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# A GAME WON

BY PAUL KETELSEN

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Mary left the train and walked toward the station. That is, she was pushed and shoved in the general direction of the station. The crowd was there to see a football game, and from the looks of the people pushing and jamming for what little room there was, it was to be a large weekend. Mary let her eyes search the mob for a crop of blond hair and a pair of massive shoulders, but nothing to match that description was to be seen. Her eyes clouded and she brushed a few mischievous strands of amber-colored hair back from her face and forehead.

"Miss Carlton?"

The question came from a short and very meek-looking individual. He was a freshman, as indicated by the little maroon and gold cap he wore at a rakish angle on the back of his head. "Why yes," Mary answered, "how did you know?"

"Well, Johnny, I mean Mr. Drake—told me what you looked like, 'n' Miss Carlton, after a description like that no one could miss." Mary hesitated a moment, undecided whether to ask why Johnny hadn't come. She finally did. The freshman looked as though he had anticipated the question and answered. "Well, the coach kinda thought that with all the crowd the boys would naturally get a little nervous, so to keep that from happening he sorta crossed them up and rented the Country Club for the weekend. I think it's a pretty good idea, that is if you want to hear my opinion."

"Can't anyone see them?" Mary asked. "Fraid not, they won't even let you telephone out there." "Well, I suppose that is the best thing to do with them." The freshman stammered a moment then asked. "If you are ready to go, I'll show you to your hotel. The reservations have already been made. By the way, my name is Dick Standlin." "All right, Dick, I'm ready."

The eighteen fairway had been turned into a practice gridiron, and to keep from marring the grass the players had to wear tennis shoes, that is, all of them except the kickers. That's what Johnny was, a kicker. "Johnny, for cryin' out loud, put some snap into calling those signals; you're going through these practices as if we had all year. You know we have a game day after tomorrow." "O.K. coach, sorry," said Johnny. Jake, the team trainer, looked at the coach. "What the hell's wrong with the kid, Mike? I've never seen him act that way before." "Neither hav I, Jake; maybe it's that he's a little nervous." "Well if he doesn't snap out of it soon we can count on losing that game."

Johnny was truly the sparkplug of the team. As it was, they were scheduled to lose the game—not without

a hard fight—but to lose anyway; and unless they could bank on Johnny's punting to keep them out of trouble they would have even less chance of winning. It wasn't so much the losing of a football game that the fans minded, that is, the home-town fans; it was that they would hate like hell if they lost the game to Mid-Western. The game was an annual affair, and for eight straight years Mid-Western had trimmed them. The conference was at stake this game, and this, by the way, was the first time that Canton had been powerful enough to go the full schedule undefeated. It was not an unusual feat for Mid-Western to be in the playoff for the conference championship, and that made it even doubly important for the Canton rooters.

"Johnny, kick those balls higher." The coach had been watching Johnny all afternoon and still hadn't discovered the reason for his slow, halfhearted attempts to play football. "O.K., boys, go in and take a shower. Johnny, I want to talk to you a minute."

"Yes sir?"

"Listen son, I've known you for three years and you've been telling me all your troubles for the same length of time. I know something is bothering you; just what is it?"

"It's nothing, coach, I just don't feel like doing anything." Mike's eyes wandered over the boy. It couldn't be the big-head. Johnny just wasn't made that way. He then looked Johnny straight in the eye and said, "O.K.," then turned and walked off. Jake caught up with the coach in the shower room. His eyes asked the question. Mike just shrugged his shoulders and walked on.

Johnny took a hot shower and a rubdown, then went to the main dining room of the Country Club. Cots had been put up for the boys to sleep on and the room looked more like an army barracks than an elite dining room. Johnny was worried, too worried to be in any kind of shape for a big game. His forehead was wrinkled as he sat down on his cot and extracted a letter from his open suitcase. He read it again, for the umpteenth time. The letter was written in large letters, black and sinister words. His hand trembled as he weighed each of the words on the page. "Either you play a very sorry game of football Saturday and make sure your team doesn't win or we will see that your lovely girl friend isn't such a lovely thing to look at." That was all, no signature, just nothing. The letter had reached Johnny the day before the team left for the Club and Johnny had worried ever since. He couldn't tell the coach, for fear of not being able to play at all. He had to play and had to help win.

After Dick left Mary in her room in the hotel, she stood in the center of the room as if undecided as to just what to do. A knock at the door startled her, and thinking it was Dick back again she said, "Come in."

"Miss Carlton?" "Yes?"

"Are you the dame that's going to marry Johnny Drake?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Well, I guess you're the one then. Ya don't mind if I make myself comfortable do you?"

"But I don't understand—this is my room; what do you want and why did you have to pick my room to get comfortable in?"

"Sister, I'm here to see that you are a nice girl and stay very quiet."

"But why? It doesn't make sense for you to come barging into my room and telling me what to do."

"Sister, as far as you're concerned, I don't know from nothin'. I'm just here, that's all."

"But who sent you? There must be some reason for this intrusion."