At the sound of the last voice, Poke hastily applied an eye to the crack. He could see a red-headed young man, his arms raised, sitting on a stool at the counter. The short-order

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cook was pale in a corner. A hulking figure obscured his vision for a second, then a rat-faced man with a gun in his hand came into sight. The gun-handler backed to the door and said in a sing-song voice,

"Take 'im, Frankie."

Poke opened the door suddenly, swinging with big hands as he plunged into the wagon. The rat-faced one was not quick enough to escape. Poke hit him once on top of the head. The gun clattered on the tiled floor.

There were four other men in the gang. Poke socked the first with an overhand right which spilled him against another. The red-head was up now, swinging both fists with vigor and despatch. The counter-man came to life with a swinging coffee mug. There was wild disorder for seconds, then there was silence.

Poke Garrett said, "You always were a guy to get in trouble, Red."

The auburn-haired young man kicked at one of the prone figures and said "Well I'll be blowed. It's Poke Garrett. Son, I been lookin' for you for over a year."

"Looks like you just found him in time," said the counter-man. "What are we gonna do with these guys?"

Red Poore said, "These guys, my friend, are the famed Hipple brothers. That's Ike, the one with the gat. The others are Abey, Joe and Jomey—and the big guy is Frank."

"Frankie Hipple, the pug? The heavy-weight? Holy mackerel! An' I hit him with a java mug," wailed the counter-man.

Poke said, "Interesting crowd, your pals."

"You don't know the half of it, Poke," said Poore. "Let's get the hell out of here. I'll explain on the way."

"Hey, you can't do this t'me," yelled the short order man. "These guys'll moider me."

"Son, I'm doin' a mope," said Red Poore. "If you're real smart you'll do one of your own. The wagon'll keep—if they don't take it apart."

He took Poke Garrett's arm and pushed him out the sliding door. He indicated a convertible coupe and hauled Poke into it. The starter caught immediately and the car whirled off toward the city.

Poke said, "Look, Red, you know I can't stop in town. I just passed up a truck ride

in because I didn't want to be noticed."

Red Poore said, "I know all about that rap you took. You're comin' in with me."

"And have Barton City's finest on my tail every minute? And my ex-friends snubbing me—or worse, pitying me? Fine chance, Red. You can drive me through and let me go on my way, if you will. But don't try stopping in town. I won't do it."

Red Poore said, "Look, Poke. You haven't been a pal of mine since we left grade school, see? You was always nice t'me an' everything—but you got in with the collegiate crowd an' we dint see each other any more. But I always remembered stuff, see? You know—how we learned t'swim together. On'y you never learned, did ya?"

"No," said Poke. "I never learned to swim."

"A guy pulled y'out of the drink down at college, dint he?" said Red. "It was in the papers."

"My roommate pulled me out of the canal," said Poke. "Funny you should remember that. It was four years ago."

"Yeah, I got a good memory, see?" said Red softly. "I remember lots of things. Like the time you saved me from a lickin' from them same Hipple brothers we just hammered. We was on'y kids then."

"That's right. That's the same mob? I'll bet they grew up tough," grinned Poke.

"Just like you seen 'em," said Red Poore. "Rough, tough an' nasty. They swing a lot o'weight around town these days. Political strong-arm guys, y'know?"

"They evidently don't like you, Red."

"No," said Red. "They don't like me. I'm in the same racket, in a way. They control the fight business aroun' the state, see?"

"Are you a fighter, Red?" said Poke.

"Naw. I got that knocked out of me," grinned the redhead. "I got a manager's license. The Hipples see that my fighters don't get fights, so I ain't got any fighters 'cept one right now. But I got the license an' the yen. I got in the Hipple hair a couple times an' they kinda hate me. But look—goin' back to where you got me mixed up with the Hipples.

"I was knocked bow-legged when they hung that rap on you, Poke. I couldn't believe you stole stuff outa dromedaries, or whatever y'call them things. You ain't

the kind of a guy who would do that."

"You mean dormitories. I did a bit in the reform school for it," pointed out Poke Garrett steadily.

"Yeah," said Red Poore. "Yeah, I heard. I was out west with a welter I had while you was in stir. A guy named Meanly put the works t'ya, dint he?"

"Well, I made reparation," said Poke. "They could have given me a suspended sentence. But George Meanly wanted to make a name for himself—you know how it is. Forget that stuff, Red. It's done with, now. Nothing can be done about it."

THEY were entering the city. Red said rapidly, "I'm gonna give ya a couple of fast jolts, Poke, an' then if ya wanta go on through, I'll take ya a hundred miles from Barton City, okay?"

Poke's big hands opened and closed. After a moment he said, "Go ahead, Red. But you're wasting your breath. I prom—I mean I don't dare stay in Barton City."

"Look, Poke. George Meanly is out of office right now. So he moved here an' started practicin' an' that's where he is now. An' tied in with him is your old roomie, Forrest De Haven. Old man De Haven croaked, an' the kid is runnin' the law offices. They're both handlin' plenty of cases for the Hipples. They got plenty irons in the fire, this mob. But I'm on'y int'rested in one iron, see? I want the fight racket cleared up. Poke, can y'still handle the mitts?"

"I haven't boxed in two years—what did you say? Meanly and Pep De Haven have teamed up?"

"Not in the open, pal. On the q.t., see?" said Red Poore.

"How do you know all this?"

"Well, Meanly is sweet on, a nurse in town. An' the nurse—well, she goes for redheads, kinda. An' me wantin' t'know a lot of stuff—you get it?"

Poke said, "Yes, I get it. Pep De Haven and Meanly. And the rackets, eh? What's your proposition, Red?"

Poore said excitedly, "Fritz Berman an' me got a joint on the Hill. It's a gym an' trainin' quarters and a place t'live. I got plenty of scratch—the horses been good to me, see? Now what Fritz an' me need is a guy with a front. What we also need is a good heavyweight fighter. Now if a guy

was both—an' he also knew the angles on Meanly an' De Haven an' the Hipples—perfect, ain't it?"

"But the public won't stand for me. I'm a black sheep—an ex-con. My reputation would ruin whatever chance you might have to do whatever you want to do."

Red Poore said shrewdly, "Poke, there's more people in this burg thinks you never took no dough than people who *do* think so. You was a local hero in your day. All America fullback, intercollegiate boxin' champ—the public goes for that stuff. If you was to make a comeback right in your own town the newspaper boys'd go for it like flies aroun' molasses. Look—give it a shake, huh? If it don't work you can always screw."

Poke pondered. His lined, tanned young face was solemn in the fitful light from the street lamps. He looked down at his worn clothing, the big, horny hands lying in his lap. He looked out of the window at the sleeping city.

Nostalgia swept over him as the familiar scenes of his boyhood swept by. A light rain began to fall and the wet streets mirrored the electric lights, throwing soft shadows across half-forgotten haunts.

He said quietly, "Nothing can be much worse than wandering the face of the earth as a pariah. I've seen so much of the seamy side this past year. What can they do to me that hasn't already been done?"

"You're on?" demanded Red eagerly.

"I'm on," said Poke.

"Hot damn!" said Red. He turned the coupe up Clifton Boulevard and mounted a street toward the Hill. He pulled into the driveway of what had been a mansion in the early 1900s. The big house showed a light on the ground floor. Red said, "Fritz insists on waitin' up for me. Great guy, Fritz. C'mon in."

Poke allowed himself to be shoved into a room which proved to be the kitchen. It was a spacious, old-fashioned kitchen with a coal range and a big table with a red tablecloth. It was homely and comfortable.

A small, wizened man with a flattened nose and piercing blue eyes looked up from a magazine and said,

"You're late, Red. Have trouble?"

"Damn near," chortled Red Poore. "The Hipples had me faded out in Dutch's Diner,

but m'pal here butted in. Fritz, this is the guy you heard me talk about, Poke Garrett."

The little man raised eyebrows, under which the cartilage was knotty and displaced. He said, "How're you, Garrett?"

Poke shook his hand, noting the misshapen knuckles. He said, "So you're Fritz Berman. You're the featherweight who met Gans and Erne and Nelson in over-the-weight matches. The champ would never give you a shot."

The old man smiled radiantly. He said, "I'm glad someone remembers. You're welcome here, Poke. There's coffee on the stove and buns in the oven."

Poke sat and drank the steaming liquid and gnawed the succulent buns. Red Poore was pouring his tale into the ears of the old fighter. Fritz was nodding, his canny eyes half-closed. Poke thought, *Why, I'm among friends. These two like me. I'm— I'm home!*

He swallowed hard. His craggy, hard face relaxed so that he looked years younger. He doubled his hard hand into a big fist and said aloud, "The black sheep returns, eh? I'll give 'em a run for their money."

Red Poore grinned engagingly. He said, "When Fritz gets through sharpenin' up them maulies of yours, you'll give 'em more than that, Poke."

HE AWOKED with a start, recoiling from the figure beside him in the wide, soft bed. He fingered the unaccustomed softness of the white sheets and stretched luxuriously. Red Poore breathed heavily, still asleep. Poke eased himself to a sitting position. Red's gaudy pajamas shocked his eyes, but they fitted him well enough. He grinned down at the sleeping figure. The red head was a big guy himself.

Red opened his eyes and said, "Howzit, keed?"

"Great," declared Poke. "Look, let's get going. I wanta see that gym. I want gloves and someone to hit at."

"Sure," said Red, rolling from the bed. "You'll get 'em, Poke. We're goin' places. I'm a gambler. I got a hunch. There's gonna be hell to pay aroun' here."

They ate breakfast in the large kitchen where a fat woman, beaming and showing white teeth, moved about with steaming

dishes. Fritz led the way upstairs and disclosed a complete gymnasium. The entire floor had been cleared of partitions, making it into one long room. In the recess formed by the bay windows an elevated ring was ropped off. A tall, thick-chested man was running a vacuum cleaner.

Red said, "Chick'll put 'em on with you, Poke. He's our all-around guy, aincha, Chick?"

The wide-shouldered Chick showed his gums in a wide grin. He said, "Yes, Mr. Poore."

"There's tights and stuff in that locker," indicated Red. "My stuff'll fit you all right."

Poke undressed, after awhile, and got into the ring costume. The twelve ounce gloves felt good on his hands. He wondered why, in his year of wandering, he had never thought to capitalize on his collegiate ring experience. Fear of publicity, desire to efface himself from the memory of those who knew him were undoubtedly contributing causes.

Chick was already in the ring, pulling at the ropes, sleek muscles rippling under his skin. His good-natured grin was gone as he peered over at Poke.

Poke was hard as a rock. His forearms and biceps bulged with live muscle and he moved with effortless speed upon the canvas as he warmed up, shadow-boxing. Red Poore said,

"I'll hold the watch and Fritz'll referee. I'm warnin' you, Poke, this guy is plenty good. He's had twenty fights an' he ain't been beat. We been sorta holdin' him in reserve. Take it easy an' don't let him cop you. Keep yer hands up."

Poke nodded, grinning. He hadn't sparred in many months, but the ring had a familiar feel. His timing would be off, but he had no fears as he eyed his giant opponent. Red rang a bell and Chick came out weaving, left hand pawing.

Poke fell into a natural right hand stance and waited the attack. Chick lashed out with a stiff left and followed with a jarring right to the body. Poke rode with the blows, scarcely feeling them. He dropped a curving, short left to the body which pushed against him and tried mechanically to tie up the flailing fists.

Chick surprised him with the strength in his long arms. He turned Poke easily,

sent him sprawling to the ropes, followed with a clubbing, pounding attack. The serenity went from Poke's face. His straight brows wrinkled and his lips drew back from white, even teeth.

He braced sturdy legs and lashed out with a left hook. His right blurred over, crashing. Chick caught both punches on the jaw. His eyes rolled until the whites showed as he stumbled close, trying to get inside. Again the left and the booming, flashing right. Chick buckled at the knees, slumped to the canvas.

Red Poore shot an excited look at Fritz Berman as he rang the bell. The little man's eyes were narrowed, calculating. Poke said, "I—I guess I lost my temper there for a minute. I didn't mean to hurt him."

Chick bounced to his feet and leaped hastily over the ropes. He said reproachfully, "I ain't hurt. But you hadn't oughta run a champ in on me, Mr. Poore. I ain't no champ-beater."

Fritz Berman said quietly, "That'll be enough boxin'. We'll pick up from here with some special trainin'. There's some people gonna regret this business."

Poke went through three weeks of it under the tutelage of the old man. He found that Fritz Berman was a perfectionist. In his quiet way the old fighter could make a man work harder than any one would believe possible. New muscles developed, old ones gathered speed and precision. His legs learned again to run. His reflexes speeded miraculously. Because of the hard labor of the past year he responded quickly to the treatment.

Red Poore lounged into the gym one day and said, "I got us a fight, keed. A prelim down in Philly. Six roun's against Pug Downey."

Poke stopped pulling chest weights and said, "Philly? Why not here? Why not stay and get it over—the publicity an' everything?"

The redhead grinned and said, "Sure that would be swell. You forget about the Hipples? An' Meanly? Nobody fightin' for me can get on a bill in Boston City. I'm blacklisted."

"I had forgotten," said Poke. "You've been so damn decent to me I forgot all about those people. Okay, Toots. We fight out of town. For a while."

2

Up the Fight Ladder

THE Philadelphia papers were decent, too. The Ledger went out of its way to stress the fact that Poke Garrett had paid his debt to society and was entitled to a chance to come back in his new profession. Fight fans, never fussy about the past of their heroes, cheered him when he entered the ring.

Pug Downey was a tough local spoiler with a year's ring experience and a yen to go places. He had a fast left jab and a swinging right which was poison when it landed.

Poke went out at the bell and ran straight into the left. He took a dozen of them before the strangeness wore off. The lights, the smoke-laden air, the shrill cries of the galleryites, were all new and confusing to him. A stinging chop on the nose woke him up and he began to box cautiously.

He found that he could get under the left, but that Downey was quick with the swinging right. He blocked with his forearms and elbows and rode out the storm. The crowd cheered the swift milling as the round ended.

Fritz Berman, ever quiet, said, "When you get inside, nail him with a short right. You can beat that windmill swing by seconds."

Red Poore ran a comb through his hair and chattered, "Do like Fritz says. Fritz is always right. Don't pay no 'tention to anyone but Fritz, you hear? If you get lost out there look over here, but don't look at me. I go nuts at a fight."

Poke rubbed his right glove along his thigh. His legs seemed very long and naked protruding from the short trunks. For a second he wondered what the hell he was doing out there in front of all those people, swinging at a guy he had never met before. The bell sent him to his feet and out to ring center.

Pug Downey jabbed confidently. Poke moved in quickly. The opening was clear. He moved his bulky right shoulder and the big fist shot out straight. As Downey came forward he impaled himself upon the straight right. Poke mechanically threw

the left hook. It glanced off the sagging head. Downey hit the canvas spread out, his gloves beating a tattoo on the padding.

Poke went to the corner indicated by the referee and watched the flailing arm go up and down. He was a bit bewildered by the suddenness of the end. He looked over and saw that Fritz Berman was methodically gathering up the pail and bottles and sponges. Poke looked back.

At "nine" Downey performed a miracle. He got to his feet. The referee wiped resin from his gloves, slapped him on the back. He staggered blindly forward.

Poke walked uncertainly out to meet him. One glance told him that Downey was out on his feet, absolutely unable to defend himself. He glanced over at Fritz. The little man's face was imperturbable. Red was screeching for a knockout.

Poke said to the referee. "This man is out on his feet. I can't hit him."

The referee snarled, "G'wan, chicken heart. Finish the mug."

Downey stumbled against him, trying to hold on. Poke put strong hands against the chest of the semi-conscious fighter and pushed him away. He said clearly, so that all at the ringside could hear, "This man is out, I tell you. I refuse to hit him."

Downey staggered backwards, stood immobile in mid-ring, then collapsed suddenly in a pitiful heap. Poke said angrily, "Officials like you cause deaths in the ring."

"That's enough outa you, jailbird," growled the official, "Scram, bum."

Poke's left curled out and met the chin of the official. He went down in an awkward sprawl. Police stormed the ring. Red Poore plunged among them, expostulating. The ringside was a bedlam.

In the midst of confusion Fritz Berman slipped unnoticed to the side of an imposing gentleman and whispered in his ear. The imposing gentleman nodded agreement, heaved himself to his feet. He bellowed, "You officers escort Garrett from the ring. He was perfectly right. He may have saved us a scandal by not hitting Downey."

The activities in the ring ceased as if by magic. The crowd recognized a popular Boxing Commissioner and cheered wildly. The referee moaned, nursing his jaw. Red hustled Poke to the dressing room.

Fritz Berman was ahead of them. He said, "That was a break. The story'll make

the headlines of every paper in the country. Poke, if you're as good as I think y'are, we're made men."

"Talk about fast thinkin'," babbled Red Poore. "Boy, you done it! Hipple, here we come!"

BUT it was the Hipple who came first. Red and Poke were lounging in the big kitchen of the house on the Hill. It was two days after the fight. The Barton City papers had copied the Philly story with pleasure, predicting great things for Poke Garrett. The drama of his comeback had drawn the always sentimental sports reporters into its wake. They were already booming him for local showing.

The door of the kitchen opened without warning. The rat-faced Hipple carried the gun in his hand. The others, flashy, unprepossessing, strangely alike, filed in behind him. Big Frank, the heavyweight contender came last, his face set in a snarl.

Red said conversationally, "Howdy, boys. You remember Poke Garrett. Ike, you better put that rod away. It might go off."

The rat-faced gun handler was the spokesman. He said, "The roscoe's just fer pertection, wise guy. We wanta talk to you."

"It's a free country," grinned Red.

Poke stared at the brothers, one at a time. They were a vicious crew, glaring back at him with hate in their eyes. Ike said,

"You been in this town too long, Poore. You an' yer jailbird would-be is due for a long vacation."

"You don't say?" said Red. Poke wondered at his smiling nonchalance.

"We're givin' you fair warning," said the smallest and most dangerous Hipple. "One week to pack up an' get out. Or else."

"Or else what?" said Red curiously.

"Or else you won't be alive. An' your boy friend'll be back in the can. There's certain people don't like your boy friend around here," growled the gunman.

From the doorway behind them a quiet voice said, "Put that gun away, Hipple. You wouldn't want to be found with it in your hand an' you splattered all over the joint."

Poke turned and knew the reason for

Red's unconcern in the face of the revolver. Fritz Berman bore a sawed-off shotgun in his gnarled hands, the twin muzzles pointing at the brothers. Ike's face contorted with rage, but the brother nearest him seized his arm and wrested the gun from him.

Fritz said, "It's a good thing you're all not stupid. Ike'll get you killed some day. Drop that gun on the table."

Poke covered the weapon with his hand. Red Poore said calmly, "Now you can go back to your mouthpiece. Tell him we're not leavin' town, except to knock over a couple of guys and get a name. Tell him we'll be back within six months for a showdown. If he makes a move in the meantime, we're cleanin' house on *him* first—then *you*. And Frank. . . ."

The fighter started, licked his lips. He wrenched his frightened gaze from the shotgun with an effort.

"Start trainin', Frank. We're gettin' you in the ring right soon."

There was silence in the room. Then Frank Hipple made a break for the door. The others backed out slowly, without a word. One brother held Ike firmly by the arm, dragging him. When they were gone, Poke said, "Nice people."

"So now the battle's on," Red stated flatly. "How about it, Poke?"

"Hell, I'm in," said Poke, startled.

Red played with the checkered tablecloth. "All the way, Poke?"

"What makes you ask that?" demanded Poke uneasily.

"Well," said Red, "that nurse. She spilled a lot of things t'me. I know practically the whole story, see? About that stuff down at collitch."

Poke said slowly, "Oh. I see."

"Well?"

"I'll tell you, Red," said Poke uncertainly. "I'll have to get around town. See some people. Learn some things. I'll—let you know later. About everything."

"Okay. That's good enough," said Red cheerfully. "Let's think about fightin'."

Fritz Berman said in his quiet voice, "Yeah. This Majors. In Boston. He's a good boy. We'll fight him."

phia ring, had preceded him. The fight crowds howl for blood but love a humane battler. He sat in his corner and listened to Fritz.

"This cookie's got a left hook. Keep movin' to his right. Feel him out for a round or two."

The bell sounded. Majors, a fit-looking, rangy lad, came out with a high guard and stepped around fast. Poke weaved his body, looking for a chance to lead. Majors, a counter-puncher, offered a tantalizing opening.

Poke moved in with a straight left. A banging hook caught him high in the head, spinning him. Majors crowded in, hooking desperately. Poke used his great strength, clinching, shaking his buzzing head. The referee parted them.

Poke crouched lower, hunching his left shoulder. He circled to his left. Majors followed, menacing with a cocked red glove. The hook came over. Poke partly blocked it with his shoulder, swung back, pivoting.

His right arm was a long, rigid line, etched sharply under the white lights. Major's chin rattled against the clenched glove. His eyes blinked as he staggered back. Poke followed swiftly. Majors tried to hold. Poke slammed a left to the body and a right to the jaw.

Major's arms flew wide as he toppled. Poke walked to his corner like a big, sleek cat and grinned down at Fritz. The little man was waiting, ready to depart, the pail dangling from his arm. The referee counted ten while the crowd cheered for a new heavyweight prospect.

Offer piled upon offer, all from out of town. Red said, "So we'll get our experience in the sticks. Let the papers carry on for us. We should worry. We're makin' dough. We'll wind up against Frank Hipple—then we'll get the champ."

"I'm not worried about the champ for another year," said Fritz Berman. "We ain't ready for that yet."

"I'm beginning to want this Hipple, though," said Poke thoughtfully. "I been talking to some folks I used to know around town."

"Funny De Haven hasn't looked you up," said Red carelessly. "You an' him was roomies, wasn't you?"

"Yes," said Poke. "We roomed together. He also saved my life that time in

IN THE Boston ring Poke received the plaudits of the crowd with surprise. His fame, based on the drama in the Philadel-

the canal. You reminded me of that once before, Red. Remember?"

"Okay, pal, okay," said Red hastily. "I was just wonderin'."

Poke kept his peace. He had been talking to newspaper men, old acquaintances. He had ascertained that the picture was as Red had explained it, that the Hipplees owned the local clubs and that Meanly was the man behind them. He had learned that common gossip ascribed the success of young Forrest De Haven to his undercover tie-up with Meanly.

Meanly, the ex-prosecutor, had become a criminal lawyer, a mouthpiece for the mobsters. Poke caught sight of his tall, lank frame, his long nose and close-set, snapping eyes one day on Broad Street. But he smothered a sudden impulse to speak to the man who had sent him to the reform school.

He remained patient, studying the fistic art under the canny Fritz Berman, fighting here and there, always successful. He knocked out Kayo Bendel in Hartford, Pig Latone in Bridgeport, Fats Beasley in Scranton.

Philly called him back to fight Porky Mason and then he went ten rounds with Jerry Clinton, who was a good fighter indeed. Poke got the nod, but knew that he had been in a fight.

After that one, Fritz Berman said, "In a year you'll murder Clinton. All you need now is plenty of fights. And the right handlin'."

"An' right now would be a good time to knock off Frankie Hipple," said Red Poore.

Fritz said, "I wouldn't say that. Hipple is a good man. Poke ain't quite ready for Hipple."

"I want us t'get re-established in town," fretted Red. "The newspaper boys is with us. I'm sick of these crooks runnin' the burg. Poke kin take Hipple right now."

"Y'know they won't put him on," said Fritz calmly. "What's the use of belly-achin'?"

Red fidgeted. He got up and walked around the table. He sat down and burst forth, "Well, I made a bet. I bet Marty Powers five grand we'd get Frankie Hipple in th' ring with Poke before July fifteenth. Now it's the middle of June."

"Are you nuts?" said Fritz.

"No, I ain't nuts," flared Red. "We could make 'em do it. Poke could force the thing through."

Fritz Berman looked at Poke. Poke said slowly, "Five thousand dollars. A lot of money, Red."

"All I got," said the redhead. "Marty Powers didn't cover it, you c'n bet. Marty's just a front for Meanly an' the Hipplees with that Chestnut Club."

"Did you specify that I was to fight for the Chestnut Club, Red?" asked Poke.

"Yeah," said Red ruefully. "That was a sucker angle, but I fell for it. I was sure—"

"Yes. I know," said Poke. "It wasn't smart, Red. But you did it. So we'll have to make it good."

"You'll do it, Poke? Honest?" said Red, his face alight with eagerness.

"No," said Fritz Berman. "You ain't ready, Poke."

"Yes," said Poke heavily. "I'll do it. I'm—I'm going to bed right now. See you in the morning."

He went out of the room. Fritz Berman said, "You fool! Frankie'll kill him. He's not ready, I tell you."

"Ah," said Red, "he's good, Fritz. An' this is the best thing could happen to him. You'll see. This is what he needs. If he c'n throw off the weight he's carryin' in his mind, he'll go ahead faster."

"Bah! said Fritz disgustedly. "It's the weight of his fists that counts in this racket. You're an impulsive fool, Red Poore!"

3

In the Bag

THE letters on the door spelled out, *Forrest De Haven II, Counselor at Law*. Poke hesitated in the corridor of the big building. He took a deep breath and went in. A blonde girl stared coldly at him and said,

"Have you an appointment?"

"Just tell Mr. De Forrest that Poke Garrett is here," said he.

The girl's expression did not change. She spoke into a small box. A cavernous voice echoed hollowly in response, "Poke

Garrett? Oh—er—yes, Miss Jones. Er—send him in at once.”

He went in through the inner door. Pep De Haven sat behind a large mahogany desk. He hadn't changed much, Poke thought. He was a slim youth with smooth, fair skin and blue eyes. He was very handsome but the line of his jaw was not firm.

His lips trembled as he said, “Hello, Poke. How are things?”

Poke said, “Okay—up to a point. How are you?”

“I'm all right,” said De Haven listlessly. He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. “I hear you're a prize-fighter these days.”

Poke sat down in a leather chair. He said wearily, “Don't stall, Pep. You know damn well I'm a fighter. Your pals have been doing everything they could to keep me from getting on my feet in my home town. You ought to know all about me.”

De Haven said nervously, “My pals? What do you mean, Poke?”

“I mean the famed Hipple brothers. And George Meanly,” said Poke bluntly. “Hell, Pep, everyone knows you're tied up with that punk. The guy that got me my well-deserved jail sentence.”

De Haven went slowly white. He said, “You—you promised never to—you said you wouldn't—”

“I said I'd take the rap,” said Poke brutally. “I said I wouldn't ever show around here and make things tough for you. Your father was dying. You had saved my life. I took the rap, Pep. I went to the reformatory. I spent a year trying to live it down, slamming from pillar to post, bruising myself mentally and physically. I came home here by accident and find you tied up with the man who persecuted me. How about it? Should I have gone my way—penniless, helpless under my record?”

De Haven said, “You don't know the whole story, Poke. You wouldn't be so hard on me if you knew.”

“That's a cinch to guess.” Poke shrugged. “Meanly somehow found out that it was you, not I, who had stolen the money and stuff from the dorms.”

“Shhhhh!” said De Haven involuntarily.

The seriousness of Poke's face relaxed for a second. He grinned. “Make you nervous, Pep? But it's true, isn't it? Your

father was tight with you, so you helped yourself. And then when things got tough you came to me to get you out of it. I felt that I owed you something. I paid back the money and expected to get a suspended sentence. Meanly made an example of me. It's the truth, isn't it?”

“Yes,” said De Haven dully. “It's the truth, all right. But I never meant to let it ride, Poke. I always wanted to clear your name. After father died I tried to pile up some money so that if I went to jail I'd have it when I came out. I thought that with a nest egg like that I could face it.”

“I didn't have a nest egg. Pep,” said Poke.

“I know. I know. I looked for you. I wanted to help you. Then I took a couple of criminal cases to get big fees. Meanly came to town—and he had found out. He threatened to make it tough for me. I—I was yellow, Poke. I'm afraid of that man. He's a killer, Poke. I can feel it when he looks at me.”

Poke Garrett said reflectively, “You always were cowardly, Pep. Except in the water. It's funny, but you were a lion in the water. That day you pulled me out—you were great. And the meets; I used to watch you in the water polo game and marvel at you. Anyone with guts enough to play that game must have something.”

DE HAVEN slumped behind his desk, silent, his blue eyes begging. Poke said, “I hated to do this, Pep. But I have friends who have stuck by me. Out in your office Red Poore has had the two-way switch of your public address system turned on. Can you trust your frozen-faced blonde?”

De Haven stammered, “Yes, I think so. She's always been all right.”

“She's been taking this confession down,” said Poke. “We arranged it that way. Just you and your girl and Red Poore and me. We won't want to use it right now, Pep. We don't need to use it at all. I'm okay. People have forgiven me. But I want to fight here. I want to straighten out the fight game in this state.”

“What—what can I do?” stammered De Haven.

“Well, Meanly's got you, somehow. And we've got you. You don't stand to win either way unless we protect you. But if

Meanly threatens you with exposure—and you know that I'll deny Meanly's story, you're in the clear. Right?"

"But what can I do for you?"

"Your father," said Poke softly, "was a good friend of the Governor. The Governor doesn't know the truth about the racket in the fight game. If you were to go down and see him and tell him the story and urge him to switch Commissioners. . . ."

"The Governor? Why, yes. Of course. I know him well," said De Haven.

"To cover future recriminations you could also say that you had been working with these crooks to get evidence against them," Poke went on. "That would spike Meanly's guns."

Color was returning to the smooth cheeks of the young lawyer. He said, "Poke, you've given me a way out. It's the chance I've always wanted. To get clear of these leeches—to get started fresh with nothing on my mind. I'll confess to that business at school. I can face it. If only I can get clear of Meanly."

"George Meanly," said Poke, "will be taken care of in good time. Meantime, here is fifty dollars. You are now my attorney. You might suggest to the Governor that the new Commissioner direct Frank Hipple to meet me at the Chestnut Club the first week in July. It will be to our mutual interests—as lawyer and client."

De Haven said admiringly, "Gee, Poke, you were always smart. I'll go down to Capitol City tomorrow."

"You'll go right now," said Poke gently. "Time is the essence of this thing, as you lawyers say."

He held out a big paw. De Haven seized it in his two hands and said, "I'm practically there now—by plane."

Red said joyously, "And t'make the thing perfect, I dated the blonde. Howzat, Poke ol' kid?"

"You can have her," said Poke absently. "Say, when Meanly finds out about this thing, what'll he do to Pep?"

"What do you think?" said Red airily. "A punk like that can't get no worse'n' he deserves."

Poke said, "Now look, Red, I did this for you, see? I said I'd get you your five thousand dollars and I'm going to do it. But no harm is to come to De Haven. Un-

derstand that. If he is hurt, I don't go through with the fight."

"But Roke, we gotta look out for ourselves. Those Hipples will be gunnin' for us when the word comes through. We can't be worryin' about De Haven."

"You heard me, Red," said Poke sternly.

The red head squirmed. Then he said reluctantly, "Okay. We'll grab him when he gets back and hole him up here. He c'n give out he's gone on a vacation. But I don't like it, Poke."

"You'll learn to like it," grinned Poke. "I'm going upstairs and let Fritz moan over me. He thinks Hipple will kill me."

He was training in the gym when the call came. Pep De Haven's voice said breathlessly, "I'm at the airport. I got your wire. The Governor is acting at once. He was shocked and glad to cooperate. What do I do now?"

"Stay there until Red picks you up," said Poke.

He hung up. Red said, "Okay, keed?"

"Okay, Red," said Poke soberly. "Scram down to the airport and bring Pep up here."

"Wheee!" said Red leaping for the door. "We're in."

When he had gone, Fritz Berman said, "You know you ain't ready, Poke. Yer a little stale right now, what with th' strain an' everything. Yer trainin' won't be any good to you."

Poke said heavily. "We're going through with it, Fritz. Win or lose, we've gained our point."

"Hipple will cut you to ribbons," warned the little man. "He's good—an' he's cruel. He'll have a special grudge against you."

Poke said, "You've never seen me take punishment, have you, Fritz? You've always seen me out in front. I can take it. I've been in a reformatory, Fritz. A reformatory is where they send the cases that are not yet ready for the pen. A year there and the pen is the next natural step. They beat hell out of you in the reformatory, Fritz. They have a ring of hardened inmates. The rules are lax enough to let this kangaroo court sit in judgment on newcomers. I fought them for ten months. I didn't win a fight, Fritz."

He paused, his eyes hard. Then he said, "I was in a logging camp, too. I won a

couple there after taking a dozen lickings. Ever notice the scars on my ribs and back, Fritz? Caulked boots made them. Don't worry about Hipple, my friend. He can't do anything that hasn't already been done."

Fritz shook his head. His blue eyes were reminiscent. "That's all right, but you haven't felt the laces yet. You haven't had an elbow poked into your Adam's apple. Frankie Hipple's bullet head ain't butted you under the chin or over the eye. That guy knows all the dirty tricks, Poke. An' he can fight."

Poke shrugged and went back to his training. It seemed a long time now since he had put fear behind him. In the short span of his life, he reflected, he had traveled so swiftly and so far that everything in the past seemed very distant. Now he wanted only to show before the home crowd, to batter his way back to the respect and admiration of the people of his nativity. He swung hard punches at the big sand bag until sweat poured down his grim face.

THE new Commissioner was a hard-boiled ex-fight promoter who knew his business. The unsavory Matt Powers reluctantly signed papers for the fight and passed money to Red Poore. The redhead grinned hugely.

"Never bet, Matt. It's a lousy racket. Not that this is your dough."

Powers growled, "Watch your step, wise guy. You may never live to spend that dough."

Red laughed aloud and swaggered out. An hour later he walked into the kitchen of the house on the Hill. Around the table sat Poke and Pep De Haven and Fritz. Poke said sharply, "Did you get the money, Red?"

"Sure," grinned the redhead.

"Good," Poke grunted. "Now the strain is off. If he takes me it won't be so bad."

"Oh yes it will!" chirped Red. "I laid the lot of it at one to two that you'd take Hipple. Can y' imagine a sucker layin' odds like that?"

There was silence in the room. Poke's face slowly settled back into its grim expression. Fritz Berman murmured, "There's no use bein' dumb unless you show it. He lays our last dime on a shot like that."

"Whaddaya mean, dumb? Poke'll kill 'im. Poke'll knock that guy into Meanly's lap. Where do you get that stuff?" demanded Red.

Fritz said dryly, "Look at him. Look at your fighter. He's as stale as yesterday's newspaper. He can't eat. He can't sleep. We pushed him to fast. Pep was boxin' with him this afternoon an' almost knocked him out with a roundhouse swing that wouldn't floor you, you big dope. And you're slap-happy."

Red said, "Stale? Poke? Don't gimme that stuff, Fritz. Why, Poke's in the pink. He's always right."

Poke raised burning eyes and said, "Go to hell, Red. I wish to heaven I'd never seen your ugly pan."

4

Ring Riot

HE GOT up and slammed out of the room. Red stared after him open-mouthed. He said bewilderedly, "Well, what do ya know about that? Why, I'm his pal. He shouldn't talk to me like that."

"Yeah, his pal," said Fritz bitterly. "You put the screws right back into him and expect him t'kiss ya."

De Haven said, frowning, "What worries me is that we've had no word from Meanly. The Hipples haven't made a move. I tell you, it's not right."

Red said, "You guys make me sick. They're scared to make a move. This new C'missioner'd have them in the clink. They're watched ev'ry minute."

"They could try a bluff. They *would* try it if they didn't have something up their sleeves. I'm worried, I tell you," insisted De Haven.

Fritz Berman's voice was old and tired as he said, "We're all worried. All but this red-headed clown. He ain't got anything to worry with. But don't let Poke know everything ain't serene. We got one week to snap him out of it. Let's work together."

"That's right. We'll snap him out of it," said Red eagerly.

"You stay the hell out of his sight for awhile," ordered Fritz. "Right now you're

marked lousy. He don't want to see you."

It was a tough week for them all. The now almost mythical Meanly and the usually ubiquitous Hipple failed to make a move. De Haven fretted. Red was too gay. Fritz alone was his quiet, even self, striving to bring his fighter into condition.

Poke was like a bear with a sore nose. He felt let down, disgusted. The entire business of fighting seemed all at once sordid and senseless. Training was futile. He boxed listlessly on the platform in the big backyard of the old mansion. The sports reporters to a man predicted early defeat for him. He read the papers and indifferently agreed with them.

Fritz rehearsed the style of Frankie Hipple every day. Patiently the old man went over each offensive weapon, each strategical move which Poke would be called upon to face. Poke listened with ears that heard not. His one desire these days was to get away from it all, to go somewhere and lie beside a running brook, to look at the trees and the skies—and rest. He was tired. He was weary in the morning when he arose, dead when he dragged himself to bed.

A heat spell gripped the city. Poke broke out in a rash and had to abandon training entirely. Fritz brightened at the thought of postponement, but Poke turned on him with such fury that the old man did not dare force the issue. The day of the fight, Poke had not donned gloves for a week.

The Chestnut Club had hired the ball park. Every seat was sold at seven-thirty. The new Commissioner sat at the ringside, beside the Governor himself.

In the dressing room under the stands Red Poore was saying, "I don't mind losin' the dough, Poke. But don't let this mug give you the works. Gosh, it'll kill me if he starts cuttin' you up."

Fritz said, "Shut up, Red. Poke'll be all right."

He was bandaging the big, relaxed hands. Red went on, "They can't pull nothin' in the ring. Slim Culnan's an honest referee. The law's sittin' at the ringside. If ya c'n just walk out there an' smack that guy like ya smacked Majors—"

There was a sudden pounding at the door and a frightened voice crying, "Poke! Let me in, Poke!"

Red Poore yanked open the door and Pep DeHaven staggered into the room.

Blood ran down the side of his face, staining his white collar. He gasped.

"They made a try for me. I was going through the gate to my seat. Someone shot at me. They must have used a silencer. There was no noise. I—I got away from the crowd as quick as I could."

Fritz Berman was at work instantly on the nasty scalp wound. Poke's eyes came alive in his drawn face. He said, "A silencer, eh!"

Red said, "Gosh! With a rifle, a guy could sit up in the bleachers some place an' pick off—"

De Haven said hoarsely, "That's it. That's why there were no threats. They mean business this time, Poke. Meanly's stirred them into deviltry. If their brother is losing, one of them will shoot you down from the bleachers somewhere. You can't go on. I'll see the Governor. This must be stopped."

Poke said, "Don't get hysterical, Pep. Remember that physical courage of yours. If they're gunning for me, they'll want you too."

Fritz's deft fingers closed the wound, patched it with gauze and adhesive. Pep De Haven's eyes narrowed, the panic left them. He said quickly, "That's right, they'll want me too. The dirty rats. Look, Poke. Do you need Red in there?"

Fritz answered, "No. Ill pick up Chick. He's outside somewhere."

"Red and I will comb the place," said Pep De Haven. "He can work one side, I'll work the other. We'll find the man with the gun. If it's a rifle he can't conceal it too well."

"Find hell!" said Red. "We'll pop every Hipple we see; They'll be spread all over the joint. If you see a Hipple head, split it!"

He rummaged in a bag and produced two limber blackjacks. He handed one to Pep and said "I'm sorry I ain't got a rod. We'd be better with a rod a-piece."

"This will do me," said De Haven. He went over to Poke and seized his bandaged hand. "Look, Poke. Don't worry, will you? We'll get him. I promise you we'll get him."

Red was at the door. He shouted, "C'mon and get 'em, then! See ya later, Poke. Knock the big lug kickin'!"

They were gone. A voice outside said, "Garrett—yer on next."

Poke gathered a robe about his shoulders. He said in a queer voice, "Fritz, those two are going after an armed and desperate man with a blackjack apiece."

"They're your pals," said Fritz simply. "I on'y wish I could go, too."

"Yeah," said Poke. "That's it. They're my pals. Funny, isn't it? A few months ago I was a lammister from a jail record. Now my friends are out facing death for me."

HE WENT down the aisle and into the ring. He did not hear the thunderous cheers of the mob. He did not even notice when a young man leaped up and led a short, barking team cheer from the solid block of seats which State men had taken to see their old schoolmate make his comeback.

His thoughts were on the two men who trailed a gunman up in the high fastnesses of the baseball stands.

Frankie Hipple came to ring center and scowled hatred at him while the referee tersely warned against fouling. Poke ignored him, his roving eye turned on the ringside seats. He saw the Governor, the Commissioner. Further on he saw an intent, sardonic face with eyes that glowered. He marked the spot where that face was.

Then Fritz was saying, "You can't out-box him, Poke. Get inside and tamper with his guts."

Poke nodded. His gaze roved to the darkness up high in the background. It occurred to him that Pep and Red might fail, that at any moment a bullet might crash into his body. He wondered if Ike was the gunman, if he would dare to shoot. The bell clanged sharply.

He went out to meet Frankie Hipple. The big man came toward him swiftly, jabbing with a lightning left. Poke moved to the right. An unexpected right hand lashed out at him, caught him full on the jaw. He dropped to the canvas.

He managed to get one knee under him and shook his head. The ring was whirling about him. He looked for his corner, waited until it had stopped swinging. Fritz was calmly holding a clenched fist before him. They had rehearsed this many times. He watched the fist. It came up and he arose from his knee.

Blazing leather poured into his body,

driving him back. He sought to close, to hang on; but short, sharp blows held him off. The roar of the crowd was dim in his ears. He felt the ropes at his back and the hail of leather ceased. Instinctively he leaned forward, inside the knockout blow which would have finished him.

He clung tenaciously. The referee struggled with him. He moved suddenly backward, called upon his legs to carry him.

His sturdy legs, hardened with the miles of running and the years of hard labor, carried him. Frankie Hipple, cursing, snarling, dared him to fight. Poke tried to smile, kept moving out of reach. It seemed hours before the bell clanged its welcome message.

There was a cut over his eye. Fritz manipulated the stinging collodion while Chick plied the smelling salts. Poke sputtered and said, "He almost got me. What round is it?"

"Just the second comin' up," said Fritz's quiet voice. "Take it easy, Poke. You're all right. You did good. Don't move to one side against this guy. Go straight in. You can't box him, kid."

Poke looked over at Hipple. The big man was sitting on the edge of his stool, straining to get out and finish a weakened opponent. Poke remembered he was safe from bullets as long as Hipple was winning. He knew that he should make the fight last as long as possible to give Red and Pep their chance to locate the lurking killer. He also knew that he could not last another round like the last.

The bell rang. He got to his feet, let Hipple come to him. The big man hurtled across the ring in his anxiety. Poke moved inside and punched straight from the shoulder. He felt his fist go home against bone and walked straight ahead, both hands cocked.

Hipple's face changed expressions. He started backward, shooting out a long left, covering. Poke moved ahead, shooting punches. His arms were strong again. He smothered Hipple's cleverness by the fury of his attack.

Hipple broke ground. Poke followed grimly, boring inside. He got his head on the hairy chest, and his arms flew like pistons, driving punches to the mid-section. He could feel something giving. He snorted, throwing blows. The clang of the bell stopped him.

Fritz said, "That's the way. Take him this round, if you can."

He went out faster than before. Hipple was ready with a short right inside. Poke's head spun. The cut over his eye opened as searing laces scraped his face. The referee uttered a quick warning.

Poke backed off and brushed blood away. Hipple extended the left, moved his feet. Poke lowered his head and watched those feet. The left lashed into his face. Poke kept his eyes on the retreating black boxing shoes. Again and again the left bounced off his head and face, but the shoes were going backward and the blows lacked stunning effect.

Then the shoes couldn't go back any more. Hipple was against the ropes, snarling, at bay. For a fleeting instant Poke wondered about the marksman in the darkness. Then he was in there punching.

Hipple was coming forward, trying to close with him. Poke managed a bloody grin, then he shot the right from the shoulder, straight down the middle. His right fist caught Hipple square on the chin. The hooking left drove the big fighter sideways, close to the ropes.

Poke's legs carried him along with the skidding fighter. With herculean effort he swung a prodigious right from the floor. The blow landed on the side of Hipple's jaw. The big fighter skidded through the ropes and off the apron of the ring.

Poke leaned over anxiously, following the course of the fall. Hipple's head landed squarely in the stomach of a man at the ringside, a man with close-set eyes and a long, hungry beak.

Fritz was shrieking in an unnatural voice, "Duck, Poke! Out of the ring, lad!"

POKE remembered. It was too late to move. He stood straight in the corner while the referee counted. They hauled Hipple into the ring and then there was no necessity for counting. He was stiff as a board.

Poke walked to his corner on uncertain legs and said, "They must have got him."

He sat down suddenly. His knees were strangely weak. There was a commotion high in the stands. He got himself up and said, "They may need us. We've gotta get up there."

The crowd in the aisles prevented them; Poke struggled and pleaded to no avail. Misguided police seized him and rushed him proudly to his dressing room.

Red Poore said, "Where you been? We been waitin' for you."

Pep De Haven sat on the dressing table, stripped to the waist. A doctor's bag was open beside him and an efficient-looking man was bandaging his arm.

Pep said, "Some fun. Shot twice in the same night."

Poke dropped on a chair, his mouth open. Red said enthusiastically, "Pep got him. It was Ike. He was right behind third base, up high, see? It was the middle of the first round. So Pep don't wait for me. He dives over the seats and goes for Ike. Well, Ike ups an' takes a shot at Pep, see? He gets him in the arm, too. But I chucks my billie at 'im an' spoils his next shot, an' Pep, he don't even hesitate. He goes right on. He cops Ike with the sap, right on the knob."

"Why the hell dincha come down and tell us?" demanded Fritz indignantly.

"Well, hell," said Red, "there was the other three Hipples, wasn't there? How'd we know they didn't have gats, too? We tied up Pep's arm best we could an' rounded 'em up."

Poke said, "It was a game thing to do, Pep. Face a gun like that."

Pep De Haven said, "Thanks, Poke. That'll make it easier later on."

The doctor left. Poke said, "What about the blonde?"

"Well, y'see . . . I mean—Well, Mabel an' me figgers to get married nex' week," confessed Red Poore.

"Nice going, Red," grinned Poke. "Pep, you're not going to start paying all over again a debt which I have already paid. Our score was evened tonight."

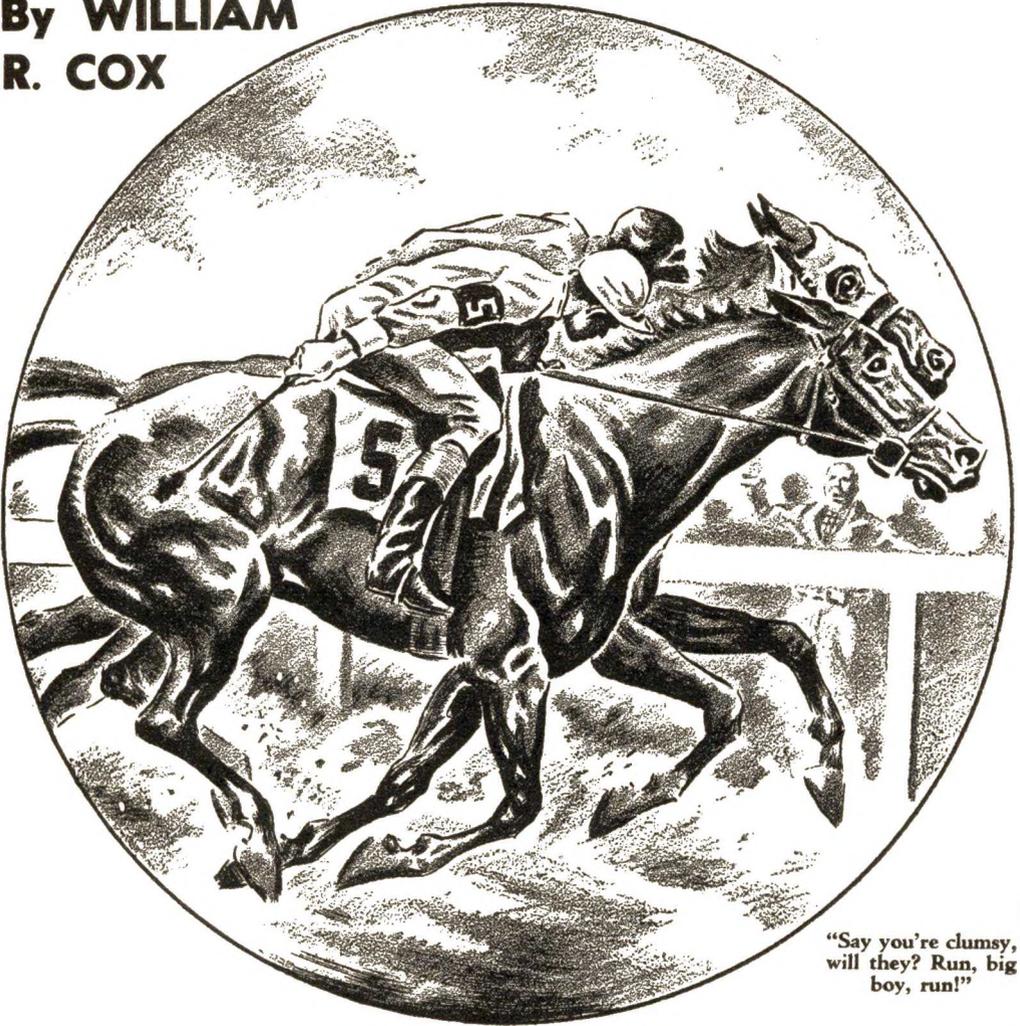
De Haven stammered, "But Poke, I can't—I mean—"

"Now, don't bother me with trifles," said Poke. "I got a heavyweight championship to work for. And there's a guy named Meanly—I promised him something. So let's buy Red a bachelor dinner."

"Yeah," said Red dolefully. "But I guess the thing's on me. You guys got everything all figured out swell. What have I got? A wife!"

HURRICANE HOOFS

By WILLIAM
R. COX



"Say you're clumsy,
will they? Run, big
boy, run!"

Down the stretch thundered Pontiac, the horse who was out of his class, with a jock half out of his saddle—in a race that was out of this world!

IT WAS the fifth at Sunnyside Park on a winter afternoon with the Florida sun boiling down. The wooden stands were sparsely filled, for this was the West Coast where the money people do not throng. Six horses broke from the starting gate. The big, reddish chestnut came out last.

The kid on top of the big horse lay on

his doubled-up knees, his face in the mane, talking it up. "Get along, you Pontiac, you big dope. Get up there, you big dope. Get up there, you false alarm! I'll beat your hide off if you don't run."

Up ahead Manager Cregar, riding at this minor league track for the coming season when the stewards would have partially forgotten a few things, was up on Glass

House. He was counting the crowd, figuring the handle on this race, looking for the other horses. He caught the eye of Amsy Hoff on Heather, and winked.

Pontiac settled into a pace which seemed heavy, but which carried him past three horses. The kid, Choo Choo Blaine, kept talking, "I told you to run. You'll run, you big dope . . ."

They went past the fourth entry. Up ahead were Manny Cregar on the favorite, Amsy Hoff and Heather. Choo Choo lifted his hands and Pontiac went around Hoff.

Manny Cregar seemed to settle down and start making a ride. Glass House gallantly responded and they went around the turn with Pontiac a length behind, Heather third and the field broken and strung out. The grandstand emitted feeble cheers. Choo Choo yelled at the red horse, "Come up, come up, run out your bleedin' heart!"

Glass House faltered one instant. Pontiac seemed to fly to the pole. They went into the backstretch and Manny Cregar was flailing his bat and Choo Choo was riding solid on Pontiac's neck. They made the turn and came into the flat and there was the finish line. Glass House tried to close the gap and Cregar, veteran of the big time, threatened to run over into his inexperienced foe. But Choo Choo only sat tight on the heavy red chestnut.

They slid over the imaginary line. It was Pontiac, Glass House and Heather. Choo Choo Blaine felt the hot blood running swiftly in his veins. He had booted in a couple of winners before, but this was salt in his soup, this time he had beaten Manny Cregar and Amsy Hoff, top-flight riders. He had done it with the clumsy, low-rated Pontiac, his pet, the joke horse of owner Louisa Harper. Pontiac, the out-sized, mild-mannered, obedient, kindly dog of the Harper stable.

Not that it was a big stable. He carried his saddle to the scales for the weighing-out and already he was thinking about the future, about the great Florida Stakes at Miami, about his chances of riding there. He nodded at Manny and said, "Nice race, huh? Thought you had me in the stretch."

Manny was a stunted little man of thirty-five. He said, "Yeah . . . couldn't pull up." He looked at Amsy Hoff, who smothered a grin.

Hoff, also a veteran, scar-faced, long-

nosed, said, "You cert'ny brought the big dope in. Never thought that left foot would win a race we were in, huh, Manny?"

They weighed. There was lead in Pontiac's saddle, despite his high handicap in that department. Choo Choo Blaine, at nineteen, weighed an even hundred pounds.

He was perfectly formed, blue-eyed, blond-haired. But his bones were light and he was less than five feet high. He simply did not take on flesh, he was built only of light bone and muscle. He turned away from the scales and there was Louisa Harper.

She hugged him and he blushed despite himself. She was about thirty-five and she was pretty as a picture. She had carried on with Pontiac, Hoppy and Gaslight after her husband died and things had been tough, but she always managed to look good. She was clean and fresh and her clothing was always tailored and simple. And she was on the level and it showed on her. In a tough racket only Louisa Harper was rock-bottom good, he had long ago decided.

She said, "You're my boy. And didn't the big redhead run? He ran today!"

"It wasn't a fast mile," muttered Choo Choo.

"Fast enough. You rated him just right," she smiled. "And I had something on his nose and more to place. This'll take us to Miami. This'll put Hoppy into the Florida Stakes."

They walked along to where the bay whinnied from his stall. Hoppy was a three-year-old, a picture horse. He was the money-getter. He was swift and easy to ride, but he had a nervous streak. Choo Choo waited while Louisa gave sugar to her star thoroughbred.

A hostler was walking Pontiac. Choo Choo watched with eyes which began to narrow. He swung abruptly and said, "Miz Louisa, I got news for you."

"Now, Choo Choo . . ." She shook her head.

"Pontiac can out-run him. 'Specially over a mile and a quarter." Choo Choo's chin stuck out. "I'll bet on it. You can hold the clock—or get someone to run the distance against me and Pontiac."

She said, "I can only enter one horse in the race. The fee is. . . . Just because Pontiac won today—"

"It ain't only that," he insisted. "I got a feelin' on him today. Pontiac is ready."

"That old fool will never be ready for a stake race," she said fondly. "He's too clumsy. No, Choo Choo. Hoppy is our hope. If he only shows . . ."

"Get the money somewhere," he begged. "Lemme ride Pontiac. Hire anybody you want to ride Hoppy. I'll show you."

"I wish I could," she said regretfully. "I just haven't the money, Choo Choo."

He trudged away, leaving her with Hoppy. He was right and he knew it. He had ridden both horses. Pontiac could make a better showing. Maybe he couldn't beat Moon Girl, Space Ship, Cricket, Cloudburst—those were great horses that would be running at Miami. But Pontiac was better than Hoppy. Choo Choo, who had practically been born on a horse, knew it.

IN THE showers the other jocks were very merry, which was a bit strange, as they are a notoriously glum breed. Manny was horsing around with a wet towel, flicking the naked bodies of anyone within reach. He sniped Amsy Hoff, leaving a red welt on his back, and Amsy retaliated in kind and a battle started. Manny was, as always, too tough, and Amsy quit.

Choo Choo grinned at them and they all quieted down, but no one said anything except to mutter congratulations on his win. There was no kidding, and he wondered about that. He took his shower and started out. Manny Cregar, dressed, was waiting for Amsy. He said, "See you in Miami, punk. But I don't expect you'll be ridin', huh?"

"Not unless it's on Pontiac," said Choo Choo sadly.

Manny guffawed. "Then you won't be ridin'. So long, kid."

Choo Choo went out. Through the door behind him he heard a loud laugh, then silence, as though everyone was listening. He shrugged and went toward the stables. The Florida twilight had set in, but he went along the stalls, sniffing the fresh hay, hearing every rustle of the thoroughbreds in the long line.

Pontiac thrust a warm muzzle at him. He was the friendliest big dumb beast in the world, Choo Choo thought. A horse was a horse and none knew it better than he, and horses came and went and you had

to be tough about them. But Pontiac was different. He was a sort of Joe Palooka of a horse—you hadda love him.

There were two figures in the dimness, beyond Hoppy's stall. Choo Choo squinted and recognized tall Dan Hunter, talking with Miz Louisa. Hunter was a nice guy, a strange one, but okay. He had known Miz Louisa for years. He had money or something, because he always kept turning up at meets, but never seemed out of the green stuff. He was not a gambler—Choo Choo could spot a horse player a mile away. He was real interested in Hoppy, Gaslight and Pontiac, though and spoke often with Choo Choo about them. Asked sensible questions, too.

Choo Choo ambled toward the pair. As he came up he could not help hearing Hunter say, "Certainly I want you to quit. But I don't think you *should* quit, just because I want you to."

"Dan you're wonderful," she said.

"And maybe the kid's got something. . . ." The tall man turned. He had wide-spaced, clever eyes and a nice smile. "Hello, Choo Choo. Nice ride."

"Aw, it wasn't anything. Pontiac just started to run. He'd be even better over the full distance."

Hunter said, "He may be right, Louisa."

"I can only afford to enter Hoppy. Oh, I put all three names in, of course, but Hoppy is the horse. He'll run. If I can get Cregar or Hoff or one of the other jockeys with experience, we've a chance."

Hunter was looking at Choo Choo. He said slowly, "I'd enter Pontiac and put this boy up."

"You don't know from beans," said Miz Louisa kindly. "Come on and eat with us, Choo Choo, and explain the facts of life to this dreamer."

It was a terrific thing, eating with them in the Columbia Restaurant in Tampa, talking with Hunter, making Miz Louisa laugh, so that her eyes sparkled and she looked about twenty. But it did nothing toward changing her mind about Pontiac.

IT WAS altogether different at Poinsettia Park in Miami. Every race was a fast one, every entry bore famed colors. Even Manny Cregar and Amsy Hooy weren't so gosh-awful big in Miami. There were riders eighteen times their size.

Cregar was still bullying Amsy and this did not set well with Hoff, so Choo Choo decided. Cregar would try to gain stature with the other jocks by belittling Amsy and nobody likes that stuff. Amsy was a pretty good fellow and Cregar made some enemies. Choo Choo was around after exercising Hoppy one day and Cregar came by and said, "I got a pair of boots over in town. Get 'em for me, will you, kid?"

"I ain't goin' to town," said Choo Choo.

"Who ast you? Take my car," said Cregar.

"I got to wait for Mr. Hunter," said Choo Choo. "Sorry, Manny." There were exercise boys around who would be glad to do the errand. Choo Choo was a jock, an apprentice, but above running errands on command.

Manny moved close. He said, "I want them boots, now. You know better than to refuse me, kid." He put a hand on Choo Choo's flesh.

Dan Hunter was coming around the end of the stable. Manny's tight, cruel little face was close to Choo Choo's. "You hear me?"

Choo Choo twisted away, then back, so that his shoulder banged into Manny's chest. He said, "I hear you. Go to hell, will you?"

Hunter came up just then. Manny started to take a swing, but held back. Choo Choo walked away with the tall man. He was seething inside, but he kept quiet, walking along, the tiniest of all the little men around the stables. He knew then it was war between him and Manny, because he wouldn't be bullied like Amsy or the exercise boys. Manny had whipped all the other jocks and sooner or later Manny would whip him. It was war, any way you looked at it. He was pretty scared.

Hunter took him to a lunch counter and ordered and said, "I had a whale of a job. But I talked her into it."

Choo Choo's blue eyes were as round as saucers. "Pontiac?"

"With you up. She let me pay the entry fee," said Hunter. "Amsy Hoff is going to ride Hoppy. You've got a week to get ready."

Choo Choo said, "The Florida Stakes! Fifty grand! If old Pontiac could only win that one!"

"It would be a nice thing for you, too."

"Gee, thanks. You're a swell guy," said Choo Choo feelingly. "Givin' old Pontiac his chance." He giggled. "Pontiac ain't old, of course, he's just such a clown. He'll run for your money, Mr. Hunter. I promise!"

Hunter said, "I—ahem— I really hope neither of them run too well. Or I should! On the other hand, I want Louise to have every opportunity. I want her to have success." He did not seem to be speaking directly to Choo Choo, but the boy understood clearly what the older man meant. "At any rate, Pontiac shall run, because you showed he could win a race with you on him."

"Thanks," said Choo Choo again. Miz Louisa came along about then and they all three discussed it. She seemed to think it was a joke, a whim upon Hunter's part in which she was indulging him. But Choo Choo didn't care, just so long as Pontiac got to run and he got to ride him.

He began the next morning, exercising the big red chestnut himself. He talked, making up little rhymes and songs, breathing them into Pontiac's ear. The thoroughbred responded beautifully to this. As Miz Louisa said, he was more pet than race horse.

Hunter got up at daylight and sat on the rail stop watch in hand, just like the touts. He talked a lot to Choo Choo about the race.

Manny Cregar had been hired to ride Moon Girl, a filly who had a chance to win, a small swift animal, a bay. Gordon was on Space Ship, Domingo would ride Cricket, Cloudburst would have Aces Holley up. All were top jocks, all were tough competition for a kid like Choo Choo. But Hunter was full of ideas, smart ones based on observation and reading and listening to horse talk.

Amsy Hoff was bringing Hoppy along. Hoppy won a couple of short races and Miz Louisa was real high on him. As the time grew close, Choo Choo began to realize that for some reason, Miz Louisa was counting on Hoppy to prove something for her.

It came out while talking with Hunter. If Hoppy won the Florida Stakes, Miz Louisa would have fifty thousand dollars and would be proven right about almost everything. She would stick to her beloved

horse racing and Dan Hunter would go back to his business enterprises and they would forget each other.

Near as Choo Choo could gather, nobody out and said this, which would have been simple and straightforward. But that's the way it stacked up.

The day of the race, Hunter said to him, "Maybe you can't win—but if you can beat Hoppy I think I will have won. And if I win, believe me you win, Choo Choo. You're a fine boy. I think we understand each other."

Well, Hunter was a nice guy, but he didn't understand a kid who had been born in a stable and would die in one, Choo Choo reflected. He meant well and he sure was crazy about Miz Louisa but that didn't cut any ice. A horse race was another thing. Choo Choo came closer to understanding Miz Louisa about the race. It was her horse, her race, so to speak.

Not many stables had two entries for the Florida Stakes. Dracone did, with Moon Girl and Chiclet, that was all. Chiclet was a big black and was running to stooge the pace for Moon Girl, but everyone knew about that and the jockeys jeered at such primitive strategy.

AMSY HOFF donned the silks with a grin on his face a mile wide. The Harper black and gold looked strange on Amsy, thought Choo Choo, who wore them as an old uniform.

Amsy said, "Too bad that old red can't get off fast. You could look after Manny, mebbe."

"Miz Louisa didn't give any orders," said Choo Choo. He was a little sad about that. She had just smiled and told him to run the best race he could. "Manny'll be after you, huh?"

Hoff said harshly, "This is my chance to get even with him. I'm gonna run him off the track if he comes at me."

Choo Choo did not answer. He believed in letting the other jocks ride their race while he paid attention to pace and the horse beneath him.

Amsy said, "Seems funny she entered Pontiac."

Choo Choo adjusted his belt. He had weighed in earlier and he had to see about the lead in his saddle. Pontiac only was carrying a hundred and five, which was

feathers for him, but that meant five pounds of lead.

Amsy said, "Hope yuh don't run off the pace altogether, kid. It ain't nice to have seven nags kickin' dirt in your face."

Choo Choo said, "We won't run no last."

Amsy laughed. He was in high spirits. He said, "Kid, don't fool yourself. That big lazy pig can't run in this company."

"He beat you and Manny!" retorted Choo Choo.

"That boat race?" hooted Amsy. Then he sobered, trying to cover. "One of those things, kid. One of those things."

"Boat race?" Choo Choo's mind went back to the day Pontiac had won on the West Coast. He remembered the gaiety among the jockeys, he remembered the loud laugh, suddenly silenced, as he had left the showers. He said slowly, "So that was it? You all had your dough down at the big odds. You held off and let me and Pontiac through."

"It was Manny's idea," said Amsy hastily. "Dough was short up there, you know that."

"I knew you were a crooked bunch. I heard that was a jockey's track." He ought to tell Miz Louisa that her rider for the day was a crook. He picked up a bit iron and looked at Amsy.

Amsy said, "Hey! Now don't go to gettin' any ideas!"

"Is there anything on today? Has Manny tried anything with you?" demanded Choo Choo. He balanced the piece of metal.

"I'm after Manny!" said Amsy hastily. "You know I hate him!"

"You better. If I catch you at anything. . . I'll be watchin' you," said Choo Choo. He heard someone come into the room and dropped the iron, turning. It was Manny Cregar.

The hatchet-faced little man said, "The Harper entry! Couple of great riders. That broad really's wastin' her dough!"

Choo Choo stepped swiftly in front of Cregar. "After the race you'll apologize for callin' her a broad."

"After the race I'll beat your head in," sneered Cregar. "And see you don't get near me on the track, either, or you won't be able to take a beatin'. G'wan, you punk. I wanta talk to Amsy."

"Like hell you're talkin' to Amsy," said

Choo Choo. "Get outa here, Amsy. Quick!"

Hoff hesitated for one second. Then he ducked quickly past them and out the door. He was pale and his hands were shaking, Choo Choo noticed. A swell thing, just before a stake race.

Cregar said, "I'm gonna get you, but good. Wise little jerk! I'm gonna cop this race and then I'm gonna fix both you and that yella son."

"I'll be around," Choo Choo promised him. He wheeled and followed Hoff.

But he was scared, he admitted. Hoff was not going to make a good ride with that fear in him. And now he knew that Pontiac had never won a race against real competition.

Hunter was waiting for him. The tall man said, "I'm not too sure about Hoff. He looks nervous."

Choo Choo nodded.

Hunter said, "You don't look too confident yourself."

"I'm all right," said Choo Choo quickly.

Louisa Harper came along. There were signs of stress in her features. She said rapidly, "If there's anything you can do to help Hoppy—" Then she stopped, staring down at Choo Choo. "Never mind. Pontiac looks wonderful. He's a darling old thing. It's wonderful that he can run today."

That was Miz Louisa, thought Choo Choo, going his way. A thoroughbred, that one. Hunter too. Hunter wanted her, but he wouldn't do anything to hurt her horses or their chances. Two nice people, people a guy could tie to.

Still, Pontiac was heavy-footed—and he had never won a real race. A big, strong, good-natured, sweet horse, sure, but could he run when the chips were down?

He wondered if Miz Louisa or Hunter had bet anything, shuddering at the odds which would be posted against them. He had ten bucks riding secretly on Pontiac, his luck bet. Money didn't mean much to Choo Choo, it was horses that counted. He would never be like Manny Cregar and the others. He was never one for the flesh-pots, the fast cars and slithery blondes.

He went through the preliminaries in a sort of dream, trying to reason things out, failing because he was too young to make even half-sense out of people, he finally

decided. He came fully awake and aware in the gate, sitting on the neck of Pontiac.

THERE was a great crowd and it was a great day for it. The sun shone and the band played and the loud speakers brayed. The storied flamingoes walked in the lagoon, tall palms waved their fronds high above in silent applause of the brave scene.

Moon Girl was on his left, nearest the pole. Manny Cregar looked over at him, lifting his lip in a snarl. Space Ship was on his right. Hoff was having trouble with Hoppy and the starter yelled and Hoppy got worse. Choo Choo knew for sure then that Hoppy was out of it.

Cregar laughed, sitting on Moon Girl, a tractable little filly with great speed and more bottom than she was supposed to possess. The other jocks were calm in their superiority. Choo Choo bent and whispered in Pontiac's ear and the big goon nickered softly, as though someone had given him sugar.

Hoppy calmed somewhat. There was an instant of suspended animation which always precedes a good start, then the barrier went up. Choo Choo leaned far forward and Pontiac heaved into action, pounding the dirt.

He could see Cregar kick the filly, see her off like a shot, taking the rail and holding it. He could see Space Ship and Cricket and Cloud Burst. He saw Chiclet fighting through to get up with Moon Girl. Chiclet could run for a short while and in a moment he was ahead, going far too fast for the distance.

There was nothing Choo Choo couldn't figure out. He saw Hoff boot Hoppy into the ruck, but Hoppy was still fighting the iron and Hoff didn't have the hands for the highly bred and sensitive entry and Choo Choo knew it. He settled down to rating Pontiac on the pace of Moon Girl and Space Ship.

He was riding his own race. Even Louisa Harper hadn't thought it worth while to coach him. She knew, however, that Choo Choo needed little coaching. Racing was instinct with him. He felt the pace, he felt everything that went on, right through his tiny bones. He ran eighth, but kept Pontiac up there, gluing his eyes on Space Ship and Moon Girl.

They came to the turn and he let out a

little. Pontiac was willing. The big red passed two horses, swung around and made the half-mile pole behind Hoppy, Moon Girl, Space Ship, Chiclet. Cloudburst fell back. The others strung out.

Then Hoppy swung wide and Amsy was fighting him and getting nowhere. Choo Choo promptly shot through a hole and got into Hoppy's spot. It was Chiclet, Space Ship, Moon Girl and Pontiac. He got a glimpse of Hoff's red, angry face, shook his head, spoke in Pontiac's perked ear.

There was a rumble from the crowd. Space Ship was fighting Moon Girl. Chiclet was already showing signs of the pace. Choo Choo rode easily, giving Pontiac plenty of room to run. They came around the three quarter pole and Pontiac wasn't all out nor feeling it. Choo Choo let him out a little more.

The big red thoroughbred seemed comically happy to run. He threw a lot of dirt with his heavy pounding, but he did not slip nor skid. He settled down, running lower than Choo Choo ever remembered, flattening out with his eyes on the horses ahead. Pontiac was enjoying his work-out.

Chiclet broke and Moon Girl moved up. Space Ship ran neck and neck with Cregar's mount, trying to get the pole. Gordon was a fine rider, very clean. Cregar battled him off, using his bat on the filly. Pontiac was suddenly up there with them, in third place.

Cregar looked around. Amazement filled his narrow eyes. He ducked his head and went back to the whip. Gordon skillfully rode Space Ship at his side. Behind them Pontiac's reddish mane flew in the wind and Choo Choo whispered admonishment in the neck which strained ever forward.

They hit the mile pole running as two horses, Space Ship and Moon Girl ahead, Pontiac right behind them. There was no chance of going through. Choo Choo swung a bit.

The big red opened his stride. He moved out. The last quarter stretched ahead. Choo Choo sang, "Now you run. Say you can't run. Say you never lost a race. Say you're clumsy, no-good, will they? Run, big boy, run!"

He went once to the bat, just a flick of it. Pontiac took it joyously for the signal

it was and made his bid. They came into the stretch.

They were wide and Cregar was almost killing the filly. Gordon gave everything he had into the ride on Space Ship. The red horse with the heavy feet ran smack past them. Cregar yelled something and tried to crowd over. The weight of the red horse sent him scaling ahead.

Choo Choo knelt, ready to shoo the galling animal in. He could feel the breath of the other two on his neck but he had no doubt.

And then he felt the saddle slipping. In one agonized moment he tried to remember why this terrible catastrophe should happen to him, could not recall having saddled up. The pressure, Amsy's revelation, his preoccupation with Miz Louisa and Hunter had caused him to fall into a brown study during that time.

All he knew was that it was slipping. He could fall off. Worse, he could lose a weight. He reached back for the weights. He got one hand on them.

He yelled, "Now, hoss! Now I can't do anything. Now it's you and high water. Run, damn you, Red, Run!"

He sat that way. He balanced like a trapeze performer, making sure the weights did not slip out and disqualify them, holding the saddle on with his knees, letting the big horse run his own race, shouting above the yells of the men behind him.

Like a statue Choo Choo maintained his seat. He seemed about to fall any moment, his position was impossible. Yet he clung like a burr, urging the red chestnut on. They came down in front of the howling, screaming stands.

Cregar was kicking the filly, Gordon was giving Space Ship everything he had. Cregar tried to bull over. Gordon rode wide and prevented him. Space Ship had something left and Gordon brought it out.

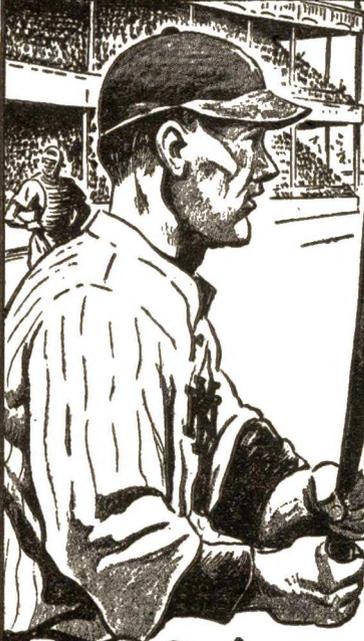
They were in a heap. The red horse shook his head and stretched. Choo Choo almost was thrown by the convulsive leap of the Harper champion. Then they were across.

He slipped and slid, hanging onto the weights. They had to lift him down, but he clutched the saddle. It came off altogether in his hands, and he stood there, looking at the cinch.

(Please continue on page 108)

MIGHTY MEN of SPORT

by Ben Nelson
Stokes Allen



Lou Gehrig

MURDERERS' ROW

THE 1927 YANKEES WERE PROBABLY THE GREATEST BASEBALL TEAM OF ALL TIME. FROM MEUSEL, COMBS AND RUTH—THE PERFECT OUTFIELD—TO PINT-SIZE MILLER HUGGINS—OFTEN CALLED THE IDEAL MANAGER—THAT TEAM HAD EVERYTHING!

OPPOSING HURLERS, FACING 6 HITTERS AVERAGING A TERRIFYING .336, WERE LICKED BEFORE THEY STARTED. IMAGINE PITCHING TO THIS-----



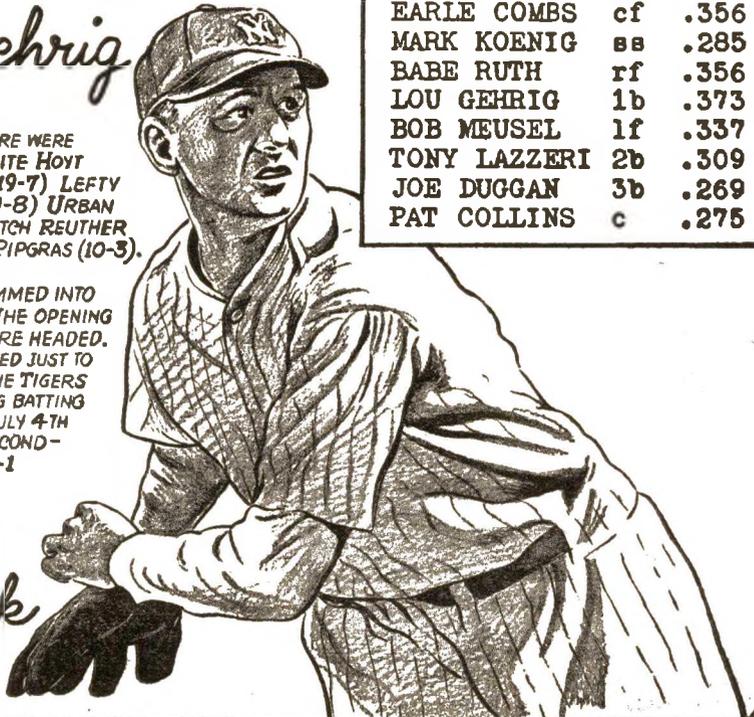
Huggins

The Babe

FOR PITCHERS THERE WERE SUCH GREATS AS WAITE HOYT (22-7) CY MOORE (19-7) LEFTY HERB PENNOCK (19-8) URBAN SHOCKER (18-6) DUTCH REUTHER (13-6) AND GEORGE PIPGRAS (10-3).

THOSE YANKS SLAMMED INTO FIRST PLACE WITH THE OPENING GAME AND NEVER WERE HEADED. THEY WEREN'T SATISFIED JUST TO WIN. THEY WHIPPED THE TIGERS 19-2, WITHOUT TAKING BATTING PRACTICE; AND ON JULY 4TH SLAUGHTERED THE SECOND-PLACE SENATORS 12-1 AND 21-1!

Herb Pennock



EARLE COMBS	cf	.356
MARK KOENIG	ss	.285
BABE RUTH	rf	.356
LOU GEHRIG	1b	.373
BOB MEUSEL	lf	.337
TONY LAZZERI	2b	.309
JOE DUGGAN	3b	.269
PAT COLLINS	c	.275



DURING THE SEASON THEY SLUGGED THEMSELVES INTO THE RECORDS RIGHT AND LEFT-- COMBS WITH 3 THREE-BAGGERS IN ONE GAME AND GEHRIG WITH 3 HOMERS. LOU ALSO SET A RECORD OF 175 RUNS BATTED IN AND STARTED MANY OF HIS RECORD BREAKING STREAKS.

AS A TEAM, THE YANKS STOLE 90 BASES, BATTED IN 908 RUNS AND SCORED 975, MADE 1644 HITS (158 HOMERS, 103 THREE BASE, 291 TWO BASE) FOR AN UNHEARD-OF AVERAGE OF .307!

BASEBALL'S MOST SHOCKING ONE-TWO PUNCH, RUTH AND GEHRIG!

ON SEPT. 29TH, RUTH HIT 2 HOMERS TO EQUAL HIS 1921 RECORD OF 59---- AND THE NEXT DAY GOLFED ONE OF SENATOR TOM ZACHARY'S SCREWBALLS INTO THE STANDS FOR HIS ALL-TIME RECORD OF 60!

THE YANKS FINISHED THE SEASON WITH 110 GAMES WON AND 44 LOST FOR A .714 AVERAGE AND A LORDLY LEAD OF 19 GAMES OVER THE ATHLETICS.

THE WORLD SERIES WITH THE PIRATES WAS NO CONTEST. THEY TOOK IT IN FOUR STRAIGHT!

OF THOSE MIGHTY YANKS OF '27, RUTH, GEHRIG AND PENNOCK HAVE ALREADY BEEN IMMORTALIZED BY MEMBERSHIP IN BASEBALL'S HALL OF FAME.

STATHENWORTH

INFIELD OUTLAW

THE red-faced man growled, "You may as well get out there an' take the kinks out, anyway," and Red Slade picked up his battered mitt and walked stiffly out of the dugout.

The red-faced man had been incredulous, and then scornful and a little angry, which had been quite natural indeed—because he happened to be Larry Lynn, manager of the world champion Bears, and he had a lot of worries on his mind, one being an eight-game losing streak.

Little Red Slade didn't know much about that, and if he did, he would have been too tired to care much. You can't play a tough double-header in St. Paul one day, ride a bumpy plane all night, and get up the next morning feeling like a bloody hero.

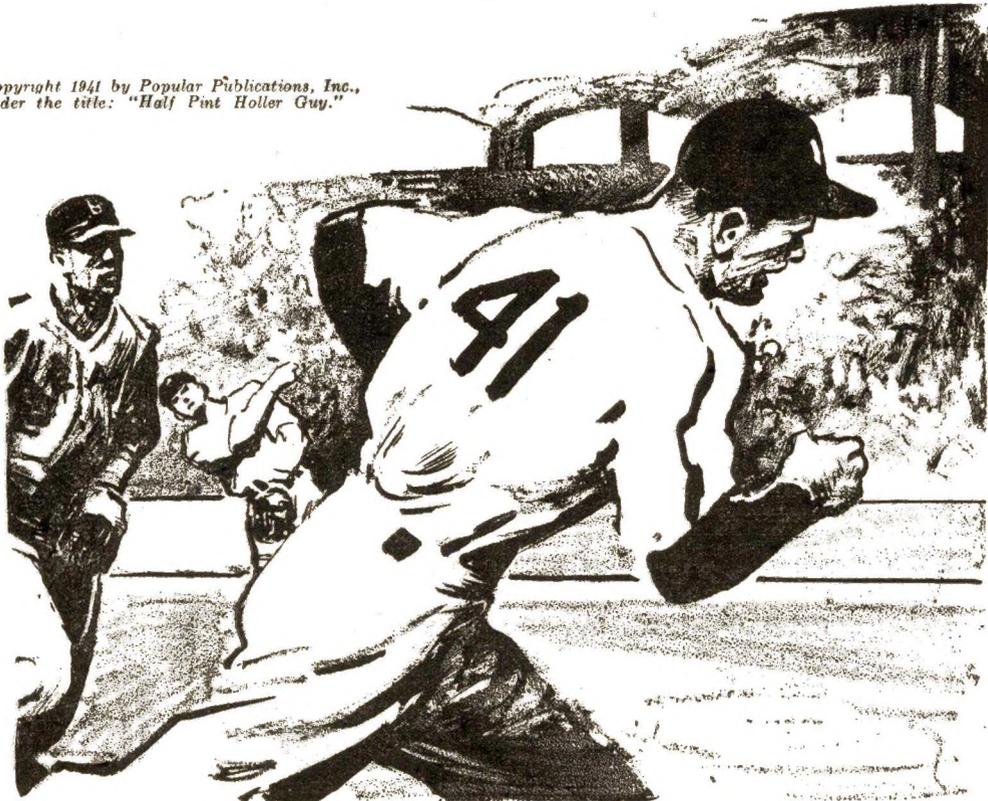
Gangling Slats Weiner, the center-

fielder, said, "Here y'are, pal," and lobbed a ball at him, and Red forgot his aches and caught it automatically, his eyes still full of this wonderful thing that had happened.

He, a second-year busher, was wearing the monkey suit of the New York Bears! Here, within touch, was the greatest collection of talent ever assembled in the history of baseball.

And they looked the part, these Bears. There was Duke Mulleany, of the iron arm, a little thinner than he looked in the newspaper photos, but the best shortstop in the business. There was Bots Cady, the one-man catching staff, so good that he never got a day off. There was the awesome outfield—Talbert, Alf Sickles, Slats Weiner—the despair and the pride of the league. And over to the side, limp-

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Little Red Slade's big-league dreams turned into an infield nightmare, the day he replaced the crowd's idol, broke the pitcher's arm—and slugged his own team's business manager.

**Thrill-Packed
Saga of the
Basepaths**

**By
DAVID CREWE**

The throw was high and in the basepath. There was only one thing to do . . .



ing a little and scowling into the shadows, was King Cobb, the greatest of them all!

Red gulped. He waved to Weiner, signaling him to get another partner. He walked precariously past baseballs that missed him by inches. He stood, hands on hips, beside the greatest first-sacker the game had ever known, and who could blame him if his eyes were shining and his lips were slightly parted?

One the bench, Larry Lynn growled disgustedly, "Lookit him! I ask Hen Brody to send me some first base insurance and I get a bathboy!"

They made a ludicrous contrast, standing beside each other. King Cobb was six feet plus in his stocking feet. The big number 7 was lost between his massive shoulders, and the hitting muscles rippled beneath his glove-tight shirt. Beside him, Red's slender arms looked matchstick-thin. The top of his hat barely reached the King's shoulder.

The bell rang, and the Bears went into the dugout for last minute instructions. Still a little dazed by it all, Red sat down, unnoticed and glum, yet tight with the pre-game jitters that hit him every day before zero hour.

IT WAS the first baseball day in three years, he was remembering with a sharp pang, that he wouldn't be out there taking his licks. There had been very bad days and a few great ones, but they all had spelled at least nine innings of baseball. He was going to miss it a lot. Even that blue and white Bear on his monkey suit wouldn't quite make up for—

A grinning face leaned in front of him, blotting out the ball field, and a voice drawled, "Hiyah, Nobody!"

Red said, "I'll nobody you, yuh big—"

The giant towhead caught Red's balled fist in his own big paw and pushed it back in his lap, still grinning.

He said, "No fightin' allowed, busher. An' no offense meant. Only—when the tailor put that number 30 on your back, he left out the 3. I reckon about thirty thousand bleacher bugs up there are thumbing through their scorecards tryin' to find a number zero. I hope it ain't no omen or anything. It's hard enough to hook on with this outfit as it is."

The towhead, it developed, was one

Hoops Ingram, a southpaw from the Missions, and a first-year man like himself.

Red said, "What the hell do they want me around here for? Lookit that infield!"

Out on the grass, Nig Lestrone had made a barehand pickup, whipping the long throw across underhand, without straightening up. It went over on a line, right for the letters on King Cobb's chest.

Hoops Ingram said, "Don't kid yourself none. This team is bustin' up. They got the names and the salaries, but they also got legs. And them legs ain't what they used to be. I'll betcha—"

Larry Lynn's voice barked, "Over here, Slade," and Red sat down beside the Bear pilot. Lynn, he noticed, looked drawn, and the strain of the last disastrous Western trip had etched deep lines of worry about his eyes.

"It's either you or Clancy, from Newark," he said. "The King is washed up."

Red cried, "Why—he hit nearly four hundred out West, with five four-masters! He's a hell of a ball player, mister!"

Larry Lynn grinned bleakly, and Red subsided, abashed, remembering that here beside him was the man who had found the King in a backwoods sawmill and made him into eighty thousand dollars worth of genius.

Bill Farrell, the Panther lead-off man, strode plateward, swinging three bats, and the chatter from the infield broke into the quiet.

Lynn said, "I watched you take your licks. You swung from your heels, and when you connected good you got it over the shortstop's head. How many homers did you hit last year?"

Red felt very small and insignificant.

He said huskily, "Two. But I get on base a lot, an' I can play that bag, mister. I can't think of anything I'd like better than holdin' down that first sack for the Bears."

The red-faced man stared at him, not unkindly.

He said, "You and about six thousand others, son. I don't believe in pulling my punches. If you were a foot taller and fifty pounds heavier and hit .300, you might have a chance, if you could field. I got this Clancy coming tomorrow, an' he's slugging .340 with thirty-five homers. You see how it is."

Pat Calloway, the southpaw meal ticket, went into his wind-up, and Bill Farrell, breaking from his flat-footed stance with amazing speed, leaned down into the low sinker and dropped a lazy, swinging bunt down the first base line.

It went down there with the finesse of a perfect billiard shot. It went past the box before Calloway could get over there. It stopped, twenty feet wide of first base.

Gasping at the sheer beauty of that play, Red leaned forward, pounding his fist into his mitt. And then he sat back again, sighing—because Farrell, one of the fastest men on the circuit, went through the inner defense in stride. The King went over fast enough, to all appearances, spearing the ball in his bare hand, but is underhand toss to Calloway, covering the bag, was pure wasted motion. The Panther speed merchant was three good strides ahead of the play.

Larry Lynn groaned.

"They've been bunting us silly all over the circuit," he said. "For every run we slug in, we let two more trickle through that right side of the infield." He stood up, and his voice was a little hoarse. "He's been playing with Charley horses on both legs all year, an' living on aspirin and adhesive tape. It's got to end sometime. Get out in front of the dugout and stretch your legs, busher. I'm puttin' you in after this frame."

IT WAS like a strange dream. The Bears came stamping into the dugout. The King, limping a little, stayed outside, going to the bat rack for his big black mace. And Larry Lynn's voice, gruffer than usual, cut through the chatter.

"Come in here and sit down," he said. "You don't play no more with that leg."

King Cobb stared incredulously. Then he saw Red walking out to the on-deck spot, and his face went a little gray under the tan.

"You can't do it!" he blurted. "I—listen, boss, no busher's gonna—"

Crouching miserably out on the green grass, Red didn't look around, but he could hear Larry's voice, strangely gentle.

"—not even a pennant's worth that much," Larry was saying. "I never thought the day would come. Besides, the doctors can do wonders for gams. This Clancy'll

be here tomorrow, an' after you get through with the sawbones. . . ."

It was a swell spot, Red was thinking dismally. One slice of a ball game, a stop-gap for another guy who was, in turn, only good enough to understudy a star—that was going to be his big league career!

Duke Mulleany went up to the plate, facing the rotund Bull Corrigan. The Bull had a thirty-eight waistline, but he still owned the fastest curve ball in the business. He reared into his wind-up, and Red gasped audibly, seeing that white cannon ball zoom down the money lane. It was the fastest pitch he had ever seen. Duke swung late, and a soft twisting fly went ou' back of second. Pete Murphy took it, without moving, for the out.

Pres Talbert, grinning, knocked the dirt out of his spikes.

"Ain't that fat boy the one?" he drawled. "Don't let him scare yuh, runt. Just go up there and swing, an' in a minute you can go back and sit down again. Watch me do it."

Red grinned ruefully, watching Pres take his copyrighted stance at the plate. The big Bohemian seemed to sprawl awkwardly, all jutting elbows and bent knees, but his knuckles were white against the brown of his bat. The hard one came in there, letter high, and Pres uncoiled, going after it before it had a chance to break. There was a thunderous crash, and Pres, halfway to first, took one look down the right-field line and slowed up to a jogging trot. The ball was a white dot, soaring majestically over the clamoring stands in deepest right.

And now was the time. Feeling utterly lost, more scared than he would admit even to himself, Red stepped plateward. For a moment, his outstretched hand brushed Talbert's as the grinning fielder stamped on the plate, and then he was alone.

Dimly, he was aware of the outraged yells from first base stands, aware for the first time that the King was out of the game. And then the yells faded away, and there was nothing left but a strange rubber, a centerfield fence which seemed miles away, and Bull, rearing up on the mound, so terribly close.

A white bullet shot horribly for his head, and he flung himself blindly into the dust. He got up a little shakily, and the plate umpire's right hand was up.

Blimp Cannell, the Panther backstop, said, "Didn't you ever see a curve ball before, sonny? Shucks, Bull hasn't really started to fog 'em in yet!"

Grimly, Red took his stance again. There was a sodden lump where his heart should have been, and his knees were shaking. Another fireball came down the center, and he swung without hope, fouling it into the stands.

The big hurler, hardly waiting for a signal, went into the same wind-up, and Red knew that he wasn't even going to waste one. He dug his spikes in, saw it was coming in on the outside corner, cut down savagely. . . . And then, off-stride, he tried to break his swing. Out of the same horrendous fireball delivery had come a slow, teasing floater! It dipped gently over Red's bat for the third strike.

HE WALKED into the dugout. The Bears were grinning pityingly.

Nig Lestrone said, "Wotta slugger! Nothing can stop us now!"

Bots Cady fled out to deep center, and they took the field again, a run to the good.

They went along to the top of the fifth, hanging grimly to that slim lead. Red discovered, with some amazement, that he was still in one piece. He hadn't seen a hard play all day. That picturebook infield could throw 'em off their left ears or on the dead run, but the ball always came up there straight as a string.

Pop Norris, the Panther right fielder, led off. Calloway threw a long one inside for a called strike.

Red chortled, watching that perfect delivery.

This wasn't so bad after all, once you got the—

The big southpaw tried for the same spot again, and the squat batter chopped viciously. Badly hit, spinning crazily, a handle blooper came down the first-base line, digging the chalk out of the line—and rolling in fair!

It was going to be close. Breaking fast from his deep defensive spot, Red charged in, eyes on that skidding ball. Dimly, he heard a lot of yelling, but there wasn't time to think about anything but that play. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the slow-gaited Norris plowing toward him, six

feet behind the ball, but coming up fast.

For his size, Red moved with astounding speed. He braked, giving the ball a last chance to roll foul, then dove down for it—

There was a stunning impact, and the soft earth smote him on the back of the neck. For a crazy second, he was upside down and he saw his own feet churning empty air above him. He landed on his belly, still clutching the ball, feeling Norris under him and wondering how the base-runner had arrived there so soon.

But—it wasn't Norris! The Panther batter was standing on first base, looking back.

It was Calloway. The big pitcher was sprawled crookedly on his side, and his hundred-grand flipper was doubled underneath him.

Cal tested it gingerly, wincing. Horror-stricken, Red got up.

The Bears were charging out of the dugout.

King Cobb was wailing, "I told yuh that damn shrimp would put the whammy on us!"

2

Calamity Sacker

THE trainer led Cal away. Red stared helplessly around a circle of glowering faces. Hoops Ingram ran out from the bullpen, shedding his sweater. Larry Lynn looked twenty years older.

He said quickly, "It wasn't your fault, kid. You played it right. Cal was playin' the ball the way he'd had to if a slower man was coverin' first, that's all."

Duke Mulleany said bitterly, "It's only a pennant, that's all."

Hoops Ingram, looking a little scared, took the mound. The kid was plenty nervous. His first pitch hit the dirt in front of the plate, and Norris made second standing up. The saturnine Pete Murphy was at the plate. Unsettled, Hoops made the next one too good. The Panther second-sacker stroked it on a line into the centerfield stands, putting his team in the lead. And then, too late, Hoops found his stuff and retired the side, but the damage had been done.

The rest of the game, to Red, was a night-

mare—a nightmare he would never forget. The battling Bears were battling no longer. They sat, dour and tight-lipped, in the dugout, crushed by the loss of their meal ticket.

Hoops sat down beside Red.

He said sagely, "It's lousy, kid, but you can't blame 'em. Calloway was holdin' this team together. The good ones are slipping, and the rookies ain't quite ready. Some of us bushers'll be up there some day, but not soon enough to save this club. Sorry you hadda be the guy to push 'em off the cliff, pal."

Larry Lynn looked like a ghost, but he grinned tightly at Red.

"Some guys I know would let their whole career be ruined by a bad break like you just got," he said. "Somehow, I don't think you're that sort. The job's still open out there, if you're big enough to fill it."

Wordlessly, not daring to speak lest he show the gratitude that choked him, Red climbed out of the dugout, found his bat and knelt down, watching an apathetic Pres Talbert strike out on four pitched balls.

The night's bumpy plane ride was beginning to take its toll. Red's legs felt heavy, and there was a dull pain in the small of his back, where Calloway's shoulder had hit him. And yet, strangely, he was relaxed for the first time that dreadful day—relaxed enough to realize that there wasn't any place on this star-studded team for a little holler guy from the wrong side of the tracks. But he could do one thing in a Bear monkey suit, anyway. He could give all he had left to try to save a ball game for Larry Lynn.

Bull Corrigan threw the duster ball, and this time he stayed up there until the last split-second, waiting for the curve. It didn't come. The ball was as straight as a string. He flung himself into the dirt, and something clicked the visor of his cap as he fell.

He got up. Blimp Cannell, behind the plate, growled, "That's the best way I know to make your wife a widow."

It came in again, the high hard one, and Red had the sudden sure knowledge that the curve was going to break this time. It looked like suicide, but he waited in the face of that head-high bomb, digging in grimly. If it didn't curve, he couldn't get out of the way now.

And—at the last minute, it swooped down! Stabbing sharply, Red cut into it and felt the tingling impact of ball against the center of his bat. He put his head down and ran his heart out.

It was a blooming liner over shortstop. He stood on first base, and the scattered yells from the diehard stands were music to his ears. He cupped his hands. Bots Cady was striding heavily toward the plate.

He yelled, "Everybody hits, Bottsy! Fix the big ape's wagon! Easy pickin' in there, old timer!"

For a little man, Red had a surprising voice. It bellowed across the infield, and there was an amused buzz from the stands.

Tony Nicosia, the Panther first-sacker said, "Don't get excited, little boy. Bottsy's gonna hit into a double killing, an' he knows it."

Bots took his stance. He didn't look like the man who had led the league for three years in runs batted in. He swung weakly at the first ball and tapped an easy roller past the box. Bulleting out of first with the impact, Red saw that it wasn't even going to be close. Young Mike Flynn, the Panther shortfielder, was on top of the ball with seconds to spare. The slow-footed Bots was an easy double play at first, unless. . . .

There was only one chance, and Red took it. Going into second a full stride behind the perfect throw, he left his feet, sighting for Pete Murphy's legs. There was a mighty crash, and something like the side of the Empire State Building came up and pushed him backward with a mighty hand.

He got up slowly, shaking his head to clear the mists. The chunky Murphy was sitting on the ground ten feet behind second base, swearing. The ball was still in his hand. He hadn't had a chance to make the throw to first.

Red was a little dizzy and he felt as though one slight push would cause him to break in small pieces but he promised himself grimly that they'd never know it. He leaned down, hoping that he wouldn't fall on his face. He helped the still dazed Murphy to his feet.

He said loftily, "Sorry I hadda hit you so hard, old man."

He walked to the dugout, hoping that

the Bears would put on a real rally, so that he could find his breath again.

The boys were slumped in their places, looking dispirited and crushed.

Larry Lynn yelled, "Nice blockin' in there, big boy."

But nobody else seemed to notice.

Alf Sickles, looking like the ghost of a once great slugger, went after a slow ball, outside, and hit a curving fly back of first base, where the grinning Nicosia was waiting.

They lost the ball game, four to one. And Red stumbled into his hotel room, too tired to eat, and fell asleep with his clothes on.

THEY went down to the park the next day to finish the series with the Panthers. A big stranger with a tanned face was boning down three bats, talking with Larry Lynn. He looked every inch a ball player. There was a first baseman's mitt sticking out of his back pocket and Red's heart began to sink.

The light-hearted Hoops, in no way crushed by his loss of the day before, sat down, whistling.

"That, sonny boy," he said, "is Clancy. He hit three over the right-field wall in batting drill. I guess maybe you an' me'll have a lotta time to talk politics on the bench from here on."

"If I'm here," Red said grimly.

If only they'd give him one more chance, let him show what he could do with a night's sleep under his belt and the tightness gone. . . .

Larry Lynn beckoned him over. The pilot's eyes started at Red's feet and stopped reluctantly on a level with his head, as if hoping that some more height had been added during the night.

"I'm takin' you out of the lineup," he said bluntly. "We need this Clancy's power to pull us out of our present nosedive."

It was on the books, but it still was tough. Red nodded and hoped that his lips weren't trembling. He went out in the outfield and shagged flies until game time, painfully conscious of the barbed comments from the stands. The bleacher bugs worshipped two gods, King Cobb and Pat Calloway. They would be slow to forgive a sawed-off runt who had kicked one out of the lineup and crippled the other in the space of one brief ball game.

The bell rang, ending the pre-game drill, and Red went into the dugout. It wasn't very pleasant. The Bear reserves were huddled around a figure seated on the bench, making fight talk. Red couldn't see who it was, but after a minute somebody in the back line moved, and he recognized King Cobb's massive legs.

Hoops Ingram said, "Park yourself, hero. We got half the dugout for ourselves. They don't trust you, an' they're mad at me because I said that the King was washed up. I figure I can do without their company for a spell, anyway."

The big pitcher was grinning, but his face was strained, and his eyes had a worried look.

Red said, "You know what I think, pal? I think you're lyin' like hell. But—thanks, anyway. It's nice to know there's one guy in this town who hasn't got the knife out for me."

Hoops said cryptically, "Betcha Larry Lynn's feelin' the same way about now."

Gloomily, alone, they sat at the end of the long bench, while the drabest game in weeks dragged along.

Little Adolpho Vergez, the Cuban portsider, was throwing for the Bears, and his elusive nothing ball was keeping the Panthers hitting into the dirt all day. They went into the seventh deadlocked with no score. In the last of the inning, with one away, Pres Talbert got the tiring Dutch Kalsch in the hole and finally drew a walk.

Amid a sudden cheer from the stands, Clancy took his stance at the plate.

The kid looked good, Red told himself soberly. He was green and a little nervous, but he took a hell of a cut at the ball. Unless he had some hidden weakness, they wouldn't be able to keep him much under the three hundred mark in any company.

THE big first baseman let a high hard one go by for a called strike, and Red nodded ungrudging approval.

The kid had a good eye. There was too much poison on that ball to risk a double killing. The Dutchman threw another in the same place. Young Clancy didn't change the pose of his body, but his feet had worked imperceptibly apart, opening his stance. It came in there, and the big bat lashed savagely down and out. A screaming liner went over first base, curving for

the bullpen in deep right field. The kid went into second standing up, and a run came across the plate.

Hoops nodded.

"It's what we need," he said. "You can field all around him, but they pay off on base knocks in this league."

Duke Mulleany was kicking the dugout steps.

"Why the hell didn't we have him here yesterday?" he said acidly. "You won't see this kid breakin' his own pitcher's arm."

Hoops said mildly, "Damn right, pal. You hafta be fast an' on your toes to play bunts the way Slade did—or like the rest of the clubs in this circuit do. Or maybe you never noticed."

King Cobb said, "I'll bust you in two, you lousy—"

Red stood beside the big pitcher. "You'll hafta take the two of us on," he said. "The way I feel now, it would be a pleasure."

The harassed face of Larry Lynn came around the corner, from the first-base coaching line.

"Make it three," he said wearily. "An' if I missed you, Cobb, and hit a couple of your fat-headed friends, that would be just fine, too."

King Cobb sat down. He waved his arms.

"You see what we're up against," he said to the glowering Bears. "A guy that can't handle his own ball club. How can yuh play winnin' ball with a combine like that?"

"Remind me to take two hundred bucks outa your next check," the little pilot barked.

His face was purple with anger.

They went into the ninth hugging that one-run lead. The first Panther batter, Pete Murphy, waiting for a two-and-two ball, bunted down the first base line, against all the tenets of baseball.

It was like a dismal comedy. Clancy, caught entirely napping, didn't move from his deep spot until the ball was opposite the pitcher's box. Swearing, the Duke ran completely around him to cover the sack. He might as well have saved his legs. Everyone ran around mightily, but nobody took care of the ball. It rolled gently out past the mound. It was still there when Murphy reached first base.

There was a hurried mound conference.

Little Adolpho Vergez was waving his arms around. Mulleany was slapping the stunned Clancy on the back, showing the crowd that it wasn't his fault. Red couldn't help but think that it was a hell of a lot more than they had done for him.

Burly Blimp Cannell pounded the dirt out of his cleats and took his stance, leveling off for the right-field wall. Vergez, still sore, tried to fog the first one through the heart of the plate. There was a mighty impact, and Alf Sickles, in deep right, took two quick steps backward and stopped, shaking his head. The ball was a white pinpoint against the clouds, six feet over the scoreboard.

They dropped the game and went out on the long road trip a bare half game in the lead.

3

Dugout Revolt

IT HAPPENED in St. Louis against the Cougars, at the end of a four-game tail-dive. It must have been brewing for a long time. Larry had Hoops out there on the mound, and the kid was throwing his heart out in a cause that was lost from the first.

The score was two to nothing, and it might as well have been a hundred, because the Bears had thrown away their batting punch, and there was nothing left but the motions. Clancy had two for two, and one of them had been a double, but you can't win ball games unless you get a man on base with another man to push him around.

At the end of the seventh, a well-dressed stranger came in the dugout and sat down beside King Cobb, talking earnestly.

He looked at Red and said, "That the guy?" The King nodded dourly, and they put their heads together while the top end of the batting list went out in order.

The Bears trotted out on the field, and Larry Lynn came in from the coaching line. The little pilot looked more drawn, more tired than a man had a right to look, Red thought. Lynn took a step toward the water cooler, saw the stranger, and his jaw shut down like a steel clamp.

Hoops said, "Ooh—I'm afraid to look!"

Larry Lynn's hat was pushed on the back of his head, and his knuckles were white against his clenched fists, but his voice was steady enough. He walked over to the stranger.

The stranger hastened to say, "Now take it easy, Lynn. I have full authority to do what I think is best for—"

Lynn said, "In the front office, yes. Out here you're just one more trouble-makin' tramp. Get the hell outa here or they'll carry you out feet first."

Duke Mulleany said, "Team spirit, boys. That's what we've got—and inspiring leadership."

He made a rude noise and the regulars repeated it, with variations. The emboldened stranger got up.

He said, "I've taken too much insolence from you, Lynn. There's a limit to everything. For two cents, I'd—"

It was pure chance that had put Red Slade between him and Larry, so that the intruder would have to step around him to get to the manager. But it was not chance, but plain temper, that made said stranger choose to push Red out of the way in passing.

It had been inside Red Slade for a long time, the baffled, sick anger that couldn't be leashed forever. It flamed into reasonless fury at the touch of that heavy, moist hand.

The push had knocked him against the wall, so that he had to throw back his right hand to keep his balance. Red was a natural right-hander, but he did the next best thing. He swung wildly, off balance, centering on a well-padded vest, and there was a satisfying jar up his arm as his fist drove home. The big man grunted, and his face came into clear range above his lowered fists. It was too tempting to pass up. Red chopped the right cross expertly. There was a muffled *thop*, and the big man sat down, and the light had gone out of his eyes.

Lynn said, "Carry him into the clubhouse, Cobb. An' I'll see you in there after the game."

Red sat down breathing heavily.

Hoops wailed, "Now you did it. I hope you can do something else besides playin', slugger, because you'll be lookin' for a job right soon now."

Red said, "I never did like to be pushed

around like a worm. Who was that guy?"

Hoops threw up his hands.

"Him? Oh, don't you fret none, Slade. You just socked E. Prentice Flynn, the general manager of this club—that's all."

He picked up his glove and went out on the mound, shaking his head.

THEY went into the first of the ninth trailing by two runs. The canny veteran on the mound for the Cards had kept them completely handcuffed, but he was tiring visibly. Slats Weiner worked him along to a three and two count, fouled five in a row off the screen and finally walked.

The light-hitting Joe Bergen was up. The Bears were clustered in a corner of the dugout, talking animatedly. Bergen let the first one go for a called strike. A sliding downer came in, curving for the corner of the plate, and the little second baseman dropped a swinging bunt down the third-base line. The throw beat him by a split stride, but Slats was on second, with only one away.

There was a sudden cheer from the stands, and Red stared out across the shadows, surprised. King Cobb had climbed out of the dugout, looking for his big black bat. The Bears were yelling and pounding on the steps. And in the corner, Larry Lynn had jumped to his feet, his face dead white with fury.

He looked down the bench, lined with glowering faces. He shrugged.

He said, "Slade, get up there an' hit for Ingram!"

He waved to Cobb, and the veteran walked slowly benchward, swearing.

Duke Mulleany said, "You do that, Lynn, and you will kill your chances with this club. It's you or your whole lineup, if that tramp goes to the plate."

The little pilot said steadily, "Get up there an' take your cut, Slade. I know you'll do your best."

It wasn't fun, going up there to a strange rubber, knowing that he held a good hunk of the fate of his boss in his bat. The shadows were down, and the centerfield bleachers made a swirling, everchanging background. More shaky than he would have believed possible, Red took his stance, waiting for the first big one to come down the alley. It was a fast one, shoulder high, and it was going to curve at the last minute.

Prayerfully, he lashed into it, giving it all the snap of his surprisingly powerful wrists. He felt the bat break near the handle, which meant that the ball had been poorly hit. He put his head down and gave it the old try anyway.

The yells from the stands wavered, then rose to a shrill shriek of victory. He saw the bag in front of him, a stride away and yet maddeningly far. He leaped for it hopelessly—and heard the ball smack into the mitt while he was in the air. On third, Slats Weiner was picking himself off the ground, walking off the field. Red had hit into a double play. The ball game was over.

They went into the dressing room under the stands, and the jeers of the fans followed them down the runway. Red pushed open the door and came to a halt, surprised. The haughty Bears were circled around a rubbing table. E. Prentice Flynn was sitting on a box, with a paper in front of him and a fountain pen in his hand. He had a fine, upstanding mouse under one eye.

Hoops said, "It's a lousy crime. That fat walrus is takin' the plane back to New York tonight, an' he's got a petition there with the names of every first-stringer, demandin' that Larry Lynn get fired, or else."

A voice behind Red said, "Okay, boys. You can't work for two masters. It's not all your fault, but you've been listening to some bad advice. You can forget this thing now, an' I'll do the same. How about it?"

Larry Lynn's face was calm, but the smoke from his cigar was shaking in the silent air.

The Bears looked at him stonily.

Duke Mulleany said, "You had your chance, Lynn. We made you an' we can break you. We gotta think of our futures, too."

The little manager clamped his teeth down tight.

He said, "You made me!"

He laughed bitterly. He walked toward E. Prentice Flynn, and Flynn left hurriedly.

Lynn said, "I gotta contract here. It can't be canceled except by ten-day notice. I'm gonna give you a week to think this over—not that I want to, but I used to like you kids and I hate to see you stick your chins out and cry for the world to listen to. I could say a lot about gratitude and use some two-dollar words, but I won't. I'll just get tough instead. While I'm boss,

there's nothing the front office can do about this. You be down to the park a half-hour early tomorrow. Keep your mouths shut to any reporters unless you want a thousand-dollar fine an' a season suspension. I'm gonna try to beat some brains into you for the last time, even if I can't teach you any more baseball. An' after that, you can go to hell!"

He went into his office, and the door slammed behind him.

Bots Cady said, "You know, I allus liked that little guy's moxie, even when I wanted to take a poke at him. Maybe we better—"

King Cobb came out of the shower, flexing his taped leg gingerly.

He said, "You with us or against us, Bots? We gotta stick together in this, ain't we?"

Bots nodded glumly.

The first-string team dressed in silence and departed. A scattering of rookies and stunned veterans were left behind.

There was a paper on the floor where Lynn had been standing, and Red picked it up, automatically glancing at the type-written message. His eyes widened and he showed it to Hoops, who whistled soundlessly.

Red said, "Don't you say a word about this to anybody or I'll take you apart. You know damn well Lynn wouldn't want anybody to know!"

Hoops looked as though he wanted to cry.

"Never, so help me!" he said. "But—ain't he the guy! Let's get to bed early. I gotta notion we'll be needin', all we got—tomorrow!"

RED walked down the runway, and the sunlight hit him in the face so that for a moment he didn't see where the humming was coming from. And then he blinked, surprised. It was a full hour before game time, but the bleachers were already more than half filled. There was a sign on the right-field wall, near the boxes.

It said, *Cry, Baby, Cry.*

The dugout looked like a convention. There were two coppers keeping the gate from the grandstand closed. At least a dozen reporters were crowding around Larry Lynn, and in the opposite corner, a red-faced King Cobb was waving his

hands around. Everyone was talking and no one was listening.

A gray-haired man said, "You've got to make a statement, Lynn. This is the biggest story of the year. You've got to justify your stand."

King Cobb said defensively, "We didn't talk, Larry. We was giving you your chance to resign. How was we to know Flynn would go and spill it to every yellow rag in town?"

Larry Lynn stood up.

He said, "Okay, you want a statement. Unlike these great athletes, I do my talking with wins and loses and batting orders. I can't seem to give you any wins, but I can give you today's batting order. Maybe it'll be enough news for one day."

He sat down on the dugout steps, facing his team.

"Clancy, you played second at Newport News, didn't you?"

The big rookie nodded, open-mouthed.

"Okay, you're my second baseman. Slade, you're playin' first, and leading off. Now in that shortfield slot we'll be usin'—"

It was a weird, insane lineup. It looked like the rag and tag end of a manager's nightmare. It had old Zeke Campbell, a bullpen cast-off, behind the plate; an untried third stringer, Polly Klinger, at the hot corner; and Hoops, a pitcher, in right field. There was not a man who wouldn't be waived out of the league either for old age or untried youth. Larry read it through to the bitter end. He stopped helplessly, after the eighth name, and a swarthy man pushed through the crowd and up to where Larry Lynn stood.

"I always work for you, Mister Lynn!" Adolpho Vergez, the Cuban, said politely. "I pitch for you, plenty good, hey?" He lifted his eyebrows, waiting.

"That completes the lineup, boys," the manager said huskily. "And there's your story."

The newshounds ran down the runway, whooping excitedly.

Duke Mulleany stammered, "We—you can't do that to us, Lynn. You can't get away with it." We'll crucify you, all over the circuit. I'll—"

Hoops said solemnly, "You second-stringers get the hell out there in the field and shag flies. Us regulars gotta get ready for a ball game."

IT WAS funny, but nobody thought to laugh. Red walked slowly out to the first base spot, with the yells from the stands making his heart beat faster. Old Babe Ring, in deep shortstop, was lobbing the practice ball in, and it looped like a slow forward pass. The flustered Polly Klinger played the first easy grounder off his chest like a blocked punt, scrambled wildly for the ball and threw it into the first-base boxes.

Only Clancy, at the keystone sack, had kept his poise. He gobbled up a hard throw, spearing it expertly with his gloved hand, and his peg was on a line and sweet to see.

The infield drill dragged to its dismal end.

Red pushed his cap back on his head and beckoned, and that sad apology for an infield walked in back of the box for an impromptu conference.

Babe Ring said, "Now don't start givin' me hell until I get my back limbered up, rookie. I got just about one ball game left in my system an' I've been saving it for a day like this."

Red said, "It ain't that, fellers. Only—if I make errors out there today, remember—it ain't me out there. It's a guy who is so damned anxious to come through for his boss that he can't see straight. We gotta win this one for Larry."

Young Clancy spat judiciously into a worn mitt, grinning.

"I think I'm gonna like this company better'n them other luses," he said. "Count me in."

The Cougar first-sacker yelled, "Where'd you lose your crutches, grandpa?" and Babe Ring shook his fists in helpless anger.

The buzzer sounded, and they trotted off the field for their first turn at the bat.

The Cougars had Sammy Levine on the mound. Red found his Louisville Slugger and went to the plate, hoping that he didn't look as scared as he felt. The redoubtable Sammy had as much dippy-do and more poise than anybody else in the circuit. It was just too bad they had to come up against him this day.

The first one came up there wide, and Red let it go.

The slim hurler went into an elaborate and fearsome wind-up, and Red had the sudden hunch that the slow one was coming. The temptation, in the face of that side-armed power motion, was to swing fast, but he checked himself with an effort and waited.

It was the teaser, spinning lazily and soft as a pillow, but high. He braked, swung from his heels and heard the sweet sound that is the hallmark of a well-hit ball.

And Red was off with the crack of the bat. Halfway to first, he looked up and Larry was waving him on. As he rounded the bag, he could see Bert Neihoff in short left scooping up the ball. For a dreadful moment he had the sensation of racing against a clothesline peg that was coming straight for his head. He went into the dirt, fading away from Sonny Drumley's meat hand. He got up, breathless. The umpire's hand was down.

Shaking his head, Levine went to work on Fat Laurence, the bullpen catcher whom Larry had playing left field. He threw five curve balls, and three of them clipped the edge of the platter.

Clancy swaggered up, swinging three bats. The kid was all ball player, Red was thinking wistfully. He had the size and the wallop and he didn't scare. Levine threw two fast ones, trying to drive him away from the plate, and the big boy refused to bite. There was a mound conference. Mud Jackson, the catcher, was trying to have him passed intentionally, but the Cougar mound ace was vetoing the suggestion.

He went into his side-arm delivery, trying to blast a cross-fire downer through the middle. Clancy came out of his crouch like an uncoiled spring. Red took off for third, saw the coacher's arms telling him not to hurry, and looked over his shoulder. The ball was deep in the upper stands, thirty feet over the barrier.

He stamped upon home plate, Clancy at his heels. They shook hands solemnly. The new lineup was pouring jubilantly out of the dugout.

From the on-deck spot, old Zeke Campbell was chortling, "Bring on them bush-leaguers!"

Over in the shadows, Bots Cady and

Duke Mully were sitting in scowling silence.

Still chuckling, Zeke went up to the plate. Exactly three swings later he came back, looking a little crestfallen.

"My eye ain't quite sharpened up yet," he said lamely. "What the hell, two runs is enough against them bums!"

Working carefully, Sammy got Art Teacher in the hole with two pulverizing curves that no one alive could have touched. He went into the same wind-up, but from the bench Red could see his fingers shift in mid-delivery, going into the knuckleball. It came in there, big as a balloon, and Art swung mightily, missed by six inches, and sat down in the dirt. The Bears took the field, two runs to the good.

THE Cougars were grinning no longer. Bert Niehoff lashed venomously into the first ball the Cuban threw. It went on a line into deep center field. Lanky Finch Farraday overran it, but stabbed behind him at the last moment, and his throw to second bluffed the Cougar speed boy back to first.

Red called for a huddle. Strangely, they had accepted him as their holler guy.

"It'll be a bunt," he said. "They think we'll gobble it around like Cobb used to on first. Now, when it comes, I'll—"

It had to work, he was telling himself fiercely.

It came down there, on the first ball. Red was watching Jim Quade's feet. They spread in the tell-tale flat-footed stance, and he ran in, gambling that the batter wouldn't take his eye off the ball. If Quade crossed him up and hit away, he'd be minus a mouthful of teeth.

The bunt went down in front of the plate. Red stabbed down blindly, braked and threw, sighting for second. It was like a fast motion camera. The whole Bear infield was in motion. From deep short, Babe Ring had galloped ponderously over to cover the bag. The throw came straight as a string and Babe took it one-handed, stepped on the bag and got it away fast. Clancy, running for first, took it over his shoulder in full stride and stepped on the bag, just as big Quade hit him. He got up, still clutching the ball. Red dusted him off, winking at the open-mouthed Cougar.

"You're in fast company now, Quade,"

he said loftily. "That kid stuff don't work against this outfit."

Grinning broadly, Vergez gave King Kosta the teaser, waist high. A towering fly went out into right, pushed by the treacherous wind. Hoops, misjudging it completely, staggered in a crazy circle, flung up his hand at the last instant—and the ball skated on the edge of his glove, bounced a foot upward, and came down gently to rest in the leather pocket.

They came running into the dugout, still hugging that two-run lead.

The day was warm. The August sun seeped into aged muscles, spreading its magic over wornout arms. For five innings the Bears were a great team. They held off a Cougar rally in the third when Fat Laurence, pounding his massive legs clear to the shadows of the fence, took a screaming liner from Quade's bat off the very edge of the barrier, with two away and the bases loaded.

And in the fourth, Vergez had walked a man intentionally, gambling everything on a play to every sack. Pop Graves, the Cougar clean-up man, was at bat. It was a bad spot. The Cuban was tiring fast. He had worked a full ball game the day before. He tried to throw the sinker, and Red heard him swear as the ball left his hand. It went in there straight, and Graves caught it on the end of his bat. It was a skidding ground ball, going, not to short-stop, but straight down the third-base line.

Young Klinger came in fast but awkwardly, just ahead of the advancing runner. He stabbed down with his bare hand, came up with the ball and threw underhand, without looking.

The throw was high and into the base path. There was only one thing to do. Praying mightily, Red stood on the bag until the last minute, hoping that it might curve in by some miracle. He jumped, giving the hip to the oncoming runner. The ball caught the web of his glove, and he swung it behind him and downward, and felt it brush against big Grave's shoulder. He landed on the seat of his pants, brushed sideways by the runner's glancing impact. He squeezed the ball reverently, blessing the miracle. He walked into the dugout, and the yells in the stands were a stormy sea behind him.

They still held that two-run lead.

But that was in the fourth.

Getting better with each passing frame, Levine was working like a well-oiled machine now, and Sammy Levine at his top was just about the best pitcher in baseball. He sat the Bears down in order, for the third time in a row, and when they trotted out on the field again, Red had the chilly presentment that their luck couldn't hold much longer.

Vergez was pitching on heart alone now. He slipped two strikes over on Earl Benner, the Cougar centerfielder, wasted two, and then missed the plate on two curves that wouldn't quite come in. It was a heart-breaker. Whitey Carlson, a tough clutch-hitter, was up, and Red knew that the Cougars would throw strategy to the winds and gamble everything on an old-fashioned slugging bee.

Little Vergez kicked the mound, stalling to give his arm a rest. He faked a throw to first, wheeled suddenly and threw, grunting with the effort. It was inside—almost a wild pitch. Carlson took it in the small of the back, grinning, and trotted to first.

Larry Lynn called time. Hoops was already running in from right field. Alf Sickles, looking a little sheepish, had his head stuck inquiringly out of the dugout. The manager walked past him, ignoring the invitation.

"You'll never pitch a better game in my books," he said to the Cuban. "Put on a windbreaker and take Hoop's place in right. We'll play this out with our own gang."

Hoops said, "It's in the bag, boss. The way I feel now, nobody's goin' to get a piece of that there ball."

He went out to the mound, jaw set. He threw the fastest breaking curve Red had ever seen.

And little Sonny Drumley hit it on a line into the right-field stands, scoring three runs.

SOMEHOW, the hateful frame came to an end without further scoring. They walked slowly into the dugout. About forty thousand people were cheering them, but they didn't know it. They sat in a tight little group, and the stuff of victory had gone from them. Hopelessly, Babe Ring went to bat.

Larry Lynn, strangely gray of face, was

whooping it up bravely on the first-base line. In the corner of the dugout, the erstwhile first-stringers were shuffling uneasily. The anger was gone from their faces.

Bots Cady said gruffly, "No hard feelings, is there, gents? You boys are puttin' up a good fight out there."

Babe Ring swung vainly at a swooping downer and went out on strikes. Fat Laurence, notoriously an All-American out, went up to bat. Red Slade cocked a glance down the first base line. Larry was shrieking insults at the Cougar pitcher, giving his team the old body English. This was baseball, Red was thinking—working your head off for your team.

He got up, shaking off Hoops' clutching hand.

Duke Mulleany said, "Okay, we got it comin' to us. You are the nuts and we are a bunch of ungrateful bums. Go back and sit down. I want to see this ball game."

Red walked past. He sat down beside King Cobb, and nobody barred his way. He pulled a paper out of his hip pocket.

"That guy Lynn will send me to the Three-Eye league," he said. "But here goes nothing. Cobb, you think you got a Charley horse—you can name your price in the open market, too, hey?"

King Cobb scowled.

"I can name my own figure at Chicago or Cincinnati," he said. "A five-year contract with no questions asked."

The Bears were clustered around. It looked like a football huddle.

"Okay," Red said. "This is tough medicine, big shot. I hope you're big enough to take it. You've got a severed Achilles tendon on your right leg, my friend. It means a tough operation, and a one-to-five chance of coming back—ever." ♦

King Cobb turned white.

"Two men knew that," Red said. "Your pal Flynn—and Larry Lynn, who found you and taught you all you know. Flynn wanted to sell you for a hundred-fifty grand, while he could get the price. Larry Lynn benched you—and let you get a fine mad on, rather than tell you and spoil your confidence forever. You got a sharp eye out there at the plate, but you got a blind spot at pickin' your friends."

There was a stunned silence.

Duke Mulleany said, "I'd admire to see that paper, busher."

Red handed over the letter he had picked up in the locker room. It bore the imprint of a world-famous specialist. The million dollar lineup read it, man by man.

Bots Cady groaned, "We're done, all of us. That petition—"

"That Flynn boy left in a heap of a hurry, that day in the locker room," Red drawled. "I managed to pick this up as he went out the door." He held up a crumpled piece of paper, and the big catcher grabbed it.

"You know," Red said, "he might have been just spouting hot air to the papers. He's got nothing to back him up now, unless you go through with it."

The hapless Laurence struck out.

Red went out to the bat rack.

"Maybe," he said, "even a busher like me might manage to get on base. And Clancy here can do some fair stick work too. Seems as if, after all that, some of you birds might be able to convince that guy coaching on first that you are ready to take over where we leave off."

He went up to the plate, but the umpire called time, because a young army was pouring out of the dugout—to where a man in back of first was waiting. . . .

IT WAS the first of the ninth. The score said, Bears 8, Cougars, 3. There was baffled gloom in the tight-packed stands, and the redoubtable Sammy Levine had gone his sad way to the showers. Red trotted across home plate, to where a mighty liner by Alf Sickles had just sent him. He stepped into the dugout, grinning, and then froze.

E. Prentice Flynn was there. A portly stranger was with him.

"The big shot himself," Hoops whispered hoarsely.

The business manager frowned.

He said, "I—I don't understand. I was given to understand that there was dis-sension on this team. I even went so far as to tell Mr. Rounds about it. I was manhandled by a first-year rookie."

Duke Mulleany said innocently, "Why how you carry on, Mister Flynn! Did any of you boys ever hear of any hard feelings on this team?"

The golden boys who had made the Bear emblem a password for baseball genius shook their heads blankly.

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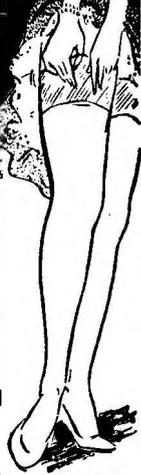
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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

Slats Weiner hit a sky-scraping liner off the right-field wall, trotting into second standing up.

E. Prentice Flynn gulped and looked into the distance. He was a smart man in his own way.

Nig Lestrone struck out, ending the inning. The Bears went galloping out of the dugout, yelping like schoolboys. The Cougars came slowly out for their last, hopeless try to knot the score.

Larry Lynn said, "I hadda send Clancy back to first, kid. You see how it is."

Red nodded numbly. It was hard to take, the view of that shadow-drenched stadium, and the sounds and smells and all the familiar trappings of big-league baseball—his no longer.

The little manager coughed awkwardly. "Cobb knows what he's up against," he said. "And Clancy's too good a utility man to waste on that lousy first sack forever. Any punk can handle that job. I'll bet even a runt like you can. You want to give it a try when we get back to the home stand, slugger?"

THE END

(Continued from page 91)

It was new material, but it had been cut. He could see the knife mark. He started to say something, gulped.

Better to let it go. He said to a steward, "My saddle slipped, but I got the weights."

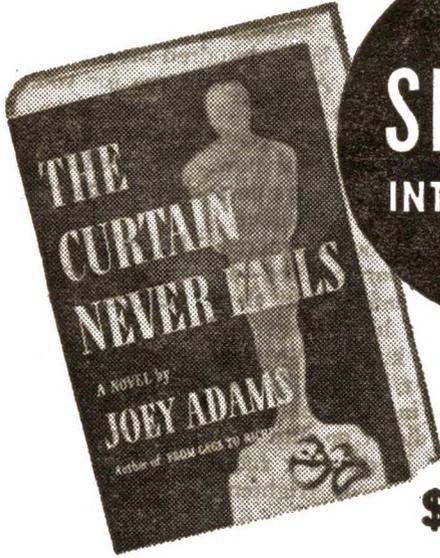
They put him on the scale. Cregar, raging, was in there howling, "He musta lost one. He oughta be ruled off anyway. Damned apprentice, wobblin' all over the track."

They were putting a wreath around Pontiac's neck. The big horse seemed a bit abashed. Choo Choo shoved Cregar roughly aside and ran over and took the bridle. Pontiac eyed him, then seemed to chuckle as he whinnied softly through his velvet nose.

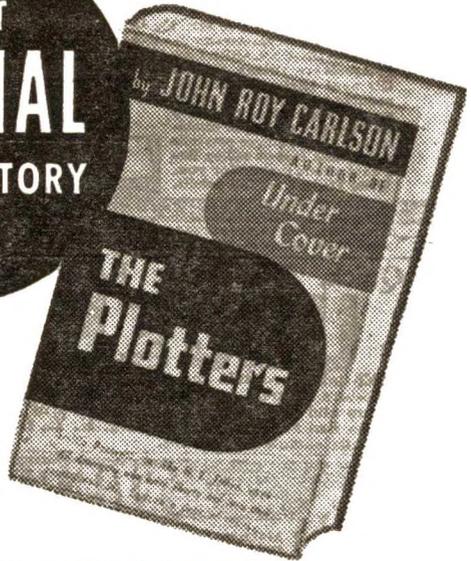
"What a horse," Choo Choo said prayerfully. "What a great, big, smart runnin' damfool horse!"

Then there was Miz Louisa and Hunter and they were hugging first Pontiac, then Choo Choo, then each other. Choo liked it best when they hugged each other.

On the way to the tack room Hunter
(Please continue on page 110)



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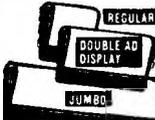
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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

(Continued from page 108)

said, "I've got something extra for you, Choo Choo. I laid a hundred on his nose. Forty to one. Also, I got a job for you."

"Who needs a job?"

Miz Louisa said gently, "We won't be around all the time now. We need a responsible man, a trainer, jockey, whatever. You can run the stable."

Choo Choo stammered, "I didn't do anything. Pontiac—Red—he ran the race himself. I hadda hold those weights in and stick on him, that's all."

"We know. We think that's enough," said Miz Louisa. She kissed him. He had to run inside, then.

He didn't go into the jockey room. He waited in the tack room. Amsy slunk in first, shamed, frightened. Then Cregar came, raging.

Choo Choo hit him with a stirrup iron. The bigger man went down, hollering "Murder! Get the cops!"

Choo Choo dropped the iron and said, "Yeah. Get 'em. I want to know about that cinch that was cut."

Cregar stopped yelling. Amsy came forward, moistening his lips. He said, "I didn't know he done that, kid."

Amsy swung. Cregar was just getting up. The punch caught him on his long nose.

Amsy said huskily, "Kid, he just ain't fit. I been bad. But this guy just ain't fit for the tracks. If he squawks, kid, I'll turn him in if it ruins me, so help me."

Choo Choo said, "He won't squawk. And he won't squeal. Racin's got a bad enough name now . . . but he'll walk chalk."

He went in to get his shower. Things had happened so fast and furious he had to think them out. He wanted to re-live the race, digest the fact that he had a life job with Miz Harper and Hunter—Mr. and Mrs. Hunter, that would be, and he wanted to figure out how that had come about through him and Pontiac, so he could be real proud. He had a sort of idea, but he wanted to go all over it in his mind and get it straight.

He dressed and almost ran down to the stables. It would be best to talk it over with old Pontiac, the big red, that happy, silly, smart, wonderful horse.

MAYHEM MOUND

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By John Drebing

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"But Riggs didn't think it was an accident. He thought I had thrown an intended 'duster' and he came up with eyes blazing. He was always regarded as a dangerous clutch hitter and I knew he never would be more dangerous than at that moment.

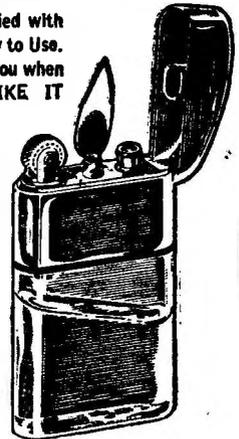
"I tried to tempt him with three curves that just missed the corner of the plate, but he refused to bite at any of them and that ran the count up to three balls and two strikes. He knew I would have to come in with the next one and those eyes were still blazing.

"Never in all my life did I ever put more on a ball than I threw up to Stephenson on that afternoon in Chicago. He swung, there was a loud report, and never in my life had I ever seen a ball hit harder or further. When last seen it was clearing the left field wall and still going up."

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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

(Continued from page 40)

MAY sat frowning at Duncan. Duncan paced back and forth, waving his arms. "I tell you it wouldn't stay in the bag. It kept jumping out at me."

"Now Duncan! Please, darling. A good night's sleep."

"And then I couldn't do anything wrong with it. A magic cloob . . . I mean club. That's why Uncle Angus called up."

"Dear," she said gently, "you *have* played a lot of golf, even though you don't like it, and I've heard you say that if a person just relaxes and lets the club head do the work, it—"

"Do anything, May, but please don't try to humor me."

"Now honestly, Duncan, don't you think that if you just happened to imagine that there was something supernatural about the club, you'd play better with it?"

"Maybe. Maybe. All I know is that it kept jumping out of the bag, demanding to be used. Explain that. Go ahead. Explain it."

"Hey, Mom! Look, Mom!" the eldest said from the doorway.

"Go away," Duncan said, "Your mother and I are having a discussion."

"Hey, look! I found my BB rifle spring. I just now remembered I hid it in your golf bag, Dad. I've been hunting and hunting for it, all over."

"Go away, young man. I told you. . . . What did you say about my golf bag?"

"My spring was in there, Dad. I just told you. I didn't want Betty messing with it while I was at the movies."

The eldest went away. Duncan sat down and glowered at the face of his wife, contorted with revolting mirth. "It . . . it kept . . . jumping out at you," she gasped.

Finally he found it possible to laugh with her.

On Monday Duncan was preoccupied at breakfast. May went to the doorway as he left. She saw him stick the clubs in the car.

"What are you doing, dear?" she asked.

He answered with enormous casualness. "Thought I might stop at a driving range on the way home tonight."

She waved at him and went slowly back for her second coffee, thinking deep thoughts about the mysterious ways of man.

SILENT VICTORY

(Continued from page 54)

boy. He could go a long way. But so could I. now, so I feinted him with a left and while the right was on its way I knew I'd never thrown a punch like it before. He went over, face forward, and never moved while the referee counted him out.

Maxie, bubbling with happiness, threw the robe over my shoulders. I looked down at her once more, then went through the ropes and up the aisle. At this point on fight night I was usually very conscious of the great mob as I made my way back to the dressing room. But this night I was aware only of a growing, a sudden fear. I wondered if she would be back next time.

Without her I could never win again. Without her . . . yes, of course . . . it would always be without her. She would be my fight night girl. If she was there I would win. But what of the days and nights between fights? Days and nights without her?

Maxie left me when we reached the dressing room door. He had business to attend to, and I went inside and closed the door, leaning against it. A great hurt rose in my chest and it rumbled up to my throat and died there. Soon the sweat on my face had the salty taste of tears.

I was a boy again, a boy who realized for the first time that he could only make sounds like grunts, a boy who could not hear the voices of other people. I was the boy again who everyone shunned, the boy who had to fight every day. The boy who never lost a fight, but never really won one either.

I threw myself on the table and stared up at the white ceiling and wondered when this would all end.

I closed my eyes and slipped into the shell of nothingness. A touch on my arm startled me. I sat bolt upright and found myself staring into those green eyes. Maxie stood behind her, grinning slyly. I could have killed him for bringing her in here. Her eyes burned into mine and she took a step closer, running her soft fingers over the bruise on my cheek. I fought the ache in my chest, the longing to hold her.

She smiled, and suddenly her fingers moved expertly in talk: "I thought you'd never send for me, Danny!"

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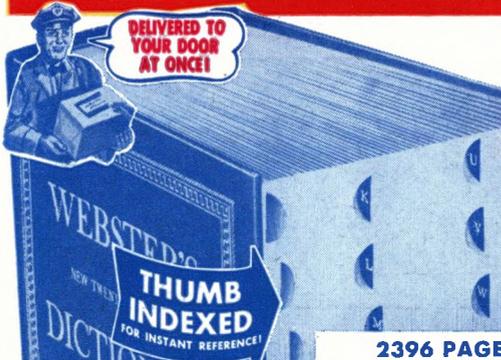
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