

PART EIGHT

AND NOW SUMMER IS OVER

Chapter I

THE GAME

And now summer is over, ~~and~~ and fall is in full swing. On the surface things seem like any other Saturday afternoon, though it has extra crispness, adding mightily to the glow and freshness of the coed cheek; and help the lung of the athlete on the field breathe its full depth. It has extra gold in it too, which causes the panes in the building across the playing field give off special lustre, at times blinding, but mostly crowning with a halo of loveliness youthful womanhood, sitting expectantly and hopefully in the cheering stands.

This was the scene, the silence, the silent whisper, and the serenity.

And the placid contentment.

Hardly had the crowd settled in this, ^{their} luxuriant complacency, barely had the cheerleader executed his Dervish dance, his voice through the megaphone still ringing true and clear, when the first explosion had burst upon them. Grabbing the ball on the first kickoff, Foster ran a full seventy yards. The poor cheerleader had missed the whole show. His back turned to the playing field, exhorting his charges to further charges of spilled and flaming emotion, he saw them sally forth to gulp and yelp: Foster, Foster, yea, Foster, rah, rah, rah! Foster, Foster, Foster! He knew he hadn't led them in a cheer for Foster. How come! He was baffled, he was stunned, he was bewildered. He whirled about in mid-air, and taking in in a flash what had happened, he broke into the special cheer he had in readiness for Foster.

The muscles of his neck were taut and throbbing with the sudden bend

and twirl in the air, but far be it from a cheerleader to weaken. On and on he would mount to greater mountains of exertion, unto the very peaks, until the last exhalation of breath would topple him ~~down~~. And so with every ounce of his strength he leaped his highest leap, and his schoolmates with him, when on the third play Foster ran exhaustedly with the ball tight-clung to his breast and fell over the goal line in exactly five minutes after the game had started. It was superb, it was glorious. One third of the first quarter, and already a touchdown for Portgrave! What further triumphs were in store for Captain Foster and his team on this fateful afternoon!

The student body, with their cheerleader, fell into their seats, thankful for the momentary ³reprieve of the anti-climax, which was a poor kickoff by their quarterback. It was Providence itself which had intervened. What if it had been an eighty yard kick, or even a sixty, or even a fifty; surely they would have to jump again. As it was they just could sit still, quiet their pulses, and wait for further developments. Aha, there is a disquieting moment and a bit of a tug at the heart, which gave it a gallop, as some guy on the other side grabbed the ball and ran nigh to eighteen yards for a first down. Nah, it wasn't any more than a little fillip at the heart strings. Pat, pat, pat! but no more. They could sit open-eyed and watch their hero with confidence. Soon he'll recover his breath and prove a bulwark against further encroachment of their goal by the enemy. And they were fully justified. With Foster in the center, his aides around him, with the clever maneuverings of the little quarterback, they foiled move after move until the opposition play was beginning to peter out and finally brought to a standstill.

The shifty quaterback received the kickoff next, and made some good yardage, worth a little wave of the handkerchief, and then a settling down again to watch the gruelling scrimmaging, and skirmishing, the

bloody struggle and maneuvering back and forth. The enemy was digging in and doggedly fighting back. There were spills and pilings up, bruised muscles and slight concussions; youth bravely going on, with none being carried off the field. Suddenly the quarterback, appearing from ^{under} a heap of struggling, wriggling bodies, started to call signals fat^s and furious. Seconds later, by the miracle of the lateral pass, the ball dropped into Foster's waiting arms, who proceeded immediately by sheer brute force, and by clever dodging and interference, to a second touchdown. The quick action, the power-drive and brilliant execution which left the foe completely befuddled and benumbed, also left the stands on the Portgrave side of the field stupefied, their reflexes a bit tardy and their cheer belated.

Blanca was not with George. Her knowledge of the game and her desire to see it were hardly proportionate with her impatience to sit through a chilly afternoon watching a gory spectacle. Rather, she found her father's business, which was brisk on Saturday afternoons, far more alluring. There was the high price her father paid for her presence there. For the customers were highly flattered by the attendance on them of this haughty and beautiful young lady, especially the males, of whom there were many on Saturdays. This money Blanca hoarded against the sum her father had promised towards a new automobile, for her own and sole possession. Her father smiled under his thick moustache when night came and he handed over the money for her day's work. There was a twinkle in his eyes. And a good thing it was - for the "old" man - that she was so eager for the money for the new car, it being constantly on her mind, that she hadn't noticed that twinkling smile. For she was as shrewed as her father, and surely would have divined that there was a trick somewhere in the transaction. As matters stood the joke was entirely on her. She hadn't guessed that her father had long made up his mind to buy her a car. It was like a dream to him - that time in the future when he'd see his daughter behind the wheel. His proud and beautiful daughter!

George found a seat near Cynthia between quarters. There were her girl friends on one side, and Miss Printe and Mr. Bibbly on the other side of her. Miss Printe moved closer to Mr. Bibbly, making room for George beside Cynthia, an admirable arrangement all around.

Said Mr. Bibbly to George across Miss Printe: "I understand you own full coverage of the School at the Eventide. Also I am aware that you are in my class in English."

"It means Mr. Bibbly?" said Miss Printe, perking up her head and smiling directly into his face.

"It means, Miss Printe," said Mr. Bibbly with dry humor, "that I shall censor George's stuff in the paper."

George smiled across Miss Printe, "And all along I had an idea that it was the editor's function."

"In the classroom I am editor," Mr. Bibbly snorted with raised eyebrow that displayed a wink in the eye. "A copy, for instance, for class criticism. It's been done before. Watch out for that needling." And he slapped his thigh for sheer glee. "That needling, oh, in your last installment, of the Puritanic Prudishness of Portgrave. That was prime. I was having my soup that evening when I read it, and would you know, it slopped over on my chin. But it poured the oil of peace on the town's boiling emotions."

"Oh, now, Mr. Bibbly," Miss Printe could hardly suppress the thin and delicate gurgle of laughter.

"It's George all over," Cynthia expressed a whispering admiration.

"You may not be aware of it, Mr. Bibbly," George allowed with Pontific ponderousness, his eyes sparkling with the humor of it, "but you are the inspiration of mine, so called, non-conformist tendencies."

"I?" Mr. Bibbly wondered, as he smacked his lips hard. "But remember, if you attack us cruelly, I shall be cruel and mark you ruthlessly," he chafed.

Mr. Bibbly's eyes were alight with the wonderful autumn afternoon, the team,

Miss Printe ^{who} still has one eye open."

"No, they have gone into the act together. But the old buzzard, would you believe it, he goes glum everytime she touches his arm. He goes into a shock."

"He's got deep feelings. And he isn't so old."

"Over thirty anyway."

"When you are thirty or over you wouldn't think of abdicating."

"Never go into a trance like that."

"Maybe you haven't experienced deep love," and she looked deep into his eyes.

"I am catching on," he breathed hotly into her ear. "The stars and the moon will be good company tonight. What say, we walk The Oaks tonight?"

"Uh-huh!"

They were resuming play in the second half. Portgrave kicked off, and here the unexpected happened. Bering High which hadn't shown much fight in the first half came out snorting mad. It was startling, especially in the Portgrave stands, quiet now as the South Portgrave cemeteries. They got hold of the ball and didn't relinquish it until they ^{had} rushed the enemy off their own territory. When finally they gave up the ghost at midfield, it was to have their man kick the ball far toward the Portgrave goal posts. Portgrave High brought the ball forward fourteen yards and succeeded making a couple of first downs, when they had to kick. In the exchange Bering won yardage. They made their downs, sometimes by a few inches, but good enough to reach the enemy's goal. Which was also their last. But Foster and company were held only to two more tallies.

Miss Printe was roused twice from her torpor during the general melee, the squawk and squash, and the tumult and uproar of the second half, to utter a little squeal on each occasion, while Mr. Bibbly was kicked alive

only once, during which he was heard to utter a grunt.

"What a difference a change of scenery makes," George observed.

"The roaring lion of the classroom is but a purring kitten here."

"His roar really is only a purr in the classroom, never a snarl," Cynthia defended him. "Just a high note, that's all."

A frenzied mob got hold of Foster in their fury of worship and the letting off of boiling energy dammed up during the long and trying afternoon. They grabbed him up on their shoulders and carried him off. George watched the proceedings with a happy smile. Things were going well - so far. But he kept a close eye on his friend. ^{Then} There came a quickening of bobbing heads and heaving shoulders. And above all the poppings he saw Foster's head. Then there would be no Foster. Then he would come up again. Now Foster wasn't smiling. Was he worried, was he hurt? They were tossing him now from arm to arm. What the h-ll! It looked to him as if Foster were helpless in their hands. Sure enough! If they keep this up they sure will cripple him for next Saturday's last and most important game. On closer examination he made the startling discovery that Foster's handlers now were of the crowd of Stanton, who had run for the captaincy and had lost to Foster. Quite possible that they might in this confusion take revenge and put Foster out of circulation for that game.

George now was quickly on the move. Calling on a few friends around him, he spearheaded a small column which cut knife-like into the crazed cordon that had seized Foster. George's knotted fists cracked an opening which the column behind made into a wide corridor. A flailing smash on the arm, slashing like the sundering edge of a hatchet, stunned the hapless fellow who had just then happened to hold down Foster's head, and he was quite willing to surrender head and all to George.

"Okay, fellows, let's go." A few more fists fell, and a wide passage was cleared. "Can you make it under your own steam?"

"Sure can, George. They can be rough! Can't understand that help-
less feeling...."

"A surprise attack, they don't give ^{you} a chance to stand on your own feet."

"What got into them?"

"The Stanton gang. To cripple you for the next game. You were storm-
tossed like a ship in a gale. All right, here's the gym. Get showered.
Don't think they'll bother you again."

"I'll be ready, if they do. Thanks, George."

Foster went into the gym, and as George turned to go he faced Cynthia.
"You here?" he was surprised.

"It was magnificent," she said, "I saw the whole thing."

"Just a few fool kids."

"So you think - or just say so," and she looked up to him, "the pre-
cision of the cutting wedge. And to look at you!"

"Oh, come, come...."

"Certainly clothes can fool you. Those 'fool kids' didn't know what
hit them. Roosevelt and the Rough Riders."

"Let go, please."

"Until The Oaks - tonight."

"Until The Oaks - and bring the stars with you!"

Mr. Josiah Flährel, editor of the Sunday supplement of the Eventide, was a simple man, of simple tastes, of unruffled and serene temperament, middle-aged, and of Irish lineage. So far as George knew he was the only man on the Eventide, ^{except Mr. Doaks,} who wore a mustache. It was well trimmed at either end, so it would never grow into the handlebar variety; but at its thickest - the center - a recalcitrant hair would grow out of bounds and creep into the mouth, or into the nostril upward. Most of the staff were on the

alert for such slinking thieving hairs, and were never amiss to report such a delinquency; and so when Mr. Flahrel noticed undue attention being paid him, he would repair immediately to repair it. He would smile broadly at the discovery, proceed to his private office, and trim the unruly hairs with the tiny well-sharpened scissors he carried in the upper left vest-pocket for that purpose. He would reappear with a broad silent smile. He was a silent likeable fellow.

"Hark, hark the presses, George," Jack Gordon greeted ^{him} George in the rhythm of the new Ragtime. "Listen to their rolling sound. Could be a Beethoven symphony, or a funeral march - if you haven't your stuff."

"Sorry I am late, Jack."

"Doubt if you are ever sorry for anything" Jack cajoled, "or anybody."

"All wrong, Jack."

"Yeh?"

"Yeh. I should never neglect anybody for anything."

"Damn it, how can anybody quarrel with you?"

Mr. Flahrel appeared at George's side. "Got anything for me?" he said in his soft caressing voice. "It was some game I heard, and some hassel after the game, in which you had a part."

"And here I have been riling him for being late!" To Flahrel: "Don't know how close we came losing our ace-cub."

"Stop your riling him," Flahrel grinned at Jack.

"It's good for his soul. So he'd be late less." Pulling George down by him, "All right, all right, I give in. I heard about ^{it} too. Now, George, what do you want to do, write the story yourself, or give me the details and I'll fill in for you? You know I am a bit faster on the typewriter."

"Thanks, Jack, but I'll do it my own way."

"What's going on around here?" Jack exclaimed. "Only a cub and already an editor hangs around waiting for a word for him, leaving columns in the blank in case his majesty, the cub, would deign favor him with a few lines. 'Got anything for me!'" he mimed Flahrel's words. "But kidding aside, kid," he went on, ^{he} gave George a friendly tap on the back, his face wreathed in a smile of encouragement, "if I were a coy female I should hide my face and melt in tears of joy that my prophecy had come true. ~~I have and I say my boy, as perhaps I have told you before.~~ All right go ahead, we are all waiting for you - the editor, the staff, the presses. Go ahead. See if you can cerebrate that peculiar brain of yours fast enough with time - and the presses..."

"Hello there..."

All three turned their heads toward the obtruding voice.

"You again!" Jack snapped.

"Hello, Flahrel, hello, George," Coming forward, ^{and} as if in an afterthought, "to you too, Jack."

Jack raised his hand and looked at Bob as if he had seen a ghost, as if he had wanted to ward off an evil spirit. "Here again," he muttered, "and always at the right time!"

"Hello, Bob," George said. George sauntered to his desk.

"No fooling, Bob, a deadline to meet - no time," Flahrel said.

"Time! Sure time is of the essence," he hurled the words contemptuously. "A long time I have waited for an answer to the smears in Forrest's sheet, The Morning Light. All I get is ominous silence. Is the Eventide on its dignity?"

"We didn't think it necessary, Bob," Mr. Flahrel said calmly, "especially since Forrest called off the dogs."

"Perhaps you haven't observed the people's reaction to George's series, Bob," Jack said. "Sort of a new renaissance of spirit. The ravings of the Light will defeat themselves."

"So I thought," Bob snapped back, "but suddenly I realized that Forrest is gaining a rallying point—"

"Among the rabble?"

"Exactly. And you needn't sneer."

"Now, don't you think I know?" Jack was confident.

"You may be a good reporter, but as a sleuth...?"

"All right, what's you got up your sleeve that's so sharp-eyed?"

"Just that they plan to do away with the Emporium."

"Burn it, with a burning cross in the burning ruin?" Jack chuckled.

"Then you know?"

"Just a good guess. I know the company Forrest keeps. So much the worse for them if they do...."

CHAPTER II

The Forgings of the Stars in Their Orbits and Seasons.

Well, George, how are you biologically? The Fates that come of the seasons' ceaseless changings and revolvings of the stars and planets, how